

Sustaining Feminist Mnemonics: A Study of Temporal and Spatial Ecology of Memory in Geetanjali Sree's "The Tomb of Sand"

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Abstract:

Geetanjali Shree's *Tomb of Sand* (originally *Ret Samadhi*) intricately explores the interconnection of spatial memory, trauma and identity against the backdrop of the 1947 Partition of India. This research investigates the novel's portrayal of memory as a collective of spatial and temporal ecology, with a distinct focus on its feminine perspective and its potential for fostering sustainability by reimagining historical narratives. Employing Aleida Assmann's theory of 'cultural memory' and Homi K. Bhabha's concept of 'hybridity', the study positions the novel as a transformative text that transcends linear historiography, constructing a multi-voiced narrative that intertwines personal and collective recollections. Assmann's framework of cultural memory illuminates how the novel preserves and revitalises Partition's traumatic legacy within a shared cultural consciousness. The protagonist's cross-border journey- both literal and symbolic embodies an ecology of memory that transcends geopolitical demarcations, fostering a collective ethos of reconciliation. This underscores the critical role of feminine agency in curating and transmitting intergenerational memories. By creating a "third space," Bhabha's idea of "hybridity" simultaneously highlights the novel's dismantling of dichotomies and "*Tomb of Sand*" reconfigures and negotiates fractured identities. Partition's lasting effects are critiqued by the protagonist's feminist assertion of agency and subversive interaction with patriarchal and patriotic tropes. This study posits "*Tomb of Sand*" as a reimagined Partition narrative, functioning as a dynamic memory ecology that champions sustainability and inclusivity. By centring feminist voices and cross-border solidarity, the novel highlights the resilience of feminine perspectives in reconstructing collective spatial memory and envisioning a reconciliatory future.

Keywords: Feminist, Ecology, Spatial, Memory, Partition, sustainability.

Introduction

Geetanjali Shree's "*Tomb of Sand*" (*Ret Samadhi*), an epochal work of postmodern literature, occupies a pivotal space in contemporary narratives exploring the legacy of the 1947 Partition of India. This multilingual, culturally rich text examines the interwoven complexities of spatial memory, trauma, and identity while offering an incisive feminist critique of the socio-political milieu shaped by Partition. The novel's narrative strategy eschews traditional historiography in favour of a polyphonic and non-linear exploration of memory, identity and reconciliation. By positioning memory as a collective ecology- a confluence of spatial, temporal, and cultural forces- the novel destabilizes dominant

nationalistic paradigms. It underscores the centrality of feminine agency in reimagining historical narratives. This paper draws upon Aleida Assmann's "cultural memory" framework and Homi K. Bhabha's theory of "hybridity" to argue that Shree's novel transcends the temporal rigidity of Partition historiography, creating a "third space" that negotiates fractured identities and fosters cross-border solidarity.

Partition narratives have historically been dominated by patriarchal discourses that emphasise political and territorial ruptures, often marginalizing the personal and emotional dimensions of trauma. In contrast, "*Tomb of Sand*" reclaims these sidelined perspectives by centring on an octogenarian old woman, Ma, whose journey- both literal and metaphorical- epitomises the reconfiguration of fragmented identities. Through her cross-border odyssey, Shree interrogates the limitations of geopolitical demarcations and presents them as artificial constructs incapable of encapsulating the human experiences of dislocation and resilience. As Assmann (2011) argues, "cultural memory" operates as a dynamic system of meaning-making that mediates between the past and the present, enabling societies to preserve, reinterpret, and transmit their collective histories. Shree's novel exemplifies this process by reframing Partition not merely as an event confined to 1947 but as an enduring cultural trauma with intergenerational repercussions.

Central to the novel's thematic fabric is its focus on sustainability, not in the environmental sense alone, but as a mechanism for sustaining cultural memory, shared identities, and collective resilience in the face of historical disjuncture. Memory, in the novel, is conceptualized as an ecology- dynamic, interdependent, and regenerative- mirroring the complex ecosystems that sustain life. Shree crafts a narrative that emphasizes the need to preserve and transmit the lessons of Partition, positioning memory as a resource that must be continually nurtured to foster reconciliation and inclusivity. The ecological metaphor underscores the interconnectedness of individual and collective memories, highlighting the necessity of maintaining cultural continuity while adapting to evolving social and political contexts. Ma's cross-border journey epitomizes this sustainability of memory, serving as both a literal and symbolic act of reclaiming and preserving the past. Her decision to confront the borders that once divided her family and nation is a powerful assertion of the enduring relevance of Partition's lessons. This act of remembrance, however, is not static; it is dynamic, adaptive, and transformative, aligning with Assmann's (2011) assertion that cultural memory evolves in response to present needs. By reimagining Partition through the lens of memory ecology, Shree advocates for a model of sustainability that prioritizes intergenerational dialogue, feminist agency, and cross-cultural solidarity.

Moreover, the novel's narrative is a critical intervention in the way Partition's traumatic legacy is remembered and transmitted. The patriarchal and nationalistic frameworks that have historically defined the discourse surrounding Partition often exclude women's experiences, reducing them to symbols of victimhood rather than active agents in the remembrance process. In *Tomb of Sand*, Shree rejects these restrictive frameworks by placing Ma at the heart of the story. Ma's journey- both physical and psychological- becomes a form of resistance to the conventional boundaries imposed by national history. Her rejection of patriarchal and nationalistic expectations in favor of a personal and collective exploration of memory challenges dominant narratives, calling for a more nuanced, intersectional approach to remembering Partition. In doing so, Shree emphasizes the importance of incorporating women's voices in the construction of cultural memory, thereby ensuring that the recollections of

marginal groups are not lost to history. By foregrounding the feminine perspective, the novel asserts that the process of sustaining memory cannot exclude those whose histories have often been silenced.

