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Women in the Sacred and the Profane in Geetanjali Shree's *Tomb of Sand* (2018)

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DEDICATIONS

I am deeply grateful to Allah for blessing me with strength to finish my dissertation.

I am forever indebted to my family, friends and students for their unconditional love and support.

I dedicate this humble piece of work to my parents, brothers and sister. I could never ask for a better family. It is your belief in me that has propelled me forward, and I hope to make you all at least a little proud of me.

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With a heart filled with thanks, I embrace the memories, the support, and the boundless affection that you have bestowed upon me. I will always be thankful, for I was gifted your love.

"This is me praying that

This was the very first page

Not where the story line ends" - TS

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ABSTRACT

The Indian society is a kaleidoscope of cultures, beliefs and social customs. Geetanjali Shree in her Booker prize winning novel *Tomb of Sand* aims to convey these themes in a correlation to the concepts of women oppression and gender Norms. Shree questions the essence of the predominant behaviours, traditions, customs and social norms within the Indian society, and projects it to other societies and communities in order to achieve universality. She made use of the dichotomy of the sacred and the profane to trace the roots of gender roles and the negative connotations stigmatized to women. In the attempt of analyzing the novel, the present research makes use of Emile Durkheim's social theory with a special focus on his notion of the sacred and the profane; in addition to the Feminist Theory to reflect on women's struggles towards mental, psychological and cultural self-emancipation. The undertaken cultural study finds out that women's subjugation is merely an inherited social practice that deprives women from their natural rights. The latter affects women's self-image and confines them to a miserable state of mind. The findings of this research could be implemented and found helpful in other areas of studies as in Psychology, Sociology and even Politics.

Keywords: Feminist Theory, The Profane, The Sacred, Self Image, Social Theory.

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the content of this dissertation represents my own work which has been done after the registration for the Master's Degree at University of Mohammed Khider Biskra.

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General Introduction

General Introduction

The relationship between Literature and Sociology is very often described as symbiotic; both fields enrich one another. The Sociology of Literature is its hybrid outcome. This intersection of those two fields is concerned with studying literature via investigating the relationship between a work of literature and the social as well as the cultural structures that have inspired it into being. It examines literary works from social, cultural, political and economic perspectives and explores the symbiosis between society and the author. The customs, traditions, values and norms of any society in a certain period of time are clearly reflected in the different genres of literature written during that period. Geetanjali SHREE made use of this dichotomy in an attempt to portray the Lifestyle of Indian Women within the Indian society.

Ret Samadhi or *Tomb of Sand*, written in Hindi language by Geetanjali SHREE and translated to English by Daisy Rockwell and won the International Booker Prize of 2022. The Washington Post chiefly described it as "an homage to the vibrancy of Hindi that threatens to lose its shine in a globalized world". The novel narrates the journey of a Mother (Ma) and her Daughter (Beti) trying to cross Borders – physical and conceptual- As Shree commented, "it is a tale of Women and a Border". It unwittingly responds to the acclaimed western perspectives of the Indians and their society. The novel implicitly and explicitly alludes to universally, and particularly Indian controversial themes like mythology, religion, culture, colonization, and politics.

The translated English version is about 700 pages long, but in short: Ma is an Indian woman, about 80 years old. Ma's husband dies and she is left grieving all over the first 100 pages. That is until Ma come up with a plan to leave and look for her former lover. Thus, they cross the border

from India to Pakistan. Beti is hated by her family for not being very conventional. She's divorced, very independent, works as a journalist, and lives by herself away from her family household. The story is interrupted by many secondary and minor characters flowing in and out of the plot. One of these is Rosie, a woman from the Hijra Community which represents, or stands for the role of these people in the Indian society. Ma dies, crossing a spiritual border, and Beti's whole world collapses due to an existential crisis; trying to figure out what and how to be.

Shree is fluent in English but she preferred to write in Hindi for a number of reasons. The subtle one implies how furious she is at the world in general and Indians in particular, for slowly letting go of their kaleidoscope of identities and excruciatingly rushing towards Whiteness. In the novel, she expresses with aversion, "the absence of color is considered the most desirable color". She attempts to depict how colorful the Indian life is to be traded for a plain White one. Thus, she writes in a purely cacophonous Indian "Dhwani" (lyrical) style, full of literary devices and figures of speech. In the process, she managed to paint a portrait of the alluring Indian lifestyle. Accordingly, implying as much as of the Sacred and Profane practices, questioning their mythological and religious roots, and how far they are deeply rooted in the unconscious. All along, focusing on how it all relates to the tale's two main Women. Rockwell in her translation, with the help of Shree herself, managed to foster the same style, and nurturing the same colourful sensations.

The theme of the Profane and the Sacred appeared in sociology and theology first, and it was introduced by Emile Durkheim. Durkheim is a French Sociologist, who is often referred to as the "father of modern sociology". His works were based on how the societies and groups could maintain stability and integrity. He also emphasized how communities could have harmony in modernity. According to sociologists, Man's objective is to look for meaning and explanation behind the different phenomena. Meaning is usually either found in Religious texts, or Mythology.

The latter two concepts shape what we believe it to be Sacred or Profane. Man's behaviour is driven by these concepts. The Sacred are objects, rituals and people who have special significance and are treated with awe and respect. On the other hand, The Profane objects, activities and people are ordinary and mundane with no special meaning attached. However, one has to note that the Sacred isn't intrinsically or metaphysically special. It was given that prestige by the social groups, whereas the Profane was deprived of it by those same social groups.

Feminists adopted Durkheim's dichotomy and adapted it to the feminist approach. Simultaneously, questioning: Why all what's Sacred is heavily masculinized while Profane reflects the feminine? Kathleen McPhillips' article "Re-casting the sacred: feminist challenges to the masculinization of the sacred in social theory" responds to Durkheim's claims and counterattacks his narrative. To her, the Sacred and the Profane should not be gendered. Both exists simultaneously, and cannot be dismantled from one another. She believes that each one crosses the other's border. The action of crossing over is what was referred to as Transgression. To them, the world and humans are too complicated to be limitedly characterized by two polar opposite conceptions.

Rationale of the Study

The reason of studying women in the sacred and the profane in Geetanjali Shree's *Tomb of Sand* is to offer insights into feminine identity, cultural and religious dynamics, feminist discourse, literary analysis, and the socio-cultural context of contemporary India. It explores women's experiences, challenges societal expectations, and contributes to discussions on gender, society, and literature, shedding light on women's complexities and fostering understanding and social change.

Statement of the Problem

The Sacred and The Profane is a complicated dichotomy that views the world in the form of polar opposites. Geetanjali SHREE makes use of these two notions in her novel *"Tomb of Sand"* to represent women at the center of the Indian context.

Research Question

What literary esthetics could be found from the portrayal of women in both the sacred and the profane in Geetanjali SHREE's *Tomb of Sand*?

Sub questions

1. How can the author's socio-cultural background affect his views on Indian women?

2. What could be the image of women in the sacred and the profane?

3. To what extent does the author's portrayal of women characters reflect Indian women's reality?

Research Methodology

To examine the sacred and the profane as binary opposition in the life of an ordinary Indian woman, the researcher intends to use a mixed approach that consists of:

1.   Feminism: where it could examine women issues and status keeping an eye on the different kinds of oppression they habitually receive and how they react to them.

2.   A number of assumptions (mainly that of Emile Durkheim) on the sociological aspects of

both the sacred and the profane and the role they play in the tragedy of Indian women.

Hypothesis

It is hypothesized that:

- The Sacred and The Profane are more of cultural than religious concepts.

- Women's self- image is distorted due to patriarchal social norms and gender roles.

Objectives of the Study

1. Exploring the realm of Indian literature, its uniqueness and diversity.

2. Investigating women issues and inspirations through the lenses of women writer.

3. Picturing women images in both the sacred and the profane.

Scope and Limitation

The present research focuses on the use of the dichotomy of The Sacred and The Profane and its view from feminist perspective. The female main character Ma in *Tomb of Sand* transgresses and blurs the line between these two realms. The study, however, focuses on the defiance of the social and gender norms and the women's psychological experiences. As a result, it also refers to the concept of New Self Image i.e. the journey through which women fight to craft a positive self-image instead of the society's distorted one. The research attempts to illustrate the necessity of overcoming Societal Norms in order to achieve a New Self-Image.

It is crucial to note the imbalance between the first two chapters (chapter 01 and 02) and the last chapter. The third chapter makes use of long quotes and passages in order to accentuate the author's perspective and support the researcher's arguments.

Chapters Demarcations

The present thesis is three chapters long. The first chapter provides an insight to the philosophy and history of Indian people. It introduces several pillar concepts in the Indian culture and society. It starts by defining: Patriarchy, Indian Man Supremacy, the Dysfunctional Social Norms and most importantly the Indian Caste System. It aims to build an understanding of why the society functions as it does; tracing the wounds of Indian women. The second chapter highlights the main themes and theories used in the thesis. It focuses mainly on the use of Durkheim's Social theory to elucidate the connection between Indian Mythology and the concept of Religion. It also tackles, from a feminist point of view, the dichotomy of the sacred and the profane. The last subtitle Transgression provides a middle ground where the latter two penetrate one another; it refers to the crossing over or the exceeding of boundaries and limits. Transgression does not deny or destroy the profane; it exceeds the taboo but also completes it. It allows us to experience the Sacred. The last chapter relies mainly on the novel. It wonders as it wanders between Myths, Religions, and Genders. It Questions the Myth of Man's Superiority, Deconstructs Religious Claustrophobics, and then Escapes Gender Norms to finally attain a New Self Image; mainly drawing back on the journey of the two female protagonists.

Chapter One: Touching the Wounds

of Indian Woman: Cultural Context

1 Chapter one: Touching the Wounds of Indian Woman

1.1   Introduction

The impact of culture and literature on one another is undeniable. In fact, it is almost impossible to disentangle the two. Culture includes every aspect of the society: beliefs, values, and traditions. Literature is the finest instrument that does not only mirror society, but also aims to redeem it. Accordingly, it is only logical to venture into the history of India and the Indian society before attempting to analyze any Indian literary body. Thus, in this first chapter a detailed inspection of the main composing ideologies of this Indian carnival is necessary. The notions of Patriarchy, Man Supremacy, Social Norms and Indian Caste System are going to be discussed in details. Along with shedding light on some of the historical as well as contemporary struggles of Indian Woman within such an oppressive combination of systems. Wrapping up, an examination of the Male Rhetoric Discourse would be necessary as an attempt to understand the tools used in reinforcing Men hegemony over Women. Thus, this chapter is dedicated to explore Patriarchy by delving into its meaning, origins, and mechanisms.

1.2   Patriarchy

The notion of patriarchy is primitively defined in many dictionaries as the unequal distribution of power between men and women in the varied aspects of society (Britannica). According to Engels the patriarchal system of governance is one of the earliest forms of domination. In his book The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the state he described it as "the world historical defeat of the female sex". To him, the direct cause of women's subordination was the rise of private property (Engels 120). It is often considered as an evolved, more complex mode of dominance than that of the matriarchal system. Thus, the feminist theories did not manufacture this concept. They brought; however, its revival in the second half of the 20th century

and gave it an elaborate connotation.

