



Navigating Space, Place, and Society: A GeoHumanities Perspective on Transgression in Geetanjali Shree's *Tomb of Sand*

Musfira Tayyab¹ & Ayesha Akram²

ABSTRACT

Article History:

Received:

March 8, 2024

Accepted:

June 26, 2024

Funding:

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

This research explores the social dynamics of space in Geetanjali Shree's *Tomb of Sand* (2021), originally published as *Ret Samadhi*, and translated into English by Daisy Rockwell. *Tomb of Sand* revolves around *Ma*, an eighty year old woman, who rises from a deep trance as *new* and develops a taste for transgression. The objective of this research essay is to evaluate the social implications of animation of places like doors, thresholds, boundaries, and walls in the novel, and to analyse the role of spatial dimension in the transgressive activities of characters. The research is significant in that it highlights the treatment of space as a physical entity that has a cognition of its own. The paper argues that the places in the novel are alive due to their social soul, and they put forth the ideologies and thoughts of the prominent actors who inhabit them. Places, therefore, become indicators of characters' transgression since they represent the social expectations with regards to gender, age or class. For instance, the door of Bade's home (in the text under scrutiny) "knows that it must remain open" as he has a responsibility towards every social class as a civil servant. However, the case is different for Beti whose departure from Bade's home is viewed as a sign of transgression. This research employs the concept of place by Tim Cresswell in his book *In Place/ Out of Place: Geography, Ideology and transgression* (1996). Appropriating the tools of interpretive phenomenological analysis of the text, the research contributes to the interdisciplinary domain of GeoHumanities.

Keywords: animation, cognition, GeoHumanities, place, transgression

¹ Research scholar at Institute of English Studies, University of the Punjab, Lahore.

² Assistant Professor at Institute of English Studies, University of the Punjab, Lahore.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Non Commercial 4.0 International License \(CC BY-NC 4.0\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/)

The dimensions of space and time are inseparable aspects of human existence that have been perceived by philosophers and critical thinkers in various manners. Before 1970s, the Western paradigms of knowledge focused on the significance of time in the evolution of humans, their society, and the quality of their existence. Space was dismissed as a stationary aspect that set the stage for the events to unfold with no contribution to shape the events. Space took shape of *res extensa* in Descartes's Cartesian ontology and morphed into empty container in Kantian philosophy (Wegner, 2002, p. 181). However, in 1970s, interest was reignited in the nature of space and its significance with the work of multiple intellectuals from various fields of social sciences including, but not limited to, Lefebvre's *Production of Space* (1991), Foucault's "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias" (1986), and Soja's *Thirdspace* (1996). With time, the field of GeoHumanities has evolved extensively and has been manifested through diverse theoretical approaches, such as Critical Literary Geography, Geocriticism, Spatial Literary Theory, cultural geography, human geography and so on. The treatment of space in GeoHumanities is holistic and deals with imagined spaces, real geographical locations, normative geography, relativity of fictional spaces with the real spaces, interlinked concepts of space and place, and their contribution in the development and progress of human intellect and society.

This research engages with the treatment of space in Geetanjali Shree's *Tomb of Sand* (2021). The objective of research is to find answers to the following research questions through the analysis of Shree's novel: What are the factors that initiate the transition of spaces into places in the selected novel? Why have the spaces been given animated nature in the novel? How does the animation of places complicate the concepts of transgression and oddity for characters? To unearth the answers, the research employs Tim Cresswell's theory of place, put forward in his book *In Place/Out of Place: Geography, Ideology and Transgression* (1996), that contributes to conceptualization of place in the field of GeoHumanities. The rationale for the appropriation of Cresswell's theory is that it deals with place in its relation to formation of ideologies and ultimate transgression of humans. Thus, it synchronises with the research objectives of the current study.

Cresswell's concept of place

Scholars have dealt with all aspects of space from its production to evolution, its cultural and humanist implications, its behaviour as a force as well as a process, along with the complications borne of its dynamic and fluid nature. While contemplating the social aspect of space in his book *Production of Space*, Lefebvre noted that "(social) space is not a thing among other things, not a product among other products, rather, it subsumes things produced and encompasses their interrelationship in their coexistence and simultaneity- their (relative) order or/and (relative) disorder" (1991, p. 73).