The novel's emphasis on feminine agency further enhances its vision of sustainability. Traditional narratives of Partition have often excluded or marginalized women's voices, presenting them as passive victims rather than active agents of memory and resilience. "*Tomb of Sand*" disrupts this pattern by foregrounding Ma's journey, which becomes a conduit for preserving and transmitting intergenerational memories. Ma's actions, from her rejection of patriarchal norms to her symbolic crossing of borders, underscore the critical role of women in sustaining collective memory. Her experiences challenge the patriarchal and nationalistic frameworks that have historically monopolized partition narratives, introducing a feminist perspective that emphasizes inclusivity and reconciliation. Homi K. Bhabha's concept of '*hybridity*' further illuminates the novel's contribution to sustainable memory. Hybridity, as articulated by Bhabha (1994), disrupts binary oppositions and creates a '*third space*' where diverse identities and histories can coexist and negotiate new meanings. In the novel, this third space emerges as a site of resistance against both patriarchal oppression and exclusionary nationalism. Ma's subversive interactions with these tropes exemplify how hybrid identities can sustain cultural memory by bridging fragmented histories and fostering cross-border solidarity. This hybridity preserves the past and reconfigures it to accommodate diverse voices, ensuring that Partition's lessons remain relevant in a rapidly globalized world.

The space as Bhabha states is not simply a site of cultural fusion but one of potential transformation, where past can be reconciled with the present in ways that transcend traditional binaries such as self/other, us/them, and East/West. In *Tomb of Sand*, 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. Her interactions with these boundaries are not passive; they are active engagements that challenge the hegemonic structures that seek to define identity in fixed terms. Ma's hybridity, then, is not just a personal experience but a reflection of the novel's broader thematic focus on the need to bridge fragmented histories and identities. Furthermore, the notion of '*hybridity*' in *Tomb of Sand* emphasizes the novel's advocacy for cross-border solidarity and inclusivity. The narrative does not confine itself to a nationalistic view of Partition but rather frames the event as a shared trauma that transcends borders. By positioning memory as a cross-border, collective experience, Shree's text suggests that the lessons of Partition are not bound by nationalistic divides but must be shared and transmitted across these divides in order to heal the wounds of history. Ma's journey, then, can be understood as a metaphor for the potential of hybrid identities to sustain collective memory in ways that are inclusive and sustainable. Through this lens, hybridity functions as a mechanism for not only preserving the past but also ensuring that it remains relevant in the present and future. The novel's hybrid spaces of memory- where diverse voices, identities, and histories intermingle- become a model for how collective memory can sustain itself by embracing multiplicity rather than enforcing homogeneity.

In light of these considerations, *Tomb of Sand* stands as a transformative and radical intervention in the corpus of Partition literature. Through its emphasis on memory as an ecology, its foregrounding of feminine agency, and its critique of rigid nationalistic discourses, the novel not only reimagines the past but also offers a vision for a future predicated on sustainability, inclusivity, and

reconciliation. By interpreting historical trauma through a lens of ecological sustainability and cross-border solidarity, Shree's work offers a model of cultural resilience that is at once political, personal, and profoundly human. The novel's innovative treatment of memory and its emphasis on the fluidity of identity and history underscore the potential for literature to foster more inclusive, compassionate, and sustainable future- a future where the fractured identities of the past are not merely preserved but actively reconfigured to foster collective healing. Thus, the novel transcends the boundaries of conventional Partition narratives, establishing itself as a text that reimagines history through the dynamic, regenerative power of memory.

The sustainability of memory in *Tomb of Sand* is further reinforced through its narrative structure, which interweaves personal and collective recollections into a cohesive yet polyphonic tapestry. This multi-voiced approach aligns with contemporary trauma theories, which emphasize the collective dimensions of suffering and resilience. Shree's narrative resists the linearity of conventional historiography, instead presenting memory as a recursive and regenerative process. This structure mirrors the ecological metaphor of memory as a dynamic system capable of sustaining cultural continuity while fostering inclusivity and adaptation. Partition's legacy, as depicted in the novel, is not confined to the geopolitical and temporal boundaries of 1947; it extends into the present, influencing identities, relationships, and cultural practices. By emphasizing the interconnectedness of past and present, Shree highlights the importance of sustaining memory as a means of fostering reconciliation and inclusivity. This aligns with Geoffrey Hartman's (1995) notion of memory as a counter-force of forgetting, positioning *Tomb of Sand* as a vital text for preserving and revitalizing Partition's cultural legacy. The novel's ecological metaphor extends to its vision of reconciliation, emphasizing the need for cross-border solidarity and intergenerational dialogue, Ma's journey, which transcends physical and symbolic borders, exemplifies this reconciliatory ethos, advocating for a pluralistic and inclusive understanding of history. This vision of sustainability challenges exclusionary nationalistic narratives, advocating instead for a shared cultural consciousness that accommodates diverse voices and perspectives.

1. Theoretical Framework

The analysis of Geetanjali Shree's "*Tomb of Sand*" is grounded in a theoretical framework that integrates Aleida Assmann's theory of '*cultural memory*' and Homi K. Bhabha's concept of '*hybridity*'. When combined, these frameworks offer a sophisticated prism through which to view the novel's complex depiction of pain, memory, and identity in the sociohistorical setting of India's Partition. This study highlights the novel's ability to move beyond traditional historiographical paradigms and promote sustainability in cultural memory by viewing memory as an active and regenerative process and hybridity as a place of negotiation and transformation.

In order to examine how *Tomb of Sand* creates an ecosystem of memory, Assmann's idea of cultural memory is crucial. Cultural memory mediates between the past and the present by acting as a dynamic storehouse of shared meanings and communal experiences, claims Assmann (2011). This idea emphasises how civilisations maintain cultural continuity and identity by preserving, reinterpreting, and transmitting historical tales. Partition is more than just a historical occurrence in Shree's novel; it is a persistent cultural tragedy that affects the characters' individual and societal consciousness.

Because it actively connects with and reconfigures the splintered legacies of Partition, Ma's journey—both physically and symbolically—becomes an embodiment of Assmann's concept of cultural memory. Thus, the novel presents memory as an ecology that is creative, adaptable, and interrelated and that may promote healing and resilience.