   In our modern time, it is evident that progress and prosperity are the offspring of the collaborate work of both men and women. Women's fight for their rights is still ongoing since the 60s. Nowadays women in many regions of the world have the authority over themselves and their lives; however, in many other areas they still do not. According to the feminists, Patriarchy is a system that strives to keep women dominated and subordinate. Through its male-made institutions, and in the name of Religions or Traditions, Patriarchy creates obstacles for women to keep them seen as the secondary inferior. Even though many women could gain the respect they deserve, and live the lives they want, they are still not seen as an equal to men (Sultana 2).

   Feminists use the concept of "Patriarchy" as a tool to help realize the realities of women. In order to make sure that men always have the dominant, main, or *masculine,* roles and women always have the subordinate, secondary or *feminine* ones. Patriarchal systems exaggerate biological differences between men and women. This ideology is so preeminent that "men are usually able to secure the apparent consent of the very women they oppress". They do this "through institutions such as the academy, the church, and the family, each of which justifies and reinforces women's subordination to men" (Millett 35). It presupposes the natural, biological superiority of men over women and does not acknowledge their equality with differences. Men are superior because biologically they are. Women are inferior because they allow themselves to be.

   In the USA, Europe, and the Western World in general, women could break free, to an extent, from the shackles of Society. On the other side of the world; however, it is not the case. In certain areas in the East, precisely in India, within the Indian Society many women are still the subject of discrimination. They are the victims of years of ignorance, burden of many traditional practices,

and most of all poverty. According to Statista – a very reliable portal of statistics used by over than 4500 academic institutions- in one of their recent demographic researches in November 2022 they deduced "total male population living in poverty in India was about 38 million. By contrast, the number of females in poverty during the same time period was around 45 million" (Kanwal).

It is all connected. The poorer the people are the more ignorant they become. They would not be able to pay for their children's education fees. If the education is made free, they would rather put their children -males preferably- to work, and have their daughters married since a very young age. Though Underage marriage is prohibited by law, the ground reality has a different say in the matter. Feminists all over the globe and World Organizations do not only denounce but criminalize such an act (Abbhi and Jayakumar). The critical economic condition is not the ultimate reason, yet it reinforces the stereotypical binaries. Men are seen as the provider and independent while women are the provider to; therefore, the dependent. For many other reasons, women's subordination became ideological; ergo, it reincarnates itself in many social practices.

1.2.1   Indian Man Supremacy

Indian society like every other classical one prioritizes Man over Woman. Males in India are automatically born with a set of unearned privileges. Whereas females are not only unprivileged; they are seen as a burden (Sultana 6). Male supremacy is an extremist patriarchal order. It doesn't only cherish the rule of men, but emphasizes women subordination and gender roles. "Gender roles" is of biological nature. Men are naturally Strong, Independent, Decisive, and Dominant. Women are naturally the opposite. These stereotypes are rules to abide in the society. From a very young age both males and females learn to behave accordingly.

Men of all families receive education without it being considered as an excess. Women on the

other hand do not, unless they are of progressive families. Men are spared from learning the housework. Their focus should be education and career-centered. Even in school men and women do not take the same classes. Only women are supposed to take Home Science. An expression like "home and childcare taste sweeter to women while business and profession taste sweeter to men" has been socially and culturally approved of for a long time (Sivakumar and Manimekalai). These socio-cultural norms restricted the roles of each gender. Women who attempt to break such conventions are seen as a threat to the stability of the society i.e. Man's rule.

1.2.2   Dysfunctional Social Norms

Each and every community shares a distinguished, unconscious set of socio-cultural rules. It is what every individual thinks of as the standard and only acceptable way to behave. Howbeit, not what everyone approves of is essentially right. In patriarchal societies the social norms serves men over women. In fact, these dysfunctional double standard social norms are made to keep women subordinate and under the power of men. According to the Unicef:

> Thus, they often amplify male privilege and exacerbate discriminatory treatment of girls, women, and non-binary gender identities. As such they not only inform girls and boys about how they should see themselves growing up, but also constrain what they can aspire to, influencing their behaviours and choices, such as health seeking behaviours, education, career, and reproductive choices (*DEFINING SOCIAL NORMS AND RELATED CONCEPTS* 2021).

These ritual practices emphasize the image of women as "obedient daughters", "faithful wives" and "devout mothers". Also, women from a very young age are trained not to challenge discrimination, subordination, exploitation, and subjugation at every level in the current patriarchal system. These dysfunctional norms restrict women from having aspirations other than marriage. On the contrary, for men, gender norms are constructed around Masculinity and a man's sense of

self revolves on his ability to control women.

It is also important to bear in mind that these social norms differ from one country to another. Thus, what is morally right in one country is not necessarily right in another. However some of these stereotypes are against the human nature and legislations. A boy is just a kid with emotions, yet he is denied from displaying any. A girl who is not 18 years old at least should not be married out of her will, even if her grandmother before her was married at 14 years old. Any attempt of breaking the rules is faced with strict punishment. Even if men are also obliged to behave in a certain way, they are at least privileged. The case for women is not the same. Despite the legislation of many Acts to protect women, many of their rights are encore abused.

In certain regions in India, the proportion of women compared to men in the population is suspiciously low. In Northern India where many poor families reside, the imbalance of the sex ratio is very evident. That is reckoned to be for many reasons. The first is human trafficking where young girls are sold by brokers. Also, due to domestic violence women escape their marital houses and end up missing. Even with the Indian government declaring pre-birth sex determination was illegal, it has been estimated that around 10 million female fetuses have been aborted in the last 20 years. In addition to this, there are the Dowry deaths, Honor killings, Sexual abuse and Rape matters ("Discrimination and Oppression of Women in Context to Indian Society").

This subordination of women is even reinforced with symbolism i.e. narratives of the inferiority of women through legends, myths and folktales. It is this glorification of the past and everything traditional that prevents women from breaking this vicious circle. In the northern and central areas of India the Sati practice was very common. It entails in burning women alive after the death of their husbands. Women were indoctrinated to believe that their destiny lay in committing their lives to their husbands even after death. Women were seen as the possession of

men and it only made sense to cremate them too (Shamsuddin). It is also believed that "The young widow needs to be *tamed* and her sexual desires *controlled*. Therefore, to maintain her *chastity* the only way that remains is to burn her alive". The heritage of such beliefs continues to exist to this very day. The most recent *voluntary* Sati incident was in 1987 in the state of Rajasthan.

All in all, the patriarchal order gives absolute priority to men and limits women's human rights. It keeps women subordinate in many ways. Patriarchy uses such concepts as "male supremacy" and "social norms" as tools to even tighten their grip on the freedom of women. One gender cannot be superior to another only out of biological difference. Societal norms regardless of how long they have existed, and no matter what are the justifications behind them, they are clearly unjust. India's cultural and religious diversity lead to several forms of discrimination. Though, people are treated differently according to their class, religion, region, tribe, gender, and language all over the world. What distinguishes India and even worsens its situation is the Caste system. It has undergone many changes over the years, yet it is still one of the society's pillars.

1.3   Indian Caste System

The caste system (also referred to as "the Jati system" /d͡ʒaːˌt̪iː/) is a hereditary social hierarchy. It classifies the Indian people into four main classes or *Varnas* according to the occupation. At the top of the pyramid there are the Priests and the Scholars or Academics. They are labeled to as "Bhramins". Right after are the Warriors and the Kings or the "Kshatryias". Next, are the "Vaishyas". They are merchants, landowners, or belong to the business community in general. The bottom symbolizes the commoners, peasants, and the servants. They are seen as subordinate to the previous three and called the "Kshudras". A fifth class "The Dalits" that is subordinate to all exists. It is not even considered within the pyramid or as a part of the Caste. They are Outcasts,

Untouchables for they are concerned with lower-order work. They are street sweepers and latrine cleaners (Deshpande).

Each class is supposed to abide by their class's rules. Every individual that is born to a certain varna cannot change it. He is supposed to remain in their destined class, adopt his class's occupation, eat their food, and is not allowed to marry from other classes. The Brahmins believe to be the first class created by God, and they hold all the wisdom. Thus it is their responsibility to keep the order. The two middle classes are responsible for agriculture and providing goods. According to the Hindu law books, the Dalits or the Outcasts are polluted. They are not allowed into the sacred places like the temples (Velassery 8). Each verna is even divide into other sub-classes or Jatis. It is a very similar order to Britain's Feudal system during the middle ages.

The ancient Hindu book "Rig Veda" provides a religious explanation of the cast system. It assumes that Purush, a supposed Deity, sacrificed itself in order to construct the human society. The parts of its body created the different Caste classes. The Brahmins characterized as the most intelligent and educated were Purush's head. The Kshatriyas for being warriors were made out of its Arms symbolizing strength. The Vaishyas created from its thighs, and the Shudras out of its feet. The Dalits were considered unholy and do not belong to Purush. Gradually, those who belonged to the lower classes started to rebel. The solution was to embrace Buddhism for it did not condemn them to their birth's verna.

The concepts of Reincarnation[1] and Karma[2] prevented the harming of that equilibrium (Deshpande).

Historically, this hierarchical system became more rigid with the arrival of the British colonial rule. It went along with their "divide and rule" attitude and started issuing rules that reinforced such a division. It continued to prevail and constituted a significant element of the Indian cultural until 1947 when India gained its independence. It was not till 1955 when legislations outlawing caste-based discrimination were issued. Despite all the governmental efforts, the traditions remained. For example, it is still considered a taboo if one married out of their caste. Also, people of former lower classes are victims of discrimination and violence (Deshpande). Even more, to maintain this Man centered systems, Man has established a set of excuses to convince and ease women into believing in their secondary position within the society. Tying the knots, the actual problem is when the unprivileged overlap i.e. the unfortunate situation of being both a Dalit and a Woman.

1.4   Rhetoric Discourse

The Rhetoric Discourse is a very commonly used term in Politics. It refers to the persuasive form of speech which may appeal either to people's logic or emotions. In short, the Rhetoric Discourse is the art of persuasion. Men have been using the latter to generate and associate some ill-conceived conceptions with being a Woman. For instance, women have been, for ages, pictured as physically weak, illogical, overly emotionally driven, and unholy creatures. Men have been using Religion, Science, and Culture to nurture such ideas, and to engrave them within the

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[1] Reincarnation is an existential philosophy which entails that once any creature dies gets reborn in the shape of another creature. It does not necessarily ends up either in Heaven or Hell.
[2] Karma is the belief that once anyone conducts a good or a bad action it will eventually returns upon them too.

collective consciousness of societies. This has guaranteed Male dominance and Gender Inequality. Feminist activists and writers were naturally triggered. Many dedicated their lives to falsify these Men-made excuses, and to polish the way women perceive themselves and the way the world perceives them too.