Tim Cresswell's theoretical argumentation about place is based on treatment of place as a normative geography. Cresswell (1996) defines normative geography as the one "in which ideas about what is right, just and appropriate are

transmitted through space and place” (p. 14). It means normative geography is produced when a space imbibes the norms and traditions of a society and becomes a place with social expectations and obligations for appropriation. Such geographies are so ubiquitous that they are unnoticed part of society’s existence. In Cresswell’s (1996) opinion, place has the connotation of “proper” in its usage in colloquial phrases like “It’s not your place to argue” and “know your place”. So, there are certain expectations that are attached with the place as it is produced by humans and, in the process of production, influences the humans. Therefore, place is the conjunction where spatial meets social and “social space” is created. Cresswell discusses the nature of place as “places are neither totally material nor completely mental; they are combinations of material and mental and cannot be reduced to either” (p. 13). Moreover, Cresswell formulates that space and ideologies are interdependent since “spatial structures structure representations of the world as they are held in a taken-for-granted way. But value and meaning are not inherent in any space and place – indeed they must be created, reproduced and defended from hearsay” (p. 8).

Cresswell (1996) discusses the levels of ideology production put forth by Goren Therborn. According to Goren Therborn, ideology works at three levels i. e., level of existence, level of appropriateness, and level of possibility. Place plays an important role in the constitution of ideology at all three levels as it defines what exists, what is appropriate action, and what phenomenon has the possibility to occur in a particular space. As ideology and space intertwine during the evolution of human society, they are infused to produce the places which consequently maintain the ideologies and their power dynamics. Here, the transgression becomes a spatial phenomenon because as “space and place are used to structure the normative world, they are also used (intentionally/otherwise) to question that normative world” (Cresswell, 1996, p. 9). Cresswell further notes that transgressive acts are the acts judged to be out of place by prominent institutions and actors. So, transgression offers the social barometer to recognise and measure the *perceived normality* of a place.

It would be instructive to establish the fundamental distinction between transgression and resistance here. Cresswell (1996) argues that the prominent distinguishing factor between transgression and resistance is the issue of *intentionality*, which is at the core of all resistive actions. Resistance is the purposeful and directed act of defiance against some disliked entity or authority with the *intention* to change or defy that entity. While transgression, according to Cresswell, is judged by the results of actions that are opposed to the normative landscape of a society and are deemed inappropriate by the dominant institutions or actors. Jonathan Warke reviews Cresswell’s position in an online article on “The Graticule”:

Cresswell explores themes of ‘normality’, ‘belonging’, ‘other’, ‘right and wrong’, ‘inclusion and exclusion’ and the idea of ‘power’ and who holds it. It’s unsurprising that these themes are explored in critical theory literature, yet Cresswell’s arguments bring a lesser explored, spatial dimension to them. (pp. 22-23)

Thus, Cresswell's work on ideology, transgression, and resistance in combination with place forms the appropriate theoretical framework to study socio-spatial transgression in a literary landscape.

Research methodology

There are various qualitative approaches, adopted and utilised in the field of GeoHumanities to deal with the space including ethnography, autoethnography, historical analysis and grounded theory. This research uses the analytical tools of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). IPA is a well-established analytical method in qualitative research which was introduced by Jonathen A. Smith in 1990s as an experiential approach in psychology. It has been expanded and refined over the years. Conventionally, IPA is a research process which is employed to comprehend the lived experiences of individuals and their influence on the lives of individuals through interaction between researcher and individuals. It efficiently provides the structure to formulate well-grounded arguments in an organised manner.

The IPA tools, modified by Jonathen A. Smith and Isabella Nizza in *Essentials of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis* (2021), have been appropriated for the exegesis of the *experience* that brings together place and humans through subjective interaction in Shree's novel, *Tomb of Sand*. The theme, purpose, and nature of present research is complemented by the analytical quality of IPA as a method because it shows flexibility towards the phenomenon and allows the evaluation of experiences. IPA's experiential toolbar enables the researchers to employ an inclusive methodology to study the nexus of social and spatial fabric with experience as the binder.