Furthermore, Assmann's focus on the preservation and revitalisation of marginalised voices resonates with the feminist aspects of cultural memory in *Tomb of Sand*. The work subverts patriarchal and nationalist clichés that have traditionally dominated Partition discussions by placing Ma's story at its centre. The reclaiming of feminine agency emphasises how women preserve and pass on intergenerational memory. Assmann's *theory of cultural memory* as a collaborative effort is echoed by the novel's multi-voiced structure, which incorporates a variety of viewpoints to create a historical narrative that is more inclusive and sustainable. The idea of *hybridity*, as proposed by Homi K. Bhabha, complements this study by clarifying how the novel negotiates disputed territories and shattered identities. According to Bhabha (1994), hybridity arises in the "third space," where cultural disparities converge to create new identities and meanings. The protagonist's rebellious encounters with patriarchal conventions and exclusive nationalisms are embodied by this third space, which is both tangible and symbolic in *Tomb of Sand*. Bhabha's concept of hybridity is best shown by Ma's cross-border excursion, which breaks down the divisions between self and other, past and present, and remembering and forgetting. In addition to criticising the artificiality of geopolitical boundaries, this identity negotiation promotes a dynamic and pluralistic cultural outlook.

This paradigm, which incorporates the ideas of Assmann and Bhabha, places *Tomb of Sand* in a transformational context by reimagining Partition narratives as dynamic and regenerative ecologies of memory. The novel's focus on maintaining cultural memory via hybridity, inclusion, and female agency highlights how it may promote healing and let readers imagine a world free from the scars of the past. Accordingly, *Tomb of Sand* is positioned within this paradigm as an essential addition to the postcolonial literary debate on memory and sustainability.

2. Research Methodology

With a foundation in an interdisciplinary framework, this study uses a qualitative literary analysis methodology to examine Geetanjali Shree's *Tomb of Sand* via the prisms of identity, trauma, and memory. In order to critically analyse the text's narrative techniques, thematic components, and the way in which feminine agency interacts with its depiction of the Partition of India, the methodology stresses a close reading of the text. Aleida Assmann's idea of cultural memory and Homi K. Bhabha's theory of hybridity serve as the theoretical foundations for the research, which integrates both perspectives to examine how the novel portrays intergenerational pain, collective memory, and cross-border solidarity.

A detailed textual examination of the book, with an emphasis on its narrative devices, characterisation, and thematic structures, forms the basis of the process. Both the temporal and spatial aspects of memory are discussed, as well as the interaction between the individual and the group. The interpretation places emphasis on the protagonist's journey as an embodiment of a feminist ecology of memory and as a metaphor for cross-border cooperation. The narrative's critique of patriarchal and

patriotic ideologies is unravelled by this method, which also examines how feminine activity preserves and reclaims cultural memory.

The efficacy of the novel's polyphonic structure to reinterpret linear historiography by portraying Partition as a continuous cultural and emotional reality rather than a unique event is examined. The study investigates how *Tomb of Sand* reimagines borders—both geographical and ideological—as areas for sustainability and reconciliation by challenging the text's use of both symbolic and literal trips. The novel's intergenerational discussions are also closely examined to determine how they contribute to inclusivity and the preservation of the painful legacy of Partition.

The study integrates perspectives from postcolonial studies and trauma studies to provide a comprehensive examination. The novel's intergenerational transmission of the pain of Partition is contextualised by trauma theory, especially the writings of Cathy Caruth and Geoffrey H. Hartman. Postcolonial theory sheds light on the novel's examination of geopolitical boundaries and its support for a reconciliatory ethos, while feminist viewpoints enrich the critique of patriarchal hierarchies. This approach establishes *Tomb of Sand* as a transformative work that goes beyond the traditional bounds of historiography, allowing for a nuanced investigation of cross-border solidarity, memory sustainability, and the tenacity of feminine agency in rebuilding collective histories.

3. Spatial Borders and Defying Boundaries in “*Tomb of Sand*”

Geetanjali Shree's *Tomb of Sand* intricately weaves together themes of spatial memory, trauma, and identity, particularly against the backdrop of the 1947 Partition of India. The novel's linguistic flexibility subverts traditional ideas of meaning and narrative within the framework of logocentric binaries, challenging the rigidity of language and its deeply ingrained conceptions. Beyond the text, this osmotic and permeable quality permeates the individuals, their stories, and even the actual buildings—doors and walls—that encircle them. Because of its dynamic and active porosity, the language itself takes on a life of its own and declares its opposition to predetermined readings.

The 80-year-old "Ma" and her free-spirited daughter "Bet" are the main focus of *Tomb of Sand*, while having a broad ensemble of characters. Ma's Back, Sunlight, and Back to the Front are the three sections that make up the novel's structure. Ma's Back, the first segment, starts after the father of the family passes away. Even in death, his presence was felt. But whether he had died or not, his widow had apparently passed away. She appeared like such while she was lying in her room, at least (15). Through Ma's trip across time and space, the novel deconstructs the idea of borders, both real and metaphorical. As the plot develops, boundaries—including those separating countries, sexes, and identities—are not only crossed but also contested and dissolved. The distinction between self and other is hazy, particularly when it comes to Ma's connection with national and cultural boundaries. This deconstruction is embodied in Ma's want to travel to Pakistan once she has recovered from the loss of her husband, as the national borders that divided her during the Partition are reinterpreted as points of connection rather than division. These boundaries are blurred, and the historical "truth" of Partition is deconstructed, reflecting Foucault's theory that discourse creates what is deemed to be "truth." Ma asks the interrogating officers, “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 flourishes.” She further

enlightens them, “A border stops nothing. It is a bridge between two connected parts (652).” Ma’s words emphasize the fluidity of borders, both geographical and metaphorical.

At its core, *Tomb of Sand* tells the story of Ma, an elderly widow who is thought by her family to have given up on life when her husband passed away. Ma sets out to redefine herself and regain control over her identity by rejecting the responsibilities and expectations that society has placed on her. She settles into her daughter's house, dresses in flowing gowns instead of conventional clothing, and makes friends with Rosie, a transgender person who embodies fluidity and boundary-defying behaviour. The evolution is aptly described by Geetanjali Shree: "As though she'd removed all layers, one by one, wife mother aunt this that, now at least she was simply herself, laid bare, apart her own, untouched by the thoughts and concerns of any other." At eighty, Ma had become self-centred.