Biological determinism is one of the most common defenses men employ to assert their superiority over women. This notion entails that males, thanks to their peculiar physiology, are by nature far superior to women. Men are very often characterized by physical strength, improved mental agility, and survival tendencies. However, recent research has consistently shown that men do not have any biological advantages over women. For instance, a study conducted by Hyde and Linn (2006) has found that gender differences in mental agility or spatial reasoning were negligible, and that any differences that did exist were likely due to more of cultural and social factors rather than purely biological ones. Similarly, a review by Eagly and Wood (2012) found that there were no consistent sex differences in the survival tendencies -violent behavior-, and that any differences that did exist were small, and highly influenced by situational factors. Others, to begin with, claim it not to be even a decent characteristic to brag of.

Feminists, who counter attacks Biological Determinism, point out that there is a great deal of variability within gender groups. Many believe that individuals should not be limited or judged only based on their gender. After all, it is scientifically proved that gender differences are largely a product of socialization and cultural norms- rather than mere biological nature. For instance, feminist sociologist Judith Butler came up with her/his theory of Gender Performativity where she/he asserts that gender is performance i.e. gender is based on behavior. It is what we do and not who we are. She/he believes it to be constructed through social practices and actions rather than being an inherent characteristic of individuals (Butler). Similarly, and before Butler, feminist

writer Simone de Beauvoir argued in her book "The Second Sex" that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (de Beauvoir). She recons that women are not inherently inferior to men, but are conditioned to be subservient to them.

Another excuse that men use to justify their superiority over women is culture. Many Patriarchal cultures have deeply ingrained gender norms and expectations that reinforce male dominance and female subservience. For instance, in many African and Indian cultures, women are expected to be submissive to men, and are often subjected to female genital mutilation and forced marriages. Similarly, in many Middle Eastern and Arab cultures, women are expected to cover their bodies and to be obedient to their husbands. However, cultural norms and practices are not immutable, and there are many examples of cultures that have shifted towards greater gender equality. For instance, in Nordic countries such as Sweden, Finland, and Norway, gender equality is a central tenet of the culture, with policies and programs in place to promote gender parity in all areas of life.

Feminists have challenged cultural norms and practices that reinforce gender inequality and have called for greater recognition of women's rights and agency. They argue that women should be free to pursue their own goals and aspirations, and should not be limited by cultural expectations. For example, feminist writer Chimamanda NgoziAdichie has spoken out against cultural stereotypes of women in her book "We Should All Be Feminists" and in her TED Talk of the same title (Adichie). She argues that women should not be limited by their gender and that cultural norms should not restrict their potential. The feminist activist, and Nobel Peace Prize winner Malala Yousafzai has also fought against cultural practices such as the denial of education, to children in general and girls in specific, back in her native Pakistan, and has called for greater recognition of women's rights worldwide (Yousafzai).

Last but not least, just like Science and Culture, Religion –or the interpretation of religious texts- was also utilized by the Male rhetoric discourse to reinforce Men's dominance. In many religions, like Islam and Judaism, women are supposed to cover parts or the whole of their bodies. Some other Eastern religions portray women as inferior, subservient, and subject to male authority. However, it is important to note that not all religious interpretations endorse gender inequality. Many religious leaders and scholars have spoken out against such practices and have called for greater gender equality. They advocated for women's rights, and have emphasized the importance of women's empowerment in achieving global peace and harmony. Feminists, in defending their case, did not attack the core of religion itself, but attempted to reinterpret those male-made interpretations from a feminist point of view.

Feminists, like the feminist theologian Mary Daly, argued that Christianity has been used to justify male dominance but that there is a feminist strand within Christian tradition that emphasizes the equality of all humans (Daly). While, the feminist theologian Amina Wadud has argued that the Quran contains messages of gender equality, but it's the patriarchal interpretations of the texts that have distorted its true meaning (Wadud). They have challenged patriarchal interpretations of religious texts, and have called for greater gender equality within religious institutions. They argue that religious traditions are of a higher meaning and should not be used to justify gender-based violence, discrimination, or exclusion.

In a nutshell, there are many excuses that men use to maintain their superiority over women in society, including biological determinism, religion, and culture. However, research has consistently shown that these excuses are unfounded, and that there is no inherent advantage that men have over women. Furthermore, there are many examples of societies and cultures that have embraced gender equality, demonstrating that gender parity is achievable with the right policies and programs in place. Feminists have responded to claims used by men to maintain their

superiority over women by challenging biological determinism, patriarchal interpretations of religious texts, and cultural norms that reinforce gender inequality. They argue that gender equality is achievable through social and political change and that women should be free to pursue their own goals and aspirations without being limited by their gender. A great sum of literature aims to illustrate Women's struggle. In doing so, they seek to foreground their important roles within those Patriarchal societies, and demand an equal stand.

1.5   Conclusion

Feminists wanting to overcome Men's dominance had to prove the Males' allegations to be devoid of truth. Concepts like biological determinism, the subjugation of women through cultural and religious pretexts were questioned and could no longer be used as justification to gender inequality. *"Tomb of Sand"* written by the Indian author Geetanjali Shree, is our window to the different aspects of the Indian Society. The novel, over the course of its 700 pages, encompasses everything: Politics, Religion, Myths, and Traditions; they all intermingle and intertwine in such lyrical fluidity.

Shree, in her novel, does not only mirror Patriarchy, Social norms, and Men Supremacy but even defies them all. "She demonstrates how women have to face patriarchy in the name of family values and Indian customs" (Aggarwal and Naik). In transcending the physical and intellectual borders, she creates an alternate reality where Women could lead and be praised for that. While chapter 1 gave an overview of the Indian Mentality, the upcoming chapter is dedicated to the theoretical aspect of the research. By making use of Archetypal Criticism, Social Theory, and the Feminist Approach, it will provide a roadmap to venture into the very essence of the novels' characters.

Chapter Two: Debating The Sacred

and The Profane: Theoretical Debate

2   Chapter Two: Debating the Sacred and the Profane

2.1   Introduction

This second chapter is concerned with adjusting the thesis's Theoretical aspect. The main aim is to define the dichotomy of the Sacred and the Profane. The concept is deeply rooted in the Indian mythology. Consequently, it is a prominent theme in the Indian literature and society. Mythology, Literature and Religion are all linked through their shared focus on the human condition, and through the common themes and motifs they often share. Shree's novel *Tomb of Sand* draws back on these previously mentioned aspects.

The novel lyrically narrates the story of two rebellious and unconventional women, a mother and her daughter. In order to provide a literary reading of their characters, it is only logical to pursue the feminist approach. To understand the reasons behind their behavior, it is also necessary to study the social factors nurturing it. Thus, the novel would be approached from multiple angles: First, through the lens of Archetypal criticism, Social Theory, and then the Feminist perspective. Especially, focusing on the representations of women in both the Sacred and the Profane contexts; relating it to the concept of Transgression.

2.2   Indian Mythology

Mythology, in its broader sense, refers to collections of ancient stories. Myths are created by cultural, social groups to provide supernatural explanations to certain phenomena. *The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms* defines the term Myth as:

> A traditional anonymous story, originally religious in nature, told by a particular cultural group in order to explain a natural or cosmic phenomenon. Individual myths are typically part of an interconnected collection of such tales, known as a culture's *mythology.* Even when a culture no longer believes that its myths are

true explanations, however, these stories often survive as receptacles of important cultural values. (Murfin and Ray).

A myth is a belief system. Social groups' behavior is driven by a number of elements; one of which is Mythology. From the east to the west of the world, myths differ. Different explanations to the same phenomena are provided by cultural groups. Each adjusts the myth to their settings. Archetypal criticism[3] traces where and how myths from all over the world depart or overlap. It is what Carl Jung[4] introduced as Collective Unconsciousness[5]. Mythology provides a rationale for a culture's religions and practices, and reflects how people relate to each other in everyday life. What distinguishes mythology is it fluidity. Myths are not laws, rigid and static. They are in a constant metamorphose.

Understanding Indian mythology requires a paradigm shift. One cannot study Hindu Mythology in terms of Western concepts. What is considered Divine/ Devilish, Right/ Wrong, Angelic/ Demonic and even the concepts of Heaven/ Hell according to the West might not be viewed in the same way for the East (Pattanaik). Indian mythology is a rich tapestry of stories, legends, and beliefs that have shaped the cultural and spiritual landscape of India for centuries. From the Creation myth of Hinduism to the epic tales of the Ramayana and Mahabharata, Indian mythology is a treasure trove of fascinating characters, intricate plots, and profound philosophical insights. There are three key aspects of Indian mythology that are necessary to explore: the creation story of Hindu mythology, the stories of major deities, and the epic tales of the Ramayana and Mahabharata (Paranjape).

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[3]An approach that identifies cross-cultural images, figures, and story patterns manifested in a wide variety of literary works.
[4]Carl Jung is atwentieth-century Swiss analytical psychologist who argues that myths reveal a collective unconscious.
[5]A term introduced by Carl Jung. It entails that all Man share a sum of inherited, unconscious memories. The latter provides similar explanations to metaphysical phenomena.

The creation story of Hindu mythology is a complex and multi-layered narrative that involves the three major gods: Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva. According to Hindu mythology, Brahma is the creator of the universe, Vishnu is the preserver, and Shiva is the destroyer. Together, they form the Holy Trinity of Hinduism, and their interplay is believed to be the driving force behind the cycles of creation, preservation, and destruction. The creation story of Hindu mythology is a fascinating tale of cosmic energy, divine intervention, and the eternal cycle of life and death (Pattanaik 4).

The stories of major deities such as Ganesha, Lakshmi, and Hanuman are an integral part of Indian mythology, and their significance in Indian culture cannot be overstated. Ganesha, the elephant-headed god, is the remover of obstacles and the patron of arts and sciences. Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth and prosperity, is revered by Hindus as the embodiment of material and spiritual abundance. Hanuman, the monkey god, is known for his strength, devotion, and unwavering loyalty to Lord Rama. These deities are not merely figures of myth and legend, but living embodiments of the values and virtues that are cherished by Indian society (Paranjape).

The epic tales of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata are perhaps the most famous and enduring stories of Indian mythology. The Ramayana tells the story of Lord Rama, an incarnation of Vishnu, and his quest to rescue his wife Sita from the demon king Ravana. The Mahabharata, on the other hand, is a sprawling epic that tells the story of the Kuru dynasty and the great war between the Pandavas and Kauravas. These epic tales are not only works of great literary and artistic merit, but also serve as a source of spiritual and moral guidance for millions of Indians (Paranjape).

Indian mythology is rich with tales of not only gods, but goddesses too. It is important to recognize the significant role that women played in these stories. From powerful goddesses to

fierce warriors, women in Indian mythology have left an indelible mark on the cultural fabric of the country. Women are seen as powerful figures in Indian epics, and the role of women as wives, mothers, and warriors in those stories is undeniable. Goddesses hold a significant place in Indian mythology. They are not only worshipped for their beauty and grace but also for their strength and power. Goddess Durga is one such example, who is revered for her fierce form and her ability to defeat evil. Saraswati, the goddess of knowledge and wisdom, is another revered deity who is considered to be the source of all creativity (Paranjape).