In the process of moving from text to its interpretation, the analytical structure of IPA facilitates the representation and elucidation of textual data through tabular organisation of phenomenon. The systematic organisation of text in the phenomenological tables includes:

- I. Exploratory notes: the basic and direct interpretive engagement with the text, presented in the right column with respect to the text.
- II. Experiential statements: Summarisation of exploratory notes in the left column with respect to the text.
- III. Experiential themes: Themes which are derived from experiential statements and are grouped together according to their experiential similarity.

These themes allow us to ground the argument in the text under the light of Cresswell's work on place. Their organization and interpretation in tabular manner fulfill the purpose to structure the text in a way that its explicit and implicit meanings are revealed.

Dynamics of space, self, and society in *Tomb of Sand*

Tomb of Sand (2021) is the translation of the Hindi novel *Ret Samadhi* (2018) by Geetajali Shree. It is centred around an octogenarian woman, Ma. With Ma, the story expands its panorama to Ma's children, Bade and Beti, her grandchildren and daughter in law, Bahu. After the death of her husband in India, Ma passes through a phase of samadhi, a deep trance, and wakes up to shed all social hues to embrace her true self. Ma, with her Beti, then makes a trek to Pakistan to reunite with Anwar, her Muslim husband from whom she was separated during partition riots of 1947. During the journey to Pakistan and search for her husband, Ma defies all boundaries, borders and responsibilities to become Chanda, a lover of her beloved. She dies in Khyber after meeting Anwar and chooses her own earth for her resting place instead of allowing authorities to indulge in a bureaucratic drama to repatriate her body to Hindustan.

In 2022, *Tomb of Sand* became the first novel in any South Asian language to win an International Booker Prize along with its English translation, done by Daisy Rockwell. As the novel received immense international attention after the Booker prize, it has been hailed by many for its unconventional and daring yet musical and meandering engagement with the stories that have no termination point.

While the novel itself embodies the postcolonial resistance, the translated text earns its merit as a transgressive manuscript as it is not linguistically confined and is replete with phrases from Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi, Sanskrit and other South Asian languages. The narrative of the text, with the playful and exuberant tone, is fluid and follows a path of its own, unbothered with the nuances of a well-knit plot. So, the narrative overflows in all directions as it breaches the constraints of language, borders, body, and society. It takes up a literary form that allows it a freedom to experiment with textual space during its immersion with the social space dynamics as anticipated in the beginning of the novel: "The story's path unfurls, not knowing where it will stop, tacking to the right and left, twisting and turning, allowing anything and everything to join in the narration" (Shree, 2021, p. 2). Weiling Deng (2023) notes that "the novel proceeds with intentionally inverted order of things: death transforms into life, violence into grace, silence into communication, nonsense into meaning, and the nonhuman into the human" (P. 2). Thus, transgression, which is unintended breaching of boundaries, expectations and conventions, underlines the form of the text.

The discussion about transgression in relation with *Tomb of Sand* (Shree, 2021) appears in the work of Weiling Deng (2023) and dissertation of Marya Moussi (2023). However, their discussions contrast with the research trajectory and objectives of the present research. Weiling Deng (2023) deals with trauma of the 1947 partition in the text through the lens of decolonial feminist historiography (p. 3). She discusses transgression in the context of memorialization of partition by Shree and her characters which disregard the official and national discourse of India. Thus, her engagement with transgression has a temporal facet as she debates the merits of text as a medium for "subversive historiography" (p. 6). The dissertation of Marya Moussi (2023) is mostly focused on the presentation of Indian culture and mythology to foreign readers. It refers to the text briefly to explain the

development of Indian mythology and ideologies which define the concepts of sanctity and profanity. Therefore, the mythological criticism of the text by Moussi deals more with the religious, cultural and social context of the text than with the text itself. Hence, the socio-spatial dynamics woven in the narrative of the text, and associated with the actions of the characters, remain unexplored and present a research gap that we seek to address.