Ma's choice to visit Pakistan, a country haunted by Partition pain and family anxiety, epitomises her opposition to imposed borders. This trek is a symbolic return to what Ma views as home, not just a physical crossing. The ideological and geographical underpinnings of such differences are undermined by her meetings with Pakistani officials, especially her clever and subversive answers to their questions over her lack of a visa. She reminisces about her lost love, the horrific events of Partition, and her claim to the land and its inhabitants in Khyber. By redefining identity, selfhood, and love outside geopolitical frameworks, Ma's story questions the sovereignty of boundaries. Ma's unwavering defiance is shown in the novel's climax scene, where she is shot. Instead of dying, her body turns to the open, boundless sky, claiming a territory she will not cede to the whims of political rhetoric. As Shree eloquently states, "the tale unhampered," her death is not a conclusion but rather a continuance. Ma endless. Women in new beginnings”

Shree's story goes well beyond Ma's personal tale to include both living and non-living objects—walls, doors, birds, and crows—all of which are endowed with free will and tales that subvert strict limits on connections and identity. The book defies easy classifications even if it deals with Partition and cross-border love. *Tomb of Sand* becomes a sophisticated meditation on modern reality by fusing feminist discourse, ecological issues, criticisms of capitalism, and thoughts on communalism. It challenges the boundaries that enclose us, both literally and figuratively, and presents an image of resiliency and resistance. The book encourages readers to face and overcome imposed restrictions, much like Ma refuses to fall face down.

Ma's decision to travel to Pakistan offers a poignant analysis of the murky borders that existed between the two countries during Partition. The blending of cultural identities across national borders is eloquently illustrated in this chapter. The trip reveals the common histories of India and Pakistan and questions established notions of nationhood. Ma's eyes show the symptoms of confusion that individuals around them exhibit when they disembark off the bus. “What's the border? Should we be here or there? Ma dusts off a few petals as she stoops to inspect the rows of flowers. She touches her hand to the dirt.” (Shree, 552). Ma's acquaintance with transgender person Rosie adds a dimension of cultural and gender hybridity. By fusing traditional values with contemporary sensibilities, Rosie's presence in Ma's life contributes to breaking social conventions. Every morning, Beti noticed Ma wearing a brand-new ointment that Rosie had prepared with amla, bhringaraj, brahmi, and a teaspoon of henna. Every day, Ma would take it out of the refrigerator, massage it into the roots of her hair with

her knuckles, separate any stray strands, wrap them around a finger, and give Beti the coil. She would say, "Here, throw this away" (313). She therefore engages in self-care.

Tomb of Sand becomes much more relevant in the backdrop of modern-day India. The novel's subversive ethos becomes an essential act of resistance in a sociopolitical environment characterised by restricted liberties, institutional brutality, and the rewriting of history to suit hegemonic interests. She creates a universe that transcends boundaries and censorship by fusing temporal, geographical, and existential dichotomies—past and present, here and there, life and death, self and other. Finally, *Tomb of Sand* honours Ma's story's timeless relevance by enacting her in the titular tomb—a structure of remembrance and resistance. Her story is unbounded and defies totalitarianism, time, and place. Even in death, Ma lives on, as the book reminds us, and her narrative serves as a testimony to the boundless potential of subversion, resistance, and change.

4. “*Tomb of Sand*” as a Reflection of Cultural Memory

Aleida Assmann's theory of 'cultural memory' emphasizes the way in which societies and individuals transmit, store, and reinterpret memories across time. For Assmann, 'cultural memory is not merely the sum of individual recollections but the collective, shared memory that is shaped by culture, history, and politics' (2011). In her work Assmann suggests that, "cultural memory is an essential mechanism by which human societies form and preserve their identities" (Assmann, 2011, p. 38). This collective memory, she argues, is not static; rather, it evolves over time, influenced by the shifting dynamics of culture, politics, and social life. *Cultural memory* is often manifested through tangible and intangible means, including rituals, literature, art, and public commemorations. Assmann's theory is particularly concerned with how such memories are curated, passed down, and reinterpreted. In this context, memory is not only a tool for preservation but also for negotiation, as different generations may reinterpret and reframe the past. Assmann further distinguishes between "communicative memory", which is the everyday, living memory passed down between individuals, and "cultural memory", which is more institutionalized, formal, and structured through objects, symbols, and texts (Assmann, 2008, p. 99). It is this intersection of communicative and cultural memory that the novel intricately explores, particularly in relation to the Partition and its lasting effects on both individual and collective identities.

The narrative is told in a sporadic manner, shifting between the past and the present, which symbolises how fragmented memory is. The way that cultural memory functions—always changing and being reinterpreted by those who interact with it—is reflected in this fragmentation. In numerous ways, Ma embodies the shared experience of Partition survivors, whose voices have frequently been muffled or ignored in popular discourse. Because Ma represents both the individual and collective components of memory, Assmann's theory helps us understand how her memory works in the book. Like the cultural memory Assmann talks about, the trauma of Partition is a "deeply embedded" and "repressed" experience that recurs in different ways throughout the story (Assmann, 2011, p. 60). India's 1947 partition is a pivotal historical moment that continues to mould the subcontinent's cultural memory. According to Assmann, societally constructed cultural narratives are closely linked to how events such as the Partition are remembered. "Every act of memory is also an act of forgetting," she observes (Assmann, 2008, p. 43). Understanding *Tomb of Sand* requires an awareness of this dual process of

remembering and forgetting, as the characters—Ma in particular—engage in both remembering the past and trying to forget the trauma it caused. The larger social struggle to accept the legacy of Partition—a heritage that is both remembered and suppressed in various ways—is mirrored in Ma's internal strife.

The recollection of Partition is disjointed and sometimes inaccessible in the narrative. The silences accompanying Partition that have dominated Indian culture are reflected in Ma's emotional distance and her unwillingness to discuss the past. This supports Assmann's claim that the conflicts between communal forgetting and remembering frequently influence cultural memory. Following the Partition, prevailing political narratives aimed to forge a single, coherent national identity, frequently erasing or marginalising the memories of violence, displacement, and loss (Assmann, 2008, p. 94). Thus, Ma's personal memory functions as a counter-narrative, a different kind of cultural memory that challenges the official narratives and aims to recover the histories of pain and loss that have been neglected.

Ma's altered identity is one of the main ways *Tomb of Sand* interacts with cultural memory. Ma struggles with the pain of Partition, looks back at her history, and eventually redefines herself as she sets off on her journey. Identity may be shaped and reshaped throughout time by cultural memory, as demonstrated by this self-reconstruction process. Assmann argues that cultural memory is about influencing the future as much as it is about conserving the past (Assmann, 2011, p. 11). Ma's involvement with her history gives her the opportunity to recover her individuality and escape the limitations of the roles that society wants her to perform. By emphasising Ma's agency, the novel subverts the conventional narratives of memory that frequently marginalise women in historical discourse. Reclaiming power is demonstrated by Ma's re-engagement with the memory of Partition, as she opposes the erasure of women's experiences in the collective memory of Partition. This act of remembering is about fighting against the cultural erasure of women's voices as much as for personal liberty. Memory is for safeguarding the future, not only remembering the past, as Assmann (2008) contends (p. 133). Thus, *Tomb of Sand* is an attempt to preserve the memory of oppressed people, especially women, and a reclamation of the past.