Indian mythology has been developing over thousands of years. It is a vast and complex subject that encompasses a wide range of stories, beliefs, and traditions. What is a Religion to the occident is a Lifestyle to the Indians. It was not until the colonial imperial British rule of Indian that Hinduism became a proper Religion. The latter has drawn a clear separation between what is Sacred and what is Secular. From the creation story of Hinduism to the epic tales of the Ramayana and Mahabharata, Indian mythology is a source of inspiration, wisdom, and spiritual insight. By exploring the three key aspects of Indian mythology discussed previously, one can realize its peculiarity. The use of Myth as a tool in literature cultivates a deeper appreciation for the rich cultural heritage of India and the enduring legacy of its myths and legends (Pattanaik 2).

In literary Criticism, the attempt of analyzing literature vis à vis its cultural and mythological setting is referred to as Cultural Myth Criticism or Mythological Criticism. It is a type of literary criticism that focuses on the study of myths and archetypes in literature. It seeks to identify the underlying cultural patterns and beliefs that shape literary works and their characters. Myth Criticism, first introduced by Carl Jung, argues that literary texts are not created in a vacuum but are rather shaped by cultural and historical contexts. It draws from various disciplines such as anthropology, psychology, and comparative mythology to provide a comprehensive understanding

of the role of myth in literature and culture. It explores how the myths and archetypes present in literature reflect the values, beliefs, and social mores of a particular society or culture (Murfin and Ray 394-396).

Some critics argue that cultural myth criticism can be limiting because it tends to focus on universal themes and patterns rather than considering the unique aspects of individual literary works. However, others argue that understanding the cultural context of a work is crucial to fully appreciating its meaning and significance. Overall, Archetypal Criticism examines how symbols, themes, and motifs in a text are informed by cultural myths and archetypes. It aims at identifying the underlying myths in a literary work and exploring their significance in the context of the story. This approach can reveal how a writer uses myths to create meaning, develop a character, and convey a message.

2.3   Religion(s)

Religion can be defined as a complex social and cultural system that encompasses beliefs, practices, rituals, and institutions aimed at understanding and connecting with the divine or the sacred. However, feminist scholars have challenged the traditional patriarchal interpretations of religion and have offered alternative perspectives. According to feminist theologian[6] Rosemary Radford Ruether, religion has historically been dominated by men who have used it to justify their power and subjugate women. In her book *Sexism and God-Talk*, Ruether argues that patriarchal interpretations of religious texts and traditions have led to the marginalization and oppression of women within religious communities (Ruether).

Feminist perspectives on religion also emphasize the need to include the experiences and

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[6]Theology, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, is defined as "the study of God and religion".

voices of women in religious discourses and practices. As the feminist scholar Letty M. Russell writes in her book *Human Liberation in a Feminist Perspective*, "the feminist critique of religion is not only a matter of theological method, but also of who is included in the conversation, whose experiences are valued, whose voices are heard, and whose agency is affirmed." The feminist perspective advocates that religion is not only a system of beliefs and practices, but also a social and cultural construct that reflects and perpetuates gender inequalities. Feminist scholars argue that religion should be reinterpreted and reconstructed to promote gender justice and equality (Russell).

2.3.1   The Sacred and the Profane in theology from Feminist Perspective

One of the most attacked notions by the feminist theologians is the dichotomy of the Sacred/ Profane. The concept of the sacred and profane was first introduced by the French sociologist Emile Durkheim in his seminal work *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life (1912).* According to Durkheim, the sacred and profane represent two distinct modes of experiencing the world which are deeply intertwined in religious life (Durkheim). As the anthropologist Clifford Geertz noted in his book *The Interpretation of Cultures (1973),* the sacred and profane are not fixed categories, but are constantly negotiated and redefined in different cultural contexts. He argues that "what is sacred in one society may be profane in another, and what is profane in one may be sacred in the other" (Geertz).

According to Durkheim, The sacred refers to the realm of the divine, the supernatural, and the transcendent. It encompasses all that is revered and regarded as holy, or set apart from the mundane world. The sacred is associated with rituals, symbols, and practices that are used to connect with the divine and to maintain social cohesion within religious communities. On the other hand, the profane refers to the everyday, secular, and mundane aspects of life. It encompasses all that is commonplace, ordinary, and familiar. The profane is associated with the everyday activities

of individuals and groups, such as work, entertainment, and social interaction. This dichotomy is a central theme in anthropology and religious studies, as it highlights the complex ways in which individuals and societies make sense of their experiences and relationships with the divine (Durkheim).

Feminist scholars have explored the meanings and uses of these concepts in relation to women's experiences and beliefs. One strand of feminist thought argues that the distinction between the sacred and the profane has been used to exclude women from the public sphere and to restrict their access to religious authority and knowledge. This perspective sees the sacred as an idealized realm of purity, transcendence, and order, associated with masculine qualities and institutions, such as priesthoods, hierarchical structures, and monotheistic religions (McPhillips).

By contrast, the profane is seen as the mundane, chaotic, and disorderly realm of daily life, characterized by bodily functions, sexuality, and domestic labor, which have been traditionally assigned to women. According to this view, women's experiences of the profane are often dismissed or devalued as not worthy of attention, while men's experiences of the sacred are privileged and elevated. Some feminist scholars have therefore questioned the validity and usefulness of the sacred/profane dichotomy, suggesting that it reproduces patriarchal biases and hierarchies. Others have proposed alternative ways of understanding the relationship between the spiritual and the material, such as the notion of embodiment, which acknowledges the interconnectedness of body, mind, and spirit, and emphasizes the importance of bodily experience and agency (McPhillips). It is important to note that the present research employs Jack Derrida's Deconstruction Theory and Laura Fuerstein's concept of Self- Image in Psychoanalysis as tools, not theories, used by Feminists to defend their cause.

2.3.2   The Sacred and the Profane in Indian Literature

The concept of the sacred and the profane has a significant place in Indian literature, particularly in Hinduism. The distinction between the sacred and the profane is evident in the mythology, epics, and religious texts of ancient India. The following Myths are a representation to the Sacred and the Profane within the Indian literary context:

A. The Bhagavad Gita: is a Hindu scripture, a part of the epic Mahabharata. It tells the story of a war fought between two groups of cousins. The battlefield of the war is considered a sacred space. The warrior's duty to fight is considered a sacred obligation, and the war is seen as a cosmic battle between good and evil. The profane, on the other hand, is represented by the warriors' use of violence and their pursuit of power. It speaks of the sacred and profane in terms of Dharma -moral duty and righteousness- (Pattanaik).

B. The Ramayana: In this epic poem, the character of Sita is considered a sacred figure, as she is the wife of Lord Rama and a symbol of feminine purity and virtue. The profane is represented by the demon king Ravana, who kidnaps Sita and represents the forces of evil and chaos (Pattanaik).

C. The Kama Sutra[7]: This ancient Indian text on sexuality and relationships distinguishes between the sacred and profane aspects of sexual activity. Sexual pleasure is seen as a sacred aspect of life, but it must be pursued within the confines of marriage and with respect for one's partner. Sexual activity outside of marriage or without regard for one's partner is considered profane (Pattanaik).

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[7]Kama Sutra are ancient Hindu texts about Love, Marriage, and Emotions.

D. The Puranas[8]: These Hindu texts contain many stories and legends about gods and goddesses that represent the sacred and profane. For example, the god Shiva represents both destruction and creation, and is associated with both the sacred and profane aspects of life. The goddess Kali represents the profane, as she is associated with death, destruction, and chaos (Pattanaik).

The concept of the sacred and profane is deeply embedded in Indian literature. It reflects the complex and nuanced ways in which individuals and societies make sense of their relationship with the divine and the mundane. Feminist critics argue that: the pejorative connotations attached to women in their societies are accordingly portrayed in that society's literature. McPhillips states that: "Durkheimian accounts of religion have been heavily gendered, and the sacred masculinized". Durkheim's Social Theory and dichotomy of the Sacred and the Profane reinforces gender roles. He also promotes the negative archetypal stereotypes related to women whether in society or in literature (McPhillips). Thus, McPhillips in her article *Re-casting the sacred: feminist challenges to the masculinization of the sacred in social theory* responds to Durkheim's claims. In her response, she alludes to a crucial concept: the act of Transgression.

2.4   Transgression

Transgression in literature refers to a character's violation of societal or moral boundaries, which often has consequences for the character and the plot of the story. This theme has been explored in many works of literature. In literature, Transgression can serve as a means of exploring societal norms and moral codes, and can challenge readers' assumptions about what is considered as an acceptable behavior. It can also be used to examine the consequences of violating these

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[8]Puranas are Hindu religious texts which narrate stories of Creation and Destruction.

boundaries and the moral dilemmas that arise as a result (Cohan and Shires). In short, Transgression means a cross-over. Durkheim's Social Theory and Feminist critics have polar views on the act of transgression in regards to the Sacred and the Profane.

Emile Durkheim regards transgression as "any act which offends the strong and defined states of the collective conscience" (Durkheim 70). In his book *The Division of Labor in Society*, Durkheim argues that society is held together by a collective consciousness or shared values, norms, and beliefs. Transgressions are actions that violate these shared values, and threaten the cohesion of society. It is based on the idea that the sacred and the profane are two distinct realms that are separated by boundaries. Transgression occurs when these boundaries are violated and the sacred is profaned. Durkheim believed that transgressions are necessary for the maintenance of social order, as they serve as a reminder of the boundaries of acceptable behavior and reinforce the importance of shared values.

To illustrate, an act of transgression in the sacred realm could include sacrilegious acts, such as desecrating a religious artifact or space, or violating a religious taboo. While an example of transgression in the profane realm could include breaking social norms or laws, such as stealing or committing murder. Durkheim believes that by punishing transgressors, society reaffirms the importance of its values and norms, and maintains social order. The feminist perspective, on the contrary, encourages those acts of transgression. They do not wish for female transgressors to be punished, but rather to be idolized. Their utmost goal is to break down the patriarchal social order.

From a feminist perspective, transgression can be defined as a deliberate and conscious violation of social norms based on gender roles, which are often oppressive to women (Grosz, 1994). According to Grosz (1994), feminist transgression serves a dual purpose. On the one hand,

it exposes the limitations and inequalities of patriarchal norms and practices, and on the other hand, it creates new spaces and possibilities for women to define themselves and their roles in society. In this way, feminist transgression can be seen as a form of resistance against oppressive social norms and a way to promote gender equality and justice. It refers to acts that challenge traditional gender norms and expectations within religious or cultural contexts. These acts can challenge the gender binary and heteronormative assumptions that often underlie religious or cultural practices and beliefs (Korte).