The socio-spatial dynamics of the text are established with the very title of the text, “Ret Samadhi”. The translation of samadhi as *tomb* does not convey the significance and nuanced nature of this signifier. The English translation of the text begins with three definitions of samadhi which provide multiple facets for the interpretation of title. Firstly, Samadhi signifies a meditative trance that formulates the final stage of yoga. In Buddhism, it is a spiritual quest to achieve the highest form of human consciousness that transcends all senses of space and time. The second description of samadhi is “place of entombment” (Shree, 2021), particularly of a saintly figure. Lastly, samadhi conveys the phenomenon of self-immolation of an ascetic by entombment. Although distinctive in their own meaning, all facets of samadhi form a picture where an intricate relationship between individual, society, and space is manifested. Definitions of samadhi involve the communion of individuals with space to achieve a state of aloofness with all the social and, ultimately spatial, aspects of the materialistic world in favour of spiritual oneness with universal consciousness. Therefore, it is often observed that yogis, who experience and practice samadhi, are viewed as a threat to established social order and balance. It is this samadhi that characterises the whole journey of Ma, from the home of her son all the way to Pakistan to the home of her former husband’s son. Resultantly, the novel demonstrates a complicated correlative phenomenon where society and space engage in different capacities and shape the consequences of characters’ actions.

While samadhi foreshadows the transgressive saga to be unravelled in the text, the complete title, *Ret Samadhi*, draws upon the mobile and transitive nature of space in the novel as sand, in its essence, is an element of nature that moves, flies, shifts and never provides a firm ground. The mobility of places, like doors and walls which “play a special role in our story” (Shree, 2021, p. 5), is a motif in the text as places migrate with their human inhabitants linked with them through companionship of generations. The walls of Bade’s home shift, slide and dance while the door surveys the passings of generation after generation of the family during their manoeuvres. So, the home acquires a metaphysical essence which allows it mobility. Shree explains the journey of home over the course of decades in the exposition part of the text:

Once, this home had been on the banks of the Ganga, near fields of roses, in the eastern soil of Uttar Pradesh. Then, leaving some denizens of the household amongst the fragrance of flowers, the rest had gone to live near the perfume factories of nearby cities...they moved from one bungalow to another, unaware that . . . he’d brought the rose-fragrant home with him, simply pouring it into different structures of bricks and mortar. (p. 13-14)

Being an extensive novel with more than five hundred pages, *Tomb of Sand* poses a challenge to structuring of the text to facilitate the application of IPA's analytical tools. To address this, we have selected specific excerpts for analytical purposes, based on their engagement with socio-spatial dynamics and its consequences. The exploratory notes are annotations formed with deliberation on the excerpts. While experiential statements are developed to provide the foundation for the inference of experiential themes.

Table 1: Phenomenological organization of text

Sr. No	Experiential Statement	Original Excerpts	Exploratory Notes
1.	Ordinariness of of the wall behind Ma's back depicts a lack of "social space" or place.	"The wall plays a special role in our story (As do the doors, since you use them to get from one side to another, from here to there, on and on through the centuries, from forever to forever). It's not an unusual wall. No special artistic features. Not a Thar desert wall studded with tiny mirrors, or a wall covered with a collaged design of rocky peaks or some such, with different shapes and colours, or spangled with tinsel garlands and printed with designs for a wedding... nor was it an awesome, colourful, tall, shiny orange-blue-green wall made by multinationals that would never fade or scratch or peel, imperishable, immortal, enduring. It was just a simple brick-and-cement wall—a yellowing, whitewashed, middle-class wall" (p. 5).	Walls represent the culture, class, aesthetic sensibilities and traditions of a society Weathered, unadorned and ordinary just like Ma.

Sr. No	Experiential Statement	Original Excerpts	Exploratory Notes
2.	Experientiality has led to the production of the place with a historical account of the family's evolution.	"The door. Not many knew that this was no ordinary door. Generations had dwelled within the walls it upheld. The door to the home of her eldest son. Where the walls take on different forms over time, but in reality exist within the shelter of that open door; where that same home stays standing, generation after generation. Such is the fate of the homes of eldest sons" (p. 13).	Door became "the door" with the experience of centuries with the same bloodline. Fate in the same sense as of humans, societies and civilisations.
3.	Door reciprocates the family's custom and tradition.	"The door to Bade's home knows it must remain open no matter what, and there are no constraints on those who enter—in terms of time of arrival, advance notice or knocking before entry. Always free to be and free of charge" (p. 14).	The family's hospitality is absorbed by the door and is expressed.
4.	Ideology has shaped space into place.	"The household was constantly roiled with controversies over social codes, traditions, culture, protection, and Ma would grow short of breath as she tried to calm everyone else's breathing" (p. 30).	Space of the household harbours the social ideologies about women's submissiveness. Hence it's a place.
5.	Departure from the family home is the breach of social ideologies upheld by the walls and door, towards an open space	But the funny thing was, amidst all the to-do, Ma managed to forge a path towards the forbidden. Like the window opening out into the guava orchard. It was Ma who had cleared this hidden path for Beti's comings and goings. Beti leapt through the open window and fluttered off like a bird" (p. 30).	Creation of a new spatial outlet, unlike the confined space of the house.