Another important component of Assmann's study is the purpose of literature for preserving and transmitting down cultural memory. According to Assmann, literature is essential to the transfer of memory. She contends that "literature stores memory in a form that transcends the limitations of individual memory, shaping the way in which memory is communicated" (Assmann, 2011, p. 88). Geetanjali Shree's novel serves as a vehicle for the transmission and preservation of the cultural memory of Partition in *Tomb of Sand*. Traumatic recollections that have been suppressed in popular history can now be discussed in the novel. The work serves as a platform for the preservation, transmission, and reimagining of cultural memory by emphasising Ma's journey and her contact with her history. Additionally, the novel challenges the politics of representation by highlighting the marginalisation of some memories and the valuing of others. The story frequently deals with the erasure of women's experiences, especially as they relate to Partition. By facing her history, Ma is resisting this erasure, and *Tomb of Sand* questions the prevailing historical narratives that have frequently silenced women's and marginalised populations' voices. Assmann's theory of cultural memory can assist us in comprehending how works of literature such as *Tomb of Sand* help to

reimagine history by giving voice to those who have been silenced and guaranteeing the preservation of the memories of those who are left out of prevailing narratives.

The novel examines the conflicts between remembering and forgetting, the silences surrounding the pain of Partition, and the role of women in creating cultural memory via the figure of Ma. The novel's engagement with these topics may be better understood by using Aleida Assmann's theory of cultural memory, which emphasises how memory serves as a site of both resistance and preservation. *Tomb of Sand* is a potent illustration of how literature may support the continuous process of memory transmission and identity negotiation by recovering suppressed history and subverting prevailing narratives.

5. Feminist Hybridity and Ecology of Memory in “*Tomb of Sand*”

This novel, *Tomb of Sand* by employing Aleida Assmann's theory of ‘*cultural memory*’ and Homi K. Bhabha's concept of ‘*hybridity*’, reconfigures the narrative of Partition, offering a more inclusive, sustainable, and fluid understanding of historical trauma and its preservation. In Shree's work, memory becomes more than just a recollection of past events—it transforms into a dynamic, collective, and spatial ecology, one that continuously evolves in response to the varied, multifaceted experiences of its characters. Ma, the protagonist, embodies this ecology of memory, as she navigates the fractured landscapes of personal, historical, and cultural trauma. Through her journey, the novel challenges conventional historiographies and pushes the boundaries of national and gendered identities, creating a “*third space*” that is crucial for understanding the transformation of memory, identity, and history.

Homi K. Bhabha's concept of ‘*hybridity*’ as articulated in *The Location of Culture* (1994), provides a framework for understanding how the novel transcends traditional narratives of history and memory. Hybridity, in Bhabha's view, is not just about the merging of two distinct cultures, but rather a dynamic, fluid process where identities and cultural practices are continuously negotiated, often within the interstitial spaces between opposing forces- East/West, colonizer/colonized, masculine/feminine, and so on. In *Tomb of Sand*, this concept of hybridity is reflected in Ma's journey, both literal and symbolic, as she moves across geographical borders and, more crucially, through the fragmented memoryscapes shaped by the trauma of Partition. Ma's crossing of these borders- physical, cultural, and psychological- becomes emblematic of her hybrid identity and memory. Her refusal to be confined to a singular national or cultural narrative is a powerful rejection of the rigid binary frameworks that often dominate historical discourses (Bhabha, 1994, p. 345). As Ma states, “I am not the dust of the land that can be swept into a corner” (Shree, 2022, p. 18), indicating her defiance of national, cultural, and temporal boundaries that seek to erase her experience. By occupying a liminal space, she allows for the convergence of personal, collective, and historical memories. This ‘*third space*’, which Bhabha describes as the location of hybridity (1994), becomes the foundation for the ecology of memory in the novel. In this space, Ma's identity is not fixed but is rather an ongoing process of becoming, constantly evolving in response to her encounters with different cultural landscapes and histories.

Hybridity, as articulated by Bhabha, emerges as the ‘*third space*’, a realm where fixed identities and binary oppositions dissolve, enabling the negotiation of meaning and culture. (Bhabha 1994). The protagonist's movement across national borders mirrors this process of hybridization, as her memory traverses and integrates diverse cultural landscapes shaped by the traumatic legacies of Partition. This

journey, while deeply rooted in the geographical terrain, is also a deeply personal and emotional odyssey where Ma confronts fragmented memories that have been shaped by personal trauma, collective history, and political upheaval. Her poignant reflection- “We never moved, only the earth did, and yet, how can a body remain still while everything around it falls apart?” (Shree, 2022, p.131)- illustrates the dynamic and evolving nature of memory, which is continually reshaped by the interplay of time, history, and trauma. Bhabha’s hybridity also facilitates the dismantling of rigid, nationalistic narratives that often tether memory to static geographies. The Partition of India is frequently framed through the binary opposition of India and Pakistan, each nation bearing its own delimited memories and traumas. In contrast, the novel transcends these geopolitical boundaries, portraying memory as fluid, multifaceted, and inclusive. This aligns with Bhabha’s assertion that hybridity “opens up a space of negotiation where power is unequal but its articulation may be equivocal” (Bhabha, 1994). By rejecting a singular, nation-centric interpretation of Partition, the novel crafts a polyphonic memory that resists the constraining demarcations of nationalistic discourse.

As Ma’s journey unfolds across physical and metaphorical borders, she becomes an embodiment of memory’s hybrid nature- dynamic, ever-shifting, and constantly in dialogue with its historical and cultural contexts. Her crossing of borders does not merely signify a geographical movement but also underscores the ‘in-between space’ (Bhabha, 1994) that hybridity occupies, where identities and memories are reconstituted. This space challenges fixed historical narratives and enables a reimagining of the past, creating what Bhabha might describe as a “revisionary time” that reconfigures historical and cultural meaning. Consequently, *Tomb of Sand* presents memory not as a monolithic construct but as an evolving interplay of individual and collective experiences, capable of transcending the binaries of nation and identity. Central to the novel’s ethos is its subversion of patriarchal norms, offering a critique of the ways in which history has traditionally silenced women. By reclaiming agency through its protagonist, Ma, the novel envisions a new framework for memory and identity and the principles of feminist sustainability.