Examples of transgression from a feminist perspective include women challenging patriarchal expectations by pursuing careers traditionally dominated by men, openly discussing taboo topics, or rejecting traditional beauty standards that often objectify and oppress women. It could be also about the attempt of taking on roles or leadership positions within traditionally male-dominated religious institutions (Korte). As well as questioning patriarchal interpretations of religious texts. In the profane realm, examples of transgression from a feminist perspective could include challenging the gendered expectations around sexuality and reproductive rights, such as advocating for access to contraception and abortion. These transgressions' acts are mainly dedicated to regaining Agency. They serve as a way to challenge and subvert oppressive gender norms, and create space for more inclusive and egalitarian religious or cultural practices.

2.5   Conclusion

Emile Durkheim was the first to set up the dichotomy of the sacred and the profane. He fastened

the link between Mythology and Religion and the Social practices. Claiming that, Mythology and Religion provide frameworks for understanding the world, and determine the place of both Men and Women in it. In the process of his work, he has related every positive connotation to Men (the sacred), while its negative counterpart was related to Women (the profane). Feminist Critics and Theologists believed his work to be a reinforcement of the unjust gender roles. Thus, they proceeded to redefine, or Re-Caste the Sacred. Feminist thought, unlike the Durkhemian, celebrated the concept and the act of transgression. They encouraged women, authors or not, to break down the patriarchal protocols by undertaking a reinterpretation of Mythology and Religion. The representation of female characters in literature became not a description of reality, but rather a manifestation of what they would like reality become.

Chapter Three: Wandering between Religions, Myths and Genders

3   Chapter Three: Wandering between Religions, Myths and Gender

3.1   Introduction

This last chapter analyzes parts of the novel and relates them to the previous chapters. It is a cultural study of the people, their attitudes, and their convictions. First, it dismantles The Myth of Man's Supremacy and a number of their stale justifications for gendered privilege. The second element focuses on how the notion of Border is used. Then, it connects it to escaping gender norms, or melting the mental chains created by cultural practices that reduce women to nothing more than their gender. The psychological process of breaking apart and rebuilding one's identity—a non-distorted new self-image—is the subject of the final title. For each stance and phrase, quotes from the book have been utilized as evidence. The three female protagonists of the book—Bahu, Ma, and Beti—have received the most attention in the study. Although each of them has a specific function and a unique history, the three of them are united by their status as women.

3.2   Questioning the Myth of Man's Superiority

Despite the fact that India has one of the most comprehensive and robust constitutions and is a secular state, Religion frequently takes precedence over constitutional requirements. Every religious group in the nation has its own unique rules and customs. As for marriage, inheritance, adoption, divorce, and other personal laws, the truth is that these laws are still recognized and founded on religious texts and religious institutions (N.M & Kuruvilla2). These customs are even supported and accentuated by symbolism in Myths, Legends and Ritual practices. The latters deliver explicit and implicit messages of the inferiority of women to emphasize the self-sacrificing, self-effacing pure image of women. These messages are conveyed through liturgical activities that emphasize gender roles. Women are repeatedly envisioned as faithful wives and pious moms on a daily basis. Furthermore, women are conditioned not to question discrimination, subordination,

exploitation, or subjugation at multiple tiers of the hierarchy. These standards prevent women from pursuing goals other than marriage (Sivakumar&Manimekalai 427).

The ancient legal literature, The Manusmriti[9], and its law codes played an important influence in the formation of the Brahmanic Patriarchy, caste system, and heteronormative[10] systems in Ancient India. The text was used by the British to build a complicated system of jurisprudence in which 'universal law' was complemented with 'personal law' regulated by one's religious allegiance. Thus, Religious attitudes continue to dominate Indian cultural and religious moralities about all that concerns women's existence (N.M. 2). The Manusmritiis frequently cited by Hindu groups and individuals as embodying the fundamentals of Hindutva life. Accordingly, Manu[11] is revered as "the father" of the Hindu legal system in India, and the Manusmriti is more than just a historical legal document; it reflects the sociocultural, religious, political, judicial, and geographic life of the populace (N.M. 4). It is the sacredness associated with the role of Men within the society, especially if Women are conditioned to believe that Men are divinely given the right to control and exercise power, renders it very difficult for Women to rise up against the Patriarchal system.

Wendy Doniger and Brian. K. Smith describe the Manusmritias a highly pivotal text for many reasons:

> The *Manusmriti*is a pivotal text of the dominant form of Hinduism as it emerged
> historically and at least in part in reaction to its religious and ideological
> predecessors and competitors. More compendiously than any other text, it

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[9]Manusmriti literally translates to "reflections of Manu" but is most commonly translated as "code of Manu." It claims to be a treatise that organizes and compiles the rules of behavior for human society. It's believed to be the Hindu equivalent of the Sharia for Muslims or the Church Dogma for Catholic Christians as the law book.
[10]of, relating to, or based on the attitude that romantic attraction between people of the opposite sex is the only normal and natural expression of sexuality
[11]Manu, according to the Indian Mythology, is regarded as the first Man.

provides a direct line to the most influential construction of the Hindu religion and Indic society as a whole. No modern study of Hindu family life, psychology, concepts of the body, sex, relationships between humans and animals, attitudes to money and material possessions, politics, law, caste, purification and pollution, rituals, social practice and ideals, and world-renunciation and worldly goals, can ignore Manu (Doniger& Smith 5).

In other words, the Manusmriti is an important text in Hinduism that greatly influences the religion and consequently the society. It provides valuable insights into various aspects of Hindu life. Its codes include family, psychology, relationships, wealth, politics, law, caste, rituals, and spiritual goals. Ignoring the Manusmriti would overlook key aspects of understanding Hindu beliefs and practices. In spite of the fact that Hinduism- as a religion- in its essence celebrates gender equality, these laws still associate Men with superiority/ Women with inferiority, promote Patriarchy, social norms, and gender roles.

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[12] Purdah بردة : the notion literally means Curtain/ Tapestry in Arabic. As a concept, it belongs to Islam and it's a metaphor to Separation and Coverage; usually with a scarf or a veil which might cover all or only certain parts of the female body.

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which its parameters are addressed in many religions, like Islam, is overlooked. It is replaced by a patrilineal one that abuses women of their rights. The patrilineal inheritance system dictates that property and wealth are passed down through the male line, strengthens the idea of men as the rightful inheritors of wealth and power (Papanek). It has become important to challenge and dismantle these beliefs in order to achieve gender equality and promote the empowerment of women in India.

Thus, Feminists' main aim is to deconstruct these Religious-Patriarchal allegations that guarantee the prevalence of Men's rule and denies Women their natural rights. The journalist and scholar N.M., in her analysis of the English translation of *The Manusmriti*by Wendy Doniger and Brian. K. Smith, finds out that:

> Several of the Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights of women related to the right to bodily integrity, marriage rights, right to contraception, right to divorce, etc., are denied as per the injunctions prescribed in the text. Women are portrayed as sexually promiscuous, secret, sly, and out to capture men. Their bodies are frequently objectified and more often devalued as eliciting disgust. The authors connect the implications of the findings with the present status of women's sexual and reproductive rights in Indian society and highlight the need for re-reading the religious and cultural texts with a human rights /gender perspective. (N.M 2).

These overwhelmingly overgeneralized characteristics of a Female essentialize women under a battered stereotype. The male version provided of the reading of these religious, historical and social texts fails to recognize how different identities intersect with womanhood. Linking the previous quote to what has been discussed in the previous chapter supports the Feminists' stand: There is a clear bias towards Men in the interpretation of texts; religious or judicial. It is not in the

text itself, but in the male-provided readings of these texts where lays in the issue. Accordingly, to prevent male hegemony, it is necessary to reassess and redefine texts by adopting a female perspective.

As a form of resilience, creative writing authors actively combat the myth of male superiority and contribute to the broader discourse on gender equality. Shree managed to question the patriarchal system via different approaches. She created empowered/ing Female characters by presenting strong and complex female characters that challenge and surpass societal limitations. These characters showcase their intelligence, resilience, and agency, highlighting the equality and capabilities of women. She also managed to highlight a number of diverse perspectives as she incorporated multiple voices and polar opposite perspectives in the narratives, gave voice to marginalized groups and showcased their unique experiences. This has promoted understanding that superiority cannot be based on gender but should be recognized across all individuals.

In the novel, Tomb of Sand, Shree does not present her characters by distinct names; she rather associates each one to their role and position within the Family. For instance, "Ma", the name of the protagonist, happens to be "Mother" in Hindi, "Beti" is the name of Ma's liberal daughter which stand for "Daughter". It is the same case for the elder Son, "Bade", whose name is pronounced as such in Hindi, too. This serves at creating allusions to the thoughts, roles, demands and expectations of each member. "Bahu", whose name translates into the daughter-in-law, is supposedly the one who preaches an unclear audience about the sexist labels that she, along with other women alike, are stigmatized with. Through the character of Bahu, Shree allowed the reader to dive in the mind of every wife and mother, to see the world as they do.

Bahu's speech took over three pages to deliver a piece of every Bahu's mind. Contradicting the view of Men as being the provider, Bahu says "I'm always the giver, and you are always the taker"(Shree 217). This indicates that there is so much more to being a provider than fulfilling mere financial needs. In other lines, she probably refers to giving up her freedom as she says "And if I lose something, what's the big deal, but if you do, you've beenrobbed, woe is me! … And when I went and did it, it was my duty, but when you did, it was big of you" (Shree 218). After marriage, a woman's main priority has to become her husband, his family and their kids. Her life becomes theirs. Her time must be dedicated to serve them all first, and herself second - if ever. Furthermore, what worsens the situation is being merely tolerated and never appreciated. As she adds, "And if I don't do it, it's carelessness, but if you don't, it's helplessness … however much I've done is not enough, and whatever little you did is plenty." (Shree 219), this entails that she has to do more than what she is capable of, and if not, she has done nothing. Unlike the Man, who is treasured and valued for any amount of effort.

The daughter-in-law's speech continues questioning Man's superiority as she refers to the inequality of opportunities given to Man and Women. She asserts "And yes, your work is the bee's knees, but mine's a hobby, if you please. Family and my own decency have destroyed me. Otherwise I'd have been like you: director, professor, officer. All right, then, you're not me, because you don't want to be me, but I'm not you since I could never be you" (Shree 220). This quote relates directly to the concepts of Patriarchy and Dysfunctional Social Norms discussed in the first chapter. Bahu blames social customs which, based on Myth, Religion and Tradition, give priority to Man over Women. Thereby, asserting that Men are given more opportunities for merely being born Males; otherwise, if women were given the same chances they could have turned out exactly the same. Inevitably, Men are allowed to choose their own paths, while women have theirs already

drawn for them. Thus, Men's superiority is not due to any heavenly given characteristics. It is the product of Patriarchal society, and years of conditioning women into thinking of themselves as inferior.