Sr. No	Experiential Statement	Original Excerpts	Exploratory Notes
	with no social mark.		
6.	Ma is in samadhi, absorbing the untainted essence of the space around her.	“The wall is cold to the touch. A tiny being glides across it. A tiny breath. Make a crack somewhere, slip into the wall...Let this be my tomb. A coolness descends into her heart which is pleasant, calm, not the kind of numbing chill from outside. The peace of the wall, not the carrying-on occurring behind her back. That panting behind her that makes her wonder how the breathing of the whole world has caused her own to collapse” (p. 34).	Wall is unsympathetic and nonchalant. Ma becomes one with the wall and develops its traits: cold to social norms.
7.	Samadhi is finished as the highest form of consciousness is achieved and Ma becomes one with universal consciousness in her intimacy with mud.	“The mud wall is hollow. The being that emerged from her heart invented itself as it went along, forging a path through the mud. Let it invent its own breathing pattern. Let it flow in paths of its own creation. Let it course into its own veins, its own puffing, its own effervescence. Was Ma boring into herself as she slipped into the wall? Carving forth her own routes. Gliding into her own arteries and aerosols. A tiny being in the dark; the edge of a breath. Motes of dust flying up as it glides. A faint flame of desire falls across her closed eyes. From air. Into air. The tomb of sand has shifted (p. 35)”	Hollowness connotes the absence of place. Mud wall is space. Ma becomes one with the wall, harnessing the space to carve out her own place.
8.	A directional confusion on the threshold upends the established norm of place.	“And lately it’s been heard that she’s enrolled in salsa dancing classes, and who knows how often the door is startled into wondering, What is this? Ousted Beti entering; reigning Bahu departing; how are the Reeboks engineering this topsy-turvy situation?” (p. 42).	Door’s reaction to “out of Place” occurrence.

Sr. No	Experiential Statement	Original Excerpts	Exploratory Notes
9.	Place is dependent on humans while space is independent of humans. Space is permanent but place moves and evolves with experiential variation.	“They had to move, but these doors and walls must remain. Is the home offended? Will the walls and doors come along, quietly, invisibly? Like a soul which resides within? That which resides within is what turns a home into a castle, or a henhouse, as the case may be. It has nothing to do with the measurements of the perimeter—surely you’ve heard? But within a house reside its inhabitants, so are they the soul? Around and about them are crammed all the objects on which they lie sit swing, but Bade and Bahu hardly have it in them to ponder such things. And paying close attention to the specific qualities of the home at this time would mean diving into the sort of cogitation that causes carelessness. The house had all but disappeared into cardboard boxes” (p. 117).	Material limitation of space. It shows Metaphysical essence of the place since the place is independent of material and owes its production to society, family and their civilization's history.
10.	During its production and assimilation with human inhabitants, the place develops sensitivity to variations in the expression of human passions.	“This is the door that opens to reveal a world created by Beti alone. Of course, every door has its importance. It has its own personality, even in a ruin. Nowadays people only notice a door’s imposing outer style, and use that to assess the financial worth of its owners. But a door can hint at so much more: the charm, caprice, awkwardness, romance, aversion, joy, uninhibited weeping, swaying, excitement, prickling sensation of the person crossing the threshold—when you pass from inside out, or outside in, take note. Doors have eyes: eyes that open, blink, stare, accuse, feel peace or boredom. Yes, yes, doors get bored—at the constant flow of the same people filing in and out each day. A door may avert its gaze, or even	Personality of the door corresponds to the nature of its inhabitants. Door is sensitive to the emotional temperament of humans. Stagnation renders a place redundant, it loses its gaze and hence role