Additionally, one of the most remarkable aspects of the novel is its feminist perspective, which interrogates the patriarchal structures embedded in Partition narratives. As Bhabha (1994) observes, hybridity disrupts the “authority of cultural hierarchies,” creating spaces for alternative voices to emerge (p. 113). Similarly, in the *Tomb of Sand*, Ma’s resistance to conforming to traditional roles exemplifies this disruption. Her assertion, “A woman’s body is the land upon which histories are written, but only if she permits them to be written” (Shree, 2022, p. 220), underscores the novel’s emphasis on female agency as a counterpoint to patriarchal control. The novel reimagines women not as passive victims of history but as active agents in the transmission of intergenerational memory. Ma’s journey, marked by her refusal to accept the silencing imposed by patriarchal structures, challenges the male-centric narratives that dominate Partition historiography. As Tharu and Lalita (1991) argue, “Women’s histories often reside in the margins, where resistance flourishes in defiance of dominant paradigms” (p. 27). Alongside, the fragmented and contradictory memories of Ma exemplify the hybridity, challenging the linear, patriarchal accounts of Partition that prioritize nationalistic pride over human suffering. Ma’s declaration, “I will not be a memory for others to preserve; I will make my own” (Shree, 2022, p. 151), encapsulates her assertion of agency in shaping memory.

The novel's depiction of memory as an evolving force resonates with the ideas of feminist sustainability, which emphasizes adaptability and inclusivity in historical narratives. As Ma reflects, "Memories are not static. They are like rivers that reshape their course, finding new paths, carving new territories" (Shree, 2022, p.186). This metaphor underscores the novel's commitment to reimagining trauma and history as dynamic processes that can be reworked to accommodate diverse experience. The significance of inclusivity in maintaining memory is demonstrated by Ma's journey. Her encounters with a variety of characters—from other women to refugees and under-represented groups—emphasize how intertwined their experiences are. This interpretation of memory supports Judith Butler's (2004) contention that in order to arrive at a fairer view of history, "precarious lives" must be acknowledged in all of their complexity (p. 22). The representation of the female body as a locus of resistance is central to the feminist reworking of Partition history in the book. Given feminist philosophy, which sees the body as a location of oppression as well as a tool for liberation, her claim of agency is especially noteworthy (Grosz, 1994).

Tomb of Sand reimagines Partition history as a dynamic, changing ecology of memory via its feminist and hybrid perspective. The novel's dedication to sustainability is demonstrated by its attention on the connections between personal and societal memory. Shree guarantees that the memory of Partition is not limited to a single, monolithic story but rather is subject to revision and change by elevating marginalised voices. Spivak (1988) proposed the idea of "strategic essentialism," in which marginalised groups briefly embrace unified identities in order to subvert prevailing paradigms. This inclusive approach is consistent with that idea (p. 13). Ma's story is strategically used in *Tomb of Sand* to challenge the patriarchal and nationalist ideologies that have traditionally influenced Partition rhetoric. The novel provides a revolutionary perspective on history by presenting memory as a fluid and composite construct. By employing Bhabha's notion of hybridity, Shree creates a dynamic, fluid ecosystem of memory that surpasses the strict limits of gendered, cultural, and national identities. This ecology makes it possible for historical narratives to be continuously reimagined and evolved, ensuring that memory is dynamic and inclusive rather of being confined to a single, static form. By elevating the female viewpoint, Shree subverts patriarchal accounts of Partition and presents a more inclusive, sustainable historical narrative. In essence, *Tomb of Sand* is a redesigned collective memory that welcomes the hybridity, flexibility, and inclusion of memory as a transforming force while opposing conventional historiographies.

6. *Tomb of Sand*: A Palimpsest of Spatial Memory and Sustainability

According to the theory of spatial ecology of memory, which has been developed by scholars such as Yi-Fu Tuan (1977) and Robert D. Kaplan (2008), memory is intricately linked to physical locations rather than being a purely internalised, abstract activity. These areas—whether little or large—are essential in determining how both individual and group memory are formed. The personal recollections of those who experience displacement, migration, and exile are strongly resonant with these geographies. The spatial experience of memory emphasises the relational dynamics of gender, space, and identity, particularly for women in postcolonial situations. This idea is consistent with feminist philosophy, which highlights women's autonomy in establishing, maintaining, and modifying their own places. Spatial theorisation is crucial for comprehending gendered experiences of memory and place, according to academics like Doreen Massey (2005) and Gillian Rose (1993).

One of the most important spatial structures in *Tomb of Sand* is the home, which serves as Ma's actual and metaphorical space. Having spent a large portion of her life in the home, the space becomes a repository for several layers of memory, both individual and collective. The novel's domestic atmosphere not only portrays Ma's identity as a trauma and displacement victim, but it also captures her roles as a wife, mother, and grandma. According to personal narratives, the house's walls are replete with memories of both happiness and sadness, reflecting the dual character of space as a place of confinement and protection (Shree, 2022). While the house symbolises the preservation of a family legacy, it also serves as a prison of gendered expectations as Ma starts unravelling her past. In the early parts of the novel, Ma is depicted in the act of remembering her life in the house. This process of remembrance is intimately tied to her physical surroundings- the kitchen, the courtyard, the bedroom, and the familiar walls- each of which becomes infused with historical and emotional significance. The spatiality of home represents the ingrained memories of the Partition and the gendered constraints placed on women, particularly women of Ma's generation, who were expected to remain within the domestic sphere, silencing their aspirations. The most striking aspect of Ma's journey is her eventual decision to leave the house. This departure from the familiar space of the home is symbolic of Ma's desire to break free from the shackles of her past and, by extension, from the patriarchal structures that have defined her existence. The home, while a site of memory, also represents the limitation of memory, as Ma's lived experience has been confined by its walls. By moving beyond the house, Ma symbolically transforms her relationship to both space and memory, suggesting that memory itself is not fixed to any single space but is a fluid and dynamic force.