The persona then regrets as it reflects on how their society once used to be versus how it has become. By the end of the speech there is a mention of ancient Myths. The speaker wonders between the two different realms, of the Sacred and the Profane, with an intent focus on the case of Females within and in-between. As the persona says "Aji, once we've become a great civilization, we'll be forever free to go any which way. And how can you carry on about the disrespect, rape and casting out of women, when this is the land where Gargi[13] once beat Yagyavalk and Mandan Mishra's wife beat Shankaracharya?" (Shree 220).Gargi, or Sage Gargi Vachaknavi, is one of world's oldest icon of feminism. Unlike the medieval and colonial periods of India, the Vedic period had no issues of gender inequality. According to the records, Gargi challenged Yagyavalk in a debate about the Brahma[14]. In some versions Gargi won the debate while in others she acknowledges Yagyavalk's wisdom (Madhavi). Mandana Mishra's wife is also a well-known ancient feminist scholar who could beat Shankracharya in a debate. These two are examples of women's intellectual abilities. Both prove that females are by no means inferior to males, yet both Myth have unclear or twisted endings.

In a nutshell, Shree managed to portray how women could become counterpart of men; by illustrating what they have accomplished in patriarchal societies despite the gender inequalities.

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[13]Gargi, the daughter of sage Vachaknu in the lineage of sage Garga (c. 800-500 BCE) was named after her father as GargiVachaknavi. From a young age she evinced keen interest in Vedic scriptures and became very proficient in fields of philosophy. She became highly knowledgeable in the Vedas and Upanishads in the Vedic times and held intellectual debates with other philosophers like yagyavalk and Mandan (Madhavi).

[14]A philosophical realm that seeks to explore the individual's relationship with the universe and life, aiming to understand the interconnectedness and significance of these aspects (Madhavi).

She declares that "this is not a history, just a herstory" (Shree 398). This quote is one of the prime examples of counter attacking the Rhetoric male discourse and showing the bias of language. The distorted endings of the Myths, Gargi and Mishra's wife, are another form of oppression. Many women's accomplishments are overlooked or minimized – if not assigned to men. Bahu represents the voice of the oppressed women in the indian society, whereas Ma and Beti chose to forge their own paths. They refused to abide by the law, traditions, and social norms. As the narrative unfolds, Ma and Beti cross a number of borders. They represent another type of women. Women who did as they pleased. Thus, Bahu represents the Sacred Feminine. Even though she questions Men's superiority, she does not act upon defying it. She is caring, nurturing and obedient. Ma and Beti are the opposite; they represent the Profane.

3.3   Deconstructing Religious Claustrophobics

The term deconstructing religious claustrophobics insinuates the attempt of unraveling and escaping the unconformity of a certain belief that inflicts discontent. It also refers to the feminist approach of using Jacques Derrida's theory of Deconstruction to counter attack and break the Male made laws. To portray the Transgression from one space to another, Shree makes use of two symbols: Borders (physical, philosophical, and biological) and Doors. As Alex Mason quotes IrusBraverman, "Across various times and cultures, the door has been a central technology for facilitating the distinction between inside and outside, individuals and society, private and public, and profane and sacred" (Mason). Mason adds, Doors and Borders are carriers of cultural codes (Mason). If one passes through/ out of a door or crosses a border their behavior shifts accordingly. Beti, Ma, and Rosie/Raza –Ma's hijra[15] friend- all of them crossed borders.

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[15]The meaning of the wordhijra refers specifically to those people, who are either born intersex, neither male nor female, or males who wish to identify as females(Masud).

Beti, Ma's daughter, has always been rebellious, unconventional and most of all Free. She's divorced, lives by herself, and works as a journalist. Whenever she visits the family house, i.e. Bade's house; she ponders:

> A foot, lifted to enter, pauses, hovers in the air. A drama unfolds in that moment. Arrested in midair, dramatically balancing, a foot upraised as though startled, and now can't decide whether to forge ahead or return whence it came. As though in a quandary as to where the world lies: ahead or behind? Which is reality and which is make-believe? The raised foot becomes a hovering question—*am I on this side or that?*Every time Bade's sister pauses in this pose at his door, the thought flashes through her mind—*have I been acting until now, or am I just about to start?*(Shree 34).

At her brother's house, Beti felt claustrophobic, alienated, and trapped. She could not express herself freely. Beti has always felt like a case under study, Shree adds: "But really, this watching, this assessing—it's an experience that travels acrosslifetimes for sisters and daughters" (Shree 36). From a young age, society's bindings did not appeal to Beti, so she got into the habit of sneaking out. "There was a constant uproar of *No, absolutely not, she won't go out!* And in the meantime, Betileapt through the open window and fluttered off like a bird. Only Ma knew.For the rest of them, by the time they heard she wasn't in her room" (Shree 37). As she grew up, due to the nature of her job, Beti found herself in airports all the time, crossing actual geographical borders.

It is not until the final part of the novel that we realize from where Beti has got her rebellious attitude. When Ma convinces Beti of taking her to Pakistan, we figure out that Ma has been there before. The storyline goes back in time to Ma's teenage years, before the partition of India. Before 1947, the territory of India and Pakistan was one land. It was then when Ma got kidnapped, along with other girls, by what seems to be Muslim troops. While she was trying to escape, she found a Buddha statue and met the eleven years' Rosie. Ma and Rosie ran away in the midst of a sand

storm. At some point both fainted and were later woken up in a hospital. As they were gaining back

their composure, the news of the Partition[16] struck. Now, they were on Indian land. Their families,

friends, lovers, and Life as they knew it, was left in what has become Pakistan. After that, Pakistan

was declared a Muslim country. Ma and Rosie did not feel the need to go back because they were

Buddhist.

Ma and Beti wander in Pakistan until they reached Khyber[17]. They got imprisoned for being

there without a Visa or a special permission in a Border area. During their stay, Ma was questioned

repeatedly by the guards on the reasons which led her to such endangered area. Ma, Chanda,

proceeds to say,

I am Chanda, Ma says to him loudly. *C-h-a-n-d-a*.Chanda.From here. Now

she presses her hand into the soil. I came of my own volition.

This name is not in your passport.

Chanda was sent off without a passport.

You have no visa.

Chanda was sent away without a visa.

Your address is in India, which is very far from here.

It is where it is, you're the one who's far, son.

I'm from here, you've travelled here.

No, son, I didn't come here, I left here (Shree 634).

And then she quotes the poet Mir TaqiMir "I don't know the reason for this estrangement //

wherever you are from, I am from there too"(Shree 634). These wise words left them stunned.

Beti; however, was more terrified than to dare and speak. She thought old age shook something

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[16]After the partition of India in 1947, each religious group belonged to a nation; Muslims to Pakistan and Hindus and Buddhist to India. Some of the Muslims in India chose to leave and go to Pakistan, whereas Hindus and Buddhist remained in India.
[17]Khyber is a border area between Pakistan and India. No one is allowed there. It is all prisons and Army Bases.

loose in Ma's head. Ma has alluded to the idea of Borders until she openly said, questioning the whole system and re-defining it:

> a border is not created to be removed. It is meant to illuminate both sides[...]A border does not enclose, it opens out [...]This side of the edging blossoms, as does that [...]What is a border? It enhances a personality. It gives strength. It doesn't tear apart. A border increases recognition. Where two sides meet and both flourish. A border ornaments their meeting. Every part of the body has a border. So does the heart. A border surrounds it but it also binds it to the other parts. It doesn't wrench the heart from the rest. Fools! If you cut a border through a heart, you don't call it a border, you call it a wound [...]A border stops nothing. It is a bridge between two connected parts. Between night and day.Life and death. Finding and losing. They are bound together. You can't separate them. A border is a horizon. Where two worlds meet. And embrace (Shree 658).

She accentuates, "A border, gentlemen, is for crossing. A border says *jump*. It's there to tempt you to cross it, come back, play, smile, welcome, meet greet create" (Shree 659). Ma adds, "You created a border in your mind. You changed the names, but theplaces and the people remained the same" (Shree 661). Finally, she exhorts "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 661).

Ma's speech about the Border mimics that of the feminists' in regards to The Sacred and The Profane dichotomy. Both parties want to take down The Border. For Ma, it is a form of geographical claustrophobia. For feminists, it is philosophical, social, moral and gendered. According to Erickson, "feminist have claimed that women are not "Profane", and have explored the "sacredness" of women's lives" (Erickson 35). Just like Ma, feminists and sociological feminist believes the world to be more complicated than to offer people one of two options. It is more than being on one side of the border, or the other. Erickson affirms that "Religion and magic are also separated intime-space. The religious/sacred belongs to one world, the magical/profaneto another,

and "between the two worlds there is no common measure" (78)
Even so, it is not always the case that an individual always exists in one or theother world"
(Erickson 37). Thus, the separation of the two realms cannot be possible. Men and women as long
as alive, continue to flow from one world to the other. We all transgress the inherited border that is
only in our minds.

3.4   Escaping Gender Norms

Gender norms are the collection of morally and socially acceptable behaviors designed by
gender. Man and Women are expected to speak, act, and think differently. For instance, Men are
not supposed to show emotions. They are rational, strong, independent, and violent, whereas
Women are simply the opposite. Defying Gender Norms, challenging inequality and the traditional
masculine is Beti's mission in Shree's work. During her childhood, Beti was adored for the way
she said "No"; however, "Everyone laughing happily with her *no* somehow disappeared with
childhood, but her *no* grew up with her. No, I won't sew, no, I won't wear a dupatta[18], no, I won't
be locked up, no, I'm not you. There was so much no, no, that even when she was going to say yes,
her lips would first say no. Drink tea. No, I'll drink tea. It's very cold. No, it's very cold" (Shree
54). Women are characterized as nurturing, but Beti nurtured the habit of saying "No"; a criteria, a
gender norm that society is not very fond of.

"A path opens with *no*. Freedom is made of *no*. *No* is fun. *No* is nonsensical. Nonsensical, but
also mystical" (Shree 54).Beti grow up and it has become difficult to tame her. When they closed
the door, she leapt through the window. Bade, her older brother, was not anymore pleased of her
behavior. He thought, "It was fine when she was younger: go ahead and don't listen to anyone then,

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[18]Adupatta is a scarf-like piece of fabric worn over the head by women in India.

but as she got older, she had to be told what to do and what not to do. There's no question that an

elder brother must signal his disapproval to his sister, joining forces with the parental tone" (Shree

54). The issue exacerbated when her love life became the subject of town's gossip. Bade has felt

"thefull gravitas[dignity]of Bade's ancestors came to rest upon his shoulders, and the time came

for more severe measures" (Shree 55). He forced everyone in the household to cut ties with her.

Even that did not help. Beti has simply moved out, and started living by herself.

After that Ma's husband passed away, Ma felt depressed and remained in bed for almost 200

pages. It was then when Beti visited to help her mother out of her misery. One day, Ma goes missing

and after few days she is found in a police station. She decides later to go and live with her daughter

instead. Bade finds it difficult to allow this; this was not the traditions, social norms and customs.