Sr. No	Experiential Statement	Original Excerpts	Exploratory Notes
		atrophy, like a limb falling into disuse" (p. 160).	to gauge any social evolution in surroundings.
11.	A samadhist, Ma has transcended the bounds of space and society.	"Slowly Ma pours herself into the crannies and crevices of the house. She feels as though she's flying. She likes it. My feet don't touch the ground here. She flies about silently. She listens to the comings and goings of her breathing. She hears the unfurling of her own body" (p. 198).	Ma is moulding the place according to her own self.
12.	Beti's place lacks biased social ideologies. It is flexible. That's why Ma choses to own the place and mould it.	"Now you're going to wear a nightie day and night? asked Beti with an awkward laugh. She laughed, because at her house there were no middle class concerns about how one must act like this-that in front of others" (p. 214).	Ma chooses her own dressing style.
13.	Change in spatial make up of Beti's home produces an impact over her sexual desires.	"Her whole house and household was on the move, proceeding agreeably, amiably, properly, orderly, so that thing which they call desire, i.e., libido, had clicked its heels together and set out in search of more open terrain, longing for the razzmatazz of lighting and rain. Libido has no place	Beti's desires and priorities have changed in light of changes in her home and personality

Sr. No	Experiential Statement	Original Excerpts	Exploratory Notes
		in such an orderly household” (p. 297).	with the coming of Ma.
14.	Humans are linked with space on a very fundamental level where the whole universe is united as one entity.	“To understand the body one must first know the earth. The mind coils within the body, earth. It is the fluid in solid. Reflections swimming within the whimsical mind. Its pace, its gait. Lying closed, if you open it, then it’s open; shut it again, it stays closed. The capacity to crackle and flow lies everywhere. The slightest crack, the slightest bubbling: the earth slides and the liquids inside fountain flame rock and boulders course about. What has been thrown outside? The scientists come running with their tools determined to learn everything, once and for all. Under the hard earth all is soft bubbling raging fire, boiling spluttering water” (p. 299).	<p>Delves into the intricate pattern that weaves together human anatomy with geographical modelling of earth.</p> <p>Beneath hard materialistic cover, is a fluid, dynamic and burning essence.</p>
15.	A public declaration of Ma’s abandonment of social expectations in favour of her own self discovery.	“Ma stood up, more or less right in the middle of the party, and turned her face away from everyone...As though she’d removed all her layers, one by one, wife mother aunt this that, now at last she was simply herself, laid bare, apart, her own, untouched by the thoughts and concerns of any other. At eighty, Ma had turned selfish” (p. 361).	<p>Ma turns her back on the society, not in samadhi but in face of her impending journey to find her lost self.</p> <p>Selfish is self-actualization.</p>
16.	Revises the social expectations about a place; border. Ma is bleaching out social prejudices	“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. A border is fun to cross. All give-and-take goes on there. The border exists to connect, one to another. If there’s	Ma explains the positive and peaceful aspect of the border. It’s not a cutting

Sr. No	Experiential Statement	Original Excerpts	Exploratory Notes
	from a place to bring out the uniting role of it.	one, there's another. Through love" (p. 447).	entity but a joining one.
17.	She decided on her own samadhi (tomb).	"At which point, she lay upon the ground beneath the sky, in her desired position, where no one could taint the splendour of her final moment by partitioning it between Hindustan and Pakistan" (p. 478).	Ma defies the governments of two countries and their drawn maps of places to select her own resting place.

Each experiential statement indicates a theme which is prevalent in the text. However, for the sake of convenience and lucid organisation of the text, experiential themes have been grouped based on their contribution to a particular aspect of space and society in terms of Cresswell's (1996) theoretical position on place, ideology, and transgression.

Group experiential themes

Table 2: Involvement of social ideologies in the production of place

2.1	Repetition of a phenomenon produces customs	"Habit is custom"...Habit is just another word for repetition"
2.2	Customs construct ideologies	"The household was constantly roiled with controversies over social codes, traditions, culture, protection" (p. 30).
2.3	Space is morphed into place as it absorbs and reflects customs and ideologies of its inhabitants.	A Thar desert wall studded with tiny mirrors, or a wall covered with a collaged design of rocky peaks or

		some such...shiny orange-blue-green wall made by multinationals” (p. 5).
--	--	--

Table 3: Empirical animation of place

3.1	Experience creates cognition of a place	“The door to Bade’s home knows it must remain open no matter what” (p. 14).
3.2	Places exhibit sensory abilities	“how could it understand there’s such a thing as a door that sees all, hears all, records all” (p.15).
3.3	Express reaction to unusual occurrence	“the door is startled into wondering, What is this? Ousted Beti entering; reigning Bahu departing” (p. 42).
3.4	Display emotional tendencies	“Is the home offended?” (p.117).
3.5	Place influences human conceptions; an active actor rather than being passive entity	“Her whole house and household was on the move, proceeding agreeably, amiably, properly, orderly, so that thing which they call desire, i.e., libido... has no place in such an orderly household” (p.292).