The border between India and Pakistan functions as a profound spatial and political boundary that transcends its physicality to embody the traumatic rupture in Ma's personal history. This division symbolizes the displacement and dislocation that Ma endured, encapsulating the process of grappling with and reinterpreting her trauma. As the narrative reveals, "a border is not just a line drawn on the map; it is a wound carved into the heart of history" (Shree, 2022, p. 71). This metaphor underscores how the border becomes a locus of both personal and collective suffering. The border is further depicted as a site saturated with memory, bearing the weight of loss, violence, and the fragmentation of families and communities. Crossing the border, as narrated, emerges as a defining moment in the novel's exploration of the spatial ecology of memory. In one pivotal memory, Ma recalls, "the night was silent, yet it roared with the cries of those left behind, their voices etched in the air" (Shree, 2022, p. 53). This crossing signifies more than a geographical transition; it becomes a psychological and emotional rupture. The persistent scars of Partition are powerfully evoked as the spatial boundary of the border mirrors the internal, psychological boundaries that Ma must traverse to confront her fractured past. One intriguing section uses Ma's disjointed memories of crossing the Indian-Pakistani border to invoke her memories of the Partition. "I can still picture the fields, the river, and the faces of those without a place to go. The ground was already unfamiliar to me (Shree, 2022, p. 44). The border itself is used here as a symbol for the psychological upheaval that millions of people went through during the Partition. The trauma of forced migration and the brutality of territorial partition are marked by the border's terrain, which serves as a physical and metaphorical boundary. Ma's recall of the borderlands is more than just a sentimental one; it is a confrontation with the unresolved scars of the past.

The novel poignantly illustrates the spatial coding of memory by juxtaposing Ma's recollections of the border with the present-day spaces she inhabits. Her words, "the earth beneath my feet was already a foreign land" (Shree, 2022, p.44), vividly convey how the geographical divide has been internalized, creating a profound sense of alienation that transcends the physical landscape. As a spatial metaphor, the border encapsulates more than the division between nations; it embodies Ma's fragmented sense of self and the disjunction between memory and forgetting, past and present, and identity and displacement. The novel asserts, "a border splits, but it also stitches; it holds stories of those who crossed and those never could" (Shree, 2022, p. 95). This paradox captures the border's dual role as both a site of division and a nexus for understanding trauma. Ma's narrative vividly portrays how this space of rupture is a site for negotiating the complex intersections of personal and historical trauma. Through this lens, the border emerges both as a symbol of dislocation and a testament of resilience, as Ma grapples with the fragments of her identity.

Beyond the home and the border, *Tomb of Sand* also depicts urban areas as pivotal memory sites, especially during Ma's trip to Delhi. A geographical metaphor that weaves together individual and community memory, the city is rich with its historical, political, and cultural resonances. For example, Ma says of Delhi, "the city spoke in voices that were mine and not mine, its streets carrying the weight of stories that mirrored my own" (Shree, 2022, p. 112). Through this engagement with the urban environment, Ma is able to negotiate her own shattered identity within the city's changing story. Delhi is a place where the larger historical and cultural forces forming the city converge with Ma's own recollections of loss and survival. As a woman, mother, and Partition survivor, the busy marketplaces, peaceful lanes, and vast parks all capture the complexity of her personality. "Delhi's streets were paved with the remnants of colonialism and independence, every stone whispering the history of migration and Partition," the novel claims (Shree, 2022, p. 118). The story emphasises how individual and societal suffering are intertwined by placing Ma's journey inside this metropolitan context. The novel's primary theme—the dynamic interplay between geography and identity—is emphasised by Delhi's shifting spatial dynamics of memory. Like Ma's memories and her rebuilt sense of self, the city seems as a living, breathing thing that is always changing. "Delhi's breath matched my own—uneven, fragmented, but alive, a reminder that memory is neither static nor linear," the novel notes (Shree, 2022, p. 139). This fluidity of space illustrates the non-linear and constantly shifting nature of memory and functions as a metaphor for Ma's metamorphosis.

Additionally, by reimagining space and memory, Ma's journey places these ideas at the centre of a feminist sustainability paradigm. Her house, the border, and the refugee camps she passes through are all converted into places of resistance and reclamation rather than just being geographical places. Ma's choice to go back to the border as an agent of her own story rather than as a victim of Partition perfectly captures this reinvention. This change is eloquently described by Shree: "Ma was determined to stitch the border into her story, and it wasn't just a line—it was a scar" (Shree, 2022, p. 346). Ma changes the locations of her trauma from places of victimisation to places of agency by facing the geography of it. Aleida Assmann's perceptions that memory "shapes spaces not just as static sites of remembrance, but as dynamic loci of negotiation and meaning" (Assmann, 2011, p. 16) support this perspective. Thus, Ma's reclaiming of space is a feminist act that redefines her position in a patriarchal society and her relationship with the past.

Furthermore, the novel foregrounds feminist sustainability through Ma's transformative journey, where she reclaims fragmented memories and asserts her autonomy in a patriarchal world. Shree draws attention to how women's resilience goes beyond simply surviving trauma to become a radical act of envisioning and recreating identities by criticising the systematic erasure of women's experiences from national and familial history. This viewpoint is consistent with the idea of cultural trauma developed by Aleida Assmann, which highlights the transformational power of memory in creating new meanings and identities. Cultural trauma "anchors itself in collective memory and reshapes the identity of those who inherit it," according to Assmann (Assmann, 2011, p. 10). The core of this feminist tenacity is Ma's rejection of conventional gender norms. Ma challenges the deeply ingrained patriarchal conventions that attempt to limit her to the roles of mother and grandmother by rejecting the expectations of society as an old widow to be passive and resigned. As an alternative, Ma sets out on a life-changing path of self-discovery, regaining her independence and defying societal norms that strive to silence women in her generation. Crossing emotional and physical boundaries is a metaphor for defying social norms and embodies Ma's reluctance to fit in. As Shree states, "Ma didn't intend to go on as a ghost of her former existence. Not only was she breathing, but she was living" (Shree, 2022, p. 212). This act of defiance is consistent with Assmann's claim that cultural trauma may "open pathways to new identities by reconstructing relationships to the past" (Assmann, 2011, p. 14). Ma's path is about actively regaining the agency that was lost to her for a large portion of her life, not just about resisting patriarchy.