Shree then questions the nature of what society approves of as the Norm. She says,

> customs are not the invention of the Almighty, are they? [...]The Almighty
>
> crafted them one way, The Sun warmed them in another, and machismo
>
> [aggressive masculine pride] then exploited them. Machismo is hidden in the
>
> layers of nearly every custom, and its repulsiveness makes it no less macho,
>
> explained the orator. Joyousness grew fearful, the dance collapsed, happiness
>
> faded, and from this mixture the next generation was born, which does not
>
> know the reason for the mixture but has already acquired its nature. So nature
>
> became habit. Habit is custom. Thus ended the speech. Only the first time is
>
> there a spontaneous reaction. After that, it's all habit. Habit is just another word
>
> for repetition. Repetition becomes empty and meaningless, but it is also routine
>
> (Shree 138-139).

Referring to the shallow essence of customs and gender norms prove that they do not have any strong arguments for why they exist. They are a habit. A habit passed down from one generation to another. Women, like Men, without questioning are conditioned to behave in certain ways. Shree adds, "So whatever we do and however we do it, we are just enacting what has come down to us as custom ritual habit" (Shree 139).

Shree next, through the eyes of Beti, refers to the male-centered world view. Even though Ma is living with her daughter now, she is considered her son's responsibility. Beti suddenly had a profound realization,

> Those living with Bade, wherever they may go, for however long they may leave, still live with Bade, and will surely return, once they've completed their leave of absence. Amma is living with him, no matter where she may be staying. All arrangements to do with her money, her care, her living and dying, are his responsibility alone. Whether it is said aloud or not, thought about or not. So the pen can still travel to Bade because wherever the family or elderly Ma or the door might be, Bade will also be there, no matter what, whether he is physically present or not (Shree 331-332).

In the thought of him, he calls. Beti's mind examines how he is speaking to Ma; she sympathized with him as it downed on her,

> There are few eldest sons who know how to talk with their family members, i.e., how to call to ask how people are, have heart-to-heart chats, converse intimately. Giving orders, suggesting ways and means, or if not that, teasing and joking, these are the ways eldest sons speak. Outwardly attired, as it were, in the tough exterior of his father, even if his heart is his own and soft to the core. Bade's tone could be rude, dictatorial, sarcastic, fussing, worrying, talking of this and that. Because how would eldest sons know how to speak straightforward words of love?(Shree 332).

Gender norms practice so much pressure on both genders. While they give so little freedom to Women, they also put on so much responsibility on Men. Feminists by blurring the line between the sacred and profane want to offer them the option to choose. The act of transgression promotes gender equality and mainly individual autonomy. It deviates from the norms, and expectations that dictate how individuals should behave, present themselves, or conform to specific gender-related standards.

3.5   New Self-Image

Philosophies that study the self like the Kantian Ethical Subject and the Homo Economicus view the individual in isolation from their relationships and environment. They overlook the multiple sources of social identity formed at the intersections of gender, sexual orientation, race, class, age, ethnicity, ability, etc. They also ignore the complexity of the unconscious mind's fantasies, fears, and desires, as well as their influence on conscious life. The modern philosophical construct of the rational subject portrays a self that is unaffected by ambivalence, anxiety, depression, obsession, prejudice, hatred, or violence.   The body is seen as peripheral, a source of desires for Homo Economicus, and a distraction for the Kantian ethical subject. Attributes such as age, appearance, sexuality, biological composition, and physical abilities are considered irrelevant to the self. Feminists accuse these western philosophies for being misogynistic. They only apply on a middle class white Man who is, to some degree, free (qtd in. Anderson). Thus, there is a crucial need to construct a new philosophy to define the self in a way that involves women.

According to the feminist perspective, western philosophies have mainly failed to explain the concept of internalized oppression and the process of overcoming it. Women often conform to feminine behaviors, lower their aspirations, and embrace goals that align with gender expectations. Feminists argue that this is because women internalize patriarchal norms, which become ingrained in their cognitive, emotional, and motivational structure. Women may unknowingly contribute to

their own oppression. In some cases, distorted norms can even lead women to question their own sanity, a process referred to as Gaslighting. The latter causes a woman to lose her sense of self to the extent that she may experience depression and grief. Once internalized, oppressive norms shape a woman's core desires (qtd in. Anderson). This sudden, epiphany-like, realization alters the Self Image and creates a New Self Image. The female characters: Bahu, Ma and Beti, have undergone multilayered processes of self- reincarnation.

Bahu, old son's wife, realizes, amidst all the Profanity of her ordinary life, that despite the amount of effort she puts into taking care of her husband, offspring, house and her mother in law, she still feels unappreciated. In a Sacred moment, she talks to herself, "No one will believe me. No one ever does. She felt tearful. [...]I was the one who thought of all the special touches, not him" (Shree 206). She adds, "My home has never been my own. He invited whomever he wished; when did anyone ever listen to me? Bas, enough is enough, my son says, now think about yourself for a change, and leave others to themselves" (Shree 207). It is as the narrator articulated, "Every mother has the sort of son who tells her, Ma, you have been sacrificed on the family altar. Women of every race and creed meet this criterion. To what has already occurred the son adds imagined oppressions and exhorts her to put on her Reeboks and stamp out of the door" (Shree 72). Only then, Bahu started to craft an independent new image of herself; not as a daughter, wife, or mother, but as a Woman.

After the death of her husband, Ma got depressed. She was lying in bed all the time and the only words she said were: "No, I won't get up, no getting up, not now, the bundle wrapped in the quilt mumbled. No, no, not now, not getting up" (Shree 21). The narrator tells us that "These words alarmed them, and her children grew more insistent. They were afraid. Oh! Our dear mother! Papa's gone and he's taken her with him!" (Shree 21). The latter quotes hints to the Sati practice when

women committed self-suicide after their husbands died. Later when Ma goes missing, the persona was contemplating that "A feminist soul might say that she wasn't there before, either, hadn't been for years, taking care of the house and children she was a wandering shadow whose self was, in reality, missing" (Shree 180). However, what her children did not hear was that Ma was actually saying, "*No, no, I won't get up. Noooooo, I won't rise nowwww. Nooo rising nyooww.Nyoooriiisenyoooo. Now rise new. Now, I'll rise anew"* (Shree 23). Ma only needed the time to metamorphose. The awakening after the depression changed her. It felt like rebirth. Beti, drawing constellations in her mind, she thought,

> A woman, exhausted after years of subsuming her own rhythm to that of others, lying in bed for months, hanging on a breath which alone is hers, and after turning her back on everyone, she's started to recognise it somewhat, and, granted, a cane had also come her way, which could be turned into the Wishing Tree when extended, and anyway, even witches fly on canes, like brooms, soMa was this Amma, who for so many years had remained immersed in her motherhood, who had now forgotten everyone and everything: is this not a birth, or a rebirth? And what newborn comes out a-toddling—don't they have to learn how to crawl and then to todtodtodtoddle—and the newborn gets lost,cries, smiles—does it not? (Shree 225-226).

Later on, Ma started deciding for herself. She moved in with her daughter despite what society might think of her. She reconnected with her Hijra friend, Rosie, and both of them started their own business. Even more, she crossed borders looking for her former lover.

Beti's recalculations of her lifestyle were different from the ones Ma and Bahu had. After Ma moved in with her, she felt watched. She felt like a guest in her own house. It was not her sanctuary anymore. She became a mother of her own mother- a responsibility that Beti has always avoided and feared. She has seen how by starting a family, a woman might lose a sense of her being in the

process of taking care of everyone else. When she was with Ma in the prison in Khyber, she felt

depressed. Beti thought that maybe it would have been better to her if she got married, had kids

and lived a normal life. She thought it was due to her defying society that it all backfired. She wrote

in her letter to her boyfriend,

> I still had more living to do. I didn't have to live like this. I just can't breathe
> here. Arre, if I had to exist amid the struggles of home and family and others, I
> wouldn't have done it as others do: two or three children, household, servants,
> car, someone helping at every step, becoming a mother, grandmother, a rani, a
> begum. I'd wear Reeboks too, and show people, see, I can do this too. But I
> wanted my own kind of life (Shree 672).

Applying Anderson's concept of Gaslighting, Beti due to her depression questioned her previous

life decisions. For a moment, she regretted choosing an independent lifestyle. According to

Fuerstein, that is Culture's Effect on the Female Self Image. In her book *"My Mother, My Mirror"*,

Fuerstein mentions that "the important strides women have made in society haven't dramatically

improved our self-image as a group. Despite the progress of the women's movements, mothers and

daughters still share a long-lived common bond: we berate ourselves because we don't act and look

as we should, according to the culture's ideals" (Fuerstein 40-42).

In a nutshell, breaking free out of the watchful eyes of social norms is succeeded by a phase of

rebirth. The latter results in the construction of a New Self Image. The female self-image is altered

by many factors. The main one and our area of focus is Culture. Relating this to the previous

chapters, we realize that women are haunted by society's expectations of them. Defying culture is

the destruction of a whole parameter which often yields in a psychological crisis. After that period

of crisis, there is a new sense of self-actualization. The female characters in the novel: Bahu, Ma

and Beti, each are faced with a sacred moment which acts as a turning point in their lives, and

changes their view of life as they previously knew it. It transgresses them into a new sense of being; the truer the self-image is, the freer the self becomes. Finally, the individual efforts to overcome oppressive norms and practices, may lead to collective reconstruction of norms.

3.6   Conclusion

This final chapter provides a general analysis of the novel and adjusts it to the Indian social and cultural frames. It is an analysis of the people, their mindsets, and beliefs. Feminist authors have been trying to free the mind of the female within patriarchal societies. Thus, the research starts first by an annihilation of the Myth of Man's superiority, and deconstructs a sum of their worn out excuses of gendered privilege. The second title focuses on the implementation of theme of physical Borders as it relates to the theme of Borders in Escaping Gender Norm i.e. breaking the mental cages enforced by traditions to reduce and restrict Women to their Gender only. The last title is concerned with the psychological journey of deconstructing and reconstructing one's identity; creating a non-distorted self-image. Women, who overcome the social claustrophobia of the Sacred and the Profane, indulge in metamorphoses to draw New positive Self Images of themselves. They finally achieve peace with their being as females.   Quotes from the novel have been used to support each stand and read behind the metaphors. The analysis has focused on the three female characters of the novel: Bahu, Ma, and Beti. Each one them has a defined role and a distinct background, but the three of them are bounded by womanhood.

General Conclusion

General Conclusion

India is a kaleidoscope of Cultures, Ethnicities, Languages, and Religions. The existence of these multilayered beliefs is often the reason of political, racist, and gendered disputes. To recapitulate, the first chapter provides the necessary cultural background to the study. It traces the roots of a number of notions and concepts which are deeply embedded in the mindset of Indians; such as: Patriarchy, Indian Caste System, and the Rhetoric discourse. Thus, it focuses on relating these concepts to the Indian Women's struggle within the Indian society from the perspective of mythology, religion, and history. The second chapter is chiefly concerned with the theoretical aspect of the research. The research, as a cultural study, combines between the binary of The Sacred and The Profane in Theology and Gender in Feminism. The final chapter provides a focused analysis on the female characters in SHREE's novel *"Tomb of Sand"*. It provides a psychological analysis of women's healing journey towards achieving a New sense of Self Image.

The dissertation opens off in the first chapter by introducing a glimpse on the meaning of Patriarchy while focusing on two elements: the Supremacy of Indian Men and the Dysfunctional Social Norms. Next, it discusses the history and the nature of the Indian Caste System. Then, the third title, the Rhetoric Discourse, is the sum of excuses crafted by Men to convince women of their secondary position within the society. SHREE portrays women's oppression and accentuates the need to face Patriarchy shadowed in the name of Tradition, Indian Customs and the Sacred vs. the Profane.

The second chapter presents Emile Durkheim's Social Theory and his dichotomy of The Sacred and The Profane. Then, it discusses the Feminist perspective on this theory. Durkheim

believes the gender biased social practices to be based on strong foundations in both of mythology and religion. Feminist critics were triggered by his ideas on separating society only to two levels of Sacred and Profane; stigmatizing the profane to women and complimenting men with the sacred. They, on the other hand, believe in the cultural construction which entails that: it is the reasoning of men that ascribes meaning to ideas and concepts. Then, they adopted the term of Transgression to cross over the boundaries and fences of gender roles. Their goal was to question and debate the essence of the privilege given to men to encourage women to metamorphose into a freer version of themselves.

The third chapter provides an intent reading into the psychology of females who attempt to defy patriarchy and overcome gender norms. SHREE's novel is loaded with lyrical beauty; rather than respond to tragedy with rigidness, she comes out with a playful tone and exuberant wordplay. The latter is evident in the passages included in the research. SHREE, through the use of three female characters with different roles and backgrounds, attempts to illustrate the struggle of all women. The Hijra character precisely aims to punctuate any Human's connection with their both feminine and masculine self-representation. Instead of having the Sacred connoted to men and the Profane to women, she attempts to prove that any human is simultaneously Sacred and Profane. To ease the idea into the reader's mind, SHREE makes use of the theme of Borders and the story of the partition of India. The novel in itself is "an urgent protest against the destructive impact of borders and boundaries, whether between religions, countries, or genders" (Wynne).

According to the archeologists, the Cultural Construction concept is tightly linked to specific Time and Place. It means that the social norms have not always been the same. In India for example, during the Vedic period, women enjoyed equality with men more than they did later in the medieval and colonial periods. If women were really biologically inferior to men, their status would have

been always inferior to them and not have it change in different settings. Thus, what is perceived as Sacred or Profane could not have a religious or holy essence. It is constructed by men to oppress women and guarantee their hegemony over them. The research also finds out that, the Female characters in *"Tomb of Sand"* have a distorted self-image on themselves. It is only when they no longer abide by the social norms, gender roles, and prioritizes themselves and not society's laws that they meet their truer freer selves.

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Appendices

Appendices

Appendix A: Geetanjali SHREE

Image 1 "An Elegy to a Pluralistic, Polyglot India Wins Readers and Critics in the West"
https://www.nytimes.com/2023/02/11/books/geetanjali-shree-tomb-sand.html

Appendix B: **Tomb of Sabd Book Cover**

Image 2 "Tomb of Sand" Paperback

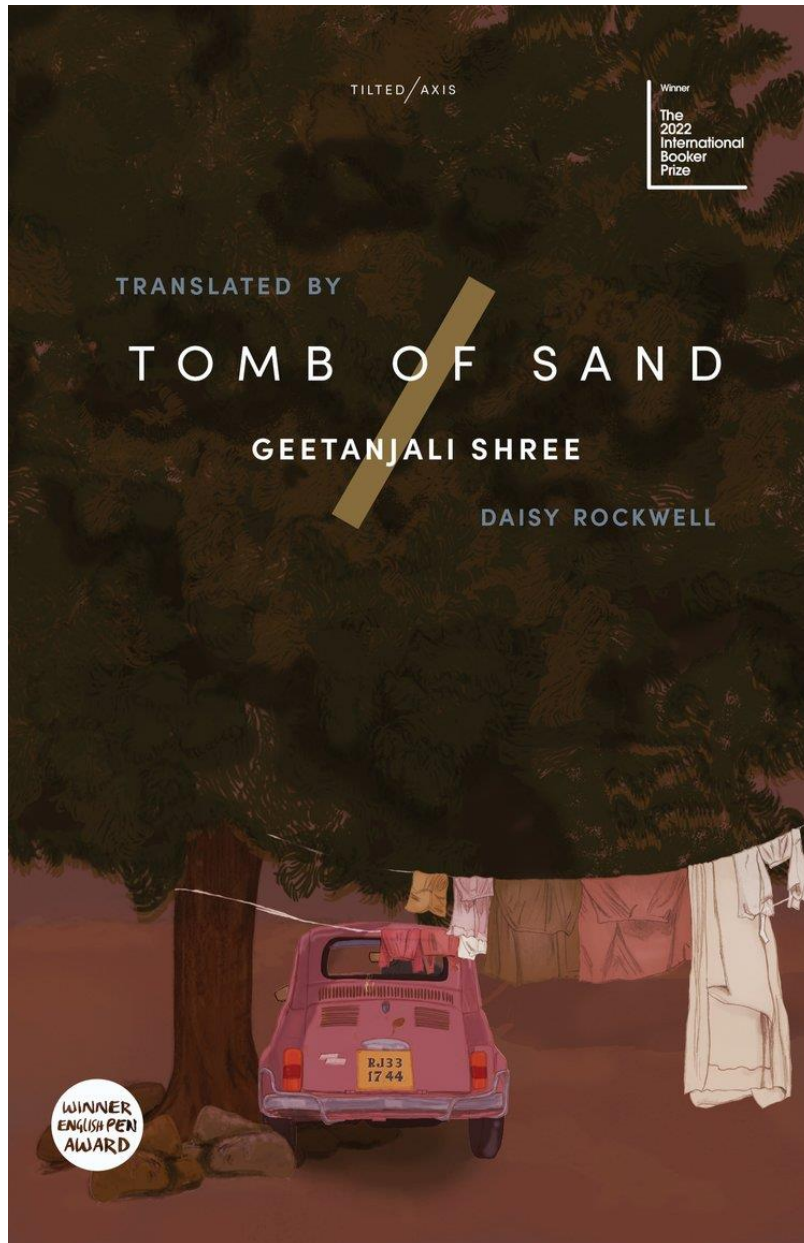https://www.tiltedaxispress.com/store/tomb-of-sand-paperback

Glossary

Glossary

Hijra People: The term "Hijra" is used to refer to a community of transgender and intersex individuals in South Asia, particularly in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. Hijras have a long history and cultural significance in the region, and they are recognized as a distinct gender identity. They are often born as Males but choose to identify as neither Males nor Females. They have been seen as spiritual or mystical beings with certain blessings or powers. Despite that, they still face hardships to integrate within other communities.

New self-image: the self-image is one's perception of themselves. It is constructed from a young age; through their connection with different elements of their surroundings (culture, society, education, family, and friends). It is the sum of input they collect to create an output i.e. identity. A self-image is forevermore altered as the person grows up. Sudden realization or epiphanies which affect one's mindset change their Self-image and create a New one.

Rhetoric discourse: Rhetoric discourse refers to the art or skill of using language effectively and persuasively to communicate and persuade an audience. It encompasses the use of various rhetorical devices and strategies to shape and influence opinions, attitudes, and beliefs. It is frequently used in the domain of politics. By employing rhetorical strategies and devices, politicians, speakers and writers can influence and shape public opinion, inspire action, and convey their message with impact. In the context of the present dissertation, it refers to the number of arguments given by Men to secure their dominance over Women.

Social Construction: Social Construction is the act of institutionalizing meaning or connotation to a certain object based on the perceived reality; as a result to human interaction. Social constructs exist because humans want them to exist. It is the means through which social

groups create social phenomena. It is all what was introduced to nature because of the behavior of Man. There is a number of social constructs such as: Money, Geographical Borders, The Sacred, The Profane, Passports, Identity cards, Visas. All these concepts are meaningless unless humans agree to render them meaningful.

Social/ Societal Norms: Social norms are a set of unwritten rules, expectations, standards of behaviour, and conventions that are widely accepted, followed, and appreciated by members of a particular society or social group. They define what is considered appropriate, acceptable, and expected behavior within a given social context. Social norms vary; what I accept in one culture may not be accepted in another. They maintain order and contribute to the smooth functioning of society.

Theology: Theology is the study of the nature of God, religious beliefs, and the principles and concepts of a particular religion or religious tradition. It is an intellectual discipline that explores questions about the divine, the nature of existence, religious experience, and the interpretation of religious texts. Studying theology deepens one's faith and provides guidance, and contributes to the spiritual development of individuals.

ملخص

يمثل المجتمع الهندي مزيجا من الثقافات، المعتقدات والتقاليد الاجتماعية. تهدف غيتانجالي شري في روايتها الحائزة على جائزة بوكر في الأدب "قبر الرمال" إلى تجسيد هذه المفاهيم و توظيفها لفهم الأسباب الرئيسية لاضطهاد المرأة وقواعد الأعراف الاجتماعية.تتساءل غيتانجالي شري عن جوهر السلوكيات والتقاليد والعادات والأعراف الاجتماعية السائدة داخل المجتمع الهندي ، وتعكسها على المجتمعات الأخرى ؛ من أجل تحقيق الشمولية الأدبية. كما توضح كيف تؤثر هذه التصورات الاجتماعية المتأصلة بشكل سلبي على المرأة و تشوه صورتها الذاتية باتجاه نفسها وفي المجتمع.اعتمدت شري على الاصطلاح الثنائي "المقدس والمدنس" لتتبع أسس الأدوار الجندرية والدلالات السلبية التي توصم بها النساء.في محاولة لتحليل الرواية ، يستخدم البحث الحالي مفهوم "النظرية الاجتماعية" لإميل دوركهايم مع التركيز بشكل خاص على اصطلاح "المقدس والدنس" ؛بالإضافة إلى النظرية النسوية لعكس وترسيخ نضالات النساء نحو التحرر الذاتي العقلي والنفسي والثقافي. تتوصل الدراسة الثقافية / الاجتماعية الحالية إلى أن تشريع اضطهاد المرأة هو مجرد ممارسة اجتماعية موروثة لا أساس لها، و تحرم المرأة من حقوقها الطبيعية .هذا الأخير يؤثر على الصورة الذاتية للمرأة ويحصرها في حالة ذهنية تتوسم بالبؤس و العجز. نتائج هذا البحث يمكن تسخيرها و الاستفادة منها في مجالات أخرى من الدراسات مثل علم النفس وعلم الاجتماع وحتى السياسة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: النظرية النسوية، المدنس، المقدس،الصورة الذاتية، النظرية الاجتماعية.