Table 4: Space as tool for spatial transgression

4.1	Fundamental connection of humans with Earth	“To understand the body one must first know the earth...” (p.299).
-----	---	--

4.2	Space has no social prejudices	“The wall is cold to the touch.” ...”The mud wall is hollow” (p. 35).
4.3	Achieve oneness with space through samadhi	“The being that emerged from her heart invented itself as it went along, forging a path through the mud. Let it invent its own breathing pattern. Let it flow in paths of its own creation. Let it course into its own veins” (p. 35).
4.4	Harness space to develop a new space at odds with social spaces.	“Slowly Ma pours herself into the crannies and crevices of the house. She feels as though she’s flying.” (p. 198).

Table 5: Spatial transgression results in social transgression

5.1	Leaving a place for fulfillment of desires	“Inside, there was a constant uproar of No, absolutely not, she won’t go out! And in the meantime, Beti leapt through the open window and fluttered off like a bird” (p.30).
5.2	Creation of a space with no societal imprints	“In her house there were no middle class concerns about how one must act like this-that in front of others” (p.210).

5.3	shaping Beti's home into an "in place" for the transgender, Rosie, who is "out of place" for the society.	"There are no silly taboos at our place" (p. 201).
5.4	Refusal to comply with social definition of borders	"A border, gentlemen, is for crossing. A border says jump. It's there to tempt you to cross it" (p. 447).
4.5	Decides her own samadhi (tomb)	"she herself descended to her own earth. At which point, she lay upon the ground beneath the sky, in her desired position" (p. 478).

The experiential themes present a pattern to figure out the factors that lead to the development of spaces into places. Shree traces the construction of the family home from neutral space formed of "bricks and mortars" to a social dwelling with "social codes, traditions, culture and protection" (2021, p. 18) characterised by "constant uproar of No" (p. 18). The walls and doors formulate the normative geography of the household, but how did this normative geography develop? Cresswell notes that "value and meaning are not inherent in any space or place—indeed they must be created, reproduced and defended from heresy" (1996, p. 9). Bade's home transforms into a social space, or place, when certain actions are repeated "generation after generation". The transformation of space into place does not happen overnight, rather it develops after "generations had dwelled" (p. 13) in the same space, following the same customs, traditions, and ideologies. So, place is a social construction, rather than natural production that involves social actors' engagement, as Cresswell argues: "the effect of a place is not simply a geographical matter. It always intersects with socio-cultural expectations" (1996, p. 8). However, if repetition of particular actions is a key factor in the development of a place, why does Bade's home not morph into a Ma's home? Or why does it not imbibe repetition of Ma's action to carve out a forbidden path for Beti as a normative action?

As the novel is based in Indian society, the "generations" which are referred to for having contributed in the development of Bade's home are the men of the family. With a realistic backdrop for her work of fiction, Shree portrays the role of power in development of a place with certain socio-cultural make up as she writes: "This is the same home in which the father (and grandfather) of the family had always scolded his servants and his offspring" (Shree, 2021, p. 13). So, the history witnessed by the place over *generations* is his-story whose repetition by male

members of family has shaped the place. So, the home is called Bade's home as he has inherited his father and grandfather's place and behaviour: "The father had shouted until his retirement; then he'd handed the yelling over to his son" (p. 25). The ownership of home by men and their domination in development of cultural codes and social ethics of place put the women of family in a directional dilemma on threshold. Shree repeatedly portrays the dilemma of Beti and Bahu over the threshold, unsure of their status in that home: "Am I an outsider or an insider, and what about her? But. She blinked and blinked. But this is the door to my home, not to that one" (p. 198). So, places are formed by the dominant actors, men, in a society as they have influence over history and their actions make culture, starting from the normative geography of their homes. Men are the social actors in