Through intergenerational relationships, especially those between Ma, her daughter, and her granddaughter, the book delves deeper into feminist sustainability. These exchanges highlight how important communal memory is to maintaining women's history. In her moving reflection on the suppression of women's stories, Ma's daughter states, "We are taught to forget, to move on, but the past is not something that can be erased." It resides in our bones (Shree, 2022, p. 158). This recognition places women in the role of stewards of historical trauma and resiliency, reflecting a feminist critique of the erasure of women's experiences from societal memory. Similarly, Assmann contends that memory is "a resource of identity and continuity," stressing that trauma transmission may be crucial for transforming communal identity (Assmann, 2011, p. 13). The story demonstrates how women's resilience is firmly anchored in their capacity to transmit and preserve histories that might otherwise be lost via Ma and her descendants' shared memories and experiences. The intergenerational conversation between Ma and her family's younger female members demonstrates how important women's voices are to rewrite history and identity. When considering the persistence of memory, Ma's granddaughter notes: "The stories we tell, the silences we break—they are our inheritance, our resistance" (Shree, 2022, p. 405). This attitude perfectly captures the feminist ethos of the book, which is adamant about maintaining women's histories as acts of defiance against patriarchal forgetting mechanisms. By arguing that memory acts as a "connective tissue for marginalised voices, offering them a platform to contest dominant narratives," Assmann lends credence to this viewpoint (Assmann, 2011, p. 20). *Tomb of Sand* reclaims these voices and uses memory as a feminist tool to envision a sustainable future in which women's tales are paramount.

Tomb of Sand, in conclusion, places feminist sustainability in a larger criticism of resilience and cultural trauma. In particular, for women marginalised by geography and history, remembering is an

act of extreme resistance, as Ma's voyage demonstrates. The novel's recurring geographical memories—from the Partition to Ma's house to the border—symbolise how individual and societal history are intertwined. "Every area she touched carried the weight of untold histories, but Ma was determined to unearth them, one by one," according to Shree (Shree, 2022, p. 379). The narrative supports Assmann's claim that memory "is not merely a repository of the past but a dynamic force capable of reshaping the future" (Assmann, 2011, p. 22). Ma's reclamation of these areas highlights the novel's demand for a sustainable future based on the tenacity of women's voices by transforming them into locations of feminist agency and historical continuity.

7. Conclusion

Geetanjali Shree's *Tomb of Sand* emerges as a profound testament to the transformative power of memory, weaving together spatial and temporal ecologies to construct a feminist narrative of sustainability and reconciliation. This research underscores the novel's unique ability to reimagine historical narratives through its engagement with Partition's traumatic legacy, framing memory as a dynamic and inclusive force. By employing Aleida Assmann's theory of cultural memory, this study reveals how *Tomb of Sand* not only preserves but revitalizes the collective consciousness of Partition's aftermath, ensuring its relevance for future generations. Homi K. Bhabha's concept of hybridity further accentuates the novel's radical dismantling of binary constructs, enabling fractured identities to coexist within a reconciliatory "third space". The protagonist's cross-border journey exemplifies this hybridity, transforming spaces of trauma into loci of agency and solidarity while centring feminine perspectives as vital curators of intergenerational memory.

The novel's unique contribution lies in its feminist reconfiguration of memory, transcending patriarchal and nationalist tropes to champion cross-border solidarity and inclusivity. Its emphasis on ecological metaphors- viewing memory as an interconnected system of spaces and times- reframes trauma as a site of growth and resilience. This narrative strategy situates *Tomb of Sand* as a paradigmatic text that fosters cultural sustainability by advocating for a nuanced understanding of history that includes marginalized voices. Moreover, its subversion of linear historiography offers a template for reimagining collective pasts in ways that are more inclusive, dynamic, and resistant to hegemonic erasures. The most significant finding of this study is the novel's creation of a dynamic "third space" that facilitates reconciliation by resisting hegemonic national and patriarchal narratives. This "third space" not only accommodates the multiplicity of voices but also reframes the Partition as an ongoing process of negotiation rather than a static historical event. The research further identifies the novel's innovative approach to memory as an ecology that bridges personal and collective trauma, while promoting the sustenance of feminine agency in curating cultural legacies. This nuanced reimagining challenges dominant historiographies and offers an inclusive model for envisioning cross-border solidarity and resilience.

However, this study also points forth limitations. Although the novel's experimental structure is distinctive, readers unfamiliar with its dense symbolic framework or non-linear narrative style may find it difficult to comprehend. Additionally, although the protagonist's journey highlights a communal ethos, the novel's emphasis on a single, complex feminine voice may under-examine other identity intersections, including caste or class. By placing *Tomb of Sand* into the larger corpus of Partition

literature, future studies might fill in these gaps and investigate the ways in which various axes of marginalisation connect within memory ecologies.

The framework of this study will be expanded in future research to examine how other modern South Asian works deal with memory, hybridity, and feminine agency in relation to Partition and postcolonial trauma. Furthermore, a comparison with testimonial literature or oral histories may shed light on the ways in which oral and textual traditions interact to shape cultural memory. Researchers are also urged to delve deeper into the ecological metaphor, especially in light of its capacity to unite environmental humanities and literary studies.

Ultimately, *Tomb of Sand* illustrates how adaptable feminist mnemonics are at rewriting fractured history into inclusive and enduring tales. The novel is crucial to the conversation on memory, identity, and sustainability because it boldly addresses historical agony while imagining an inclusive and reconciling future by emphasising feminine agency and cross-border solidarity.

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The novel's critique of patriarchal historical narratives is a continuation of its analysis of memory as both geographical and gendered. For marginalised and displaced women, remembering is an act of resistance that allows them to rebuild identities in the face of institutional erasure, as Shree emphasises. Ma regains control of her story as she works through her memories of Partition and personal grief, signifying a larger female struggle. "Her memories were no longer chains; they were keys to doors she had never opened before," says Shree (Shree, 2022, p. 298). The idea that cultural trauma may "reconfigure collective identities by embedding traumatic experiences into public consciousness" (Assmann, 2011, p. 18) is consistent with this reclaiming. In addition to rebuilding her identity, Ma's engagement with her personal trauma questions the wider erasure of women's tales from history and cultural memory.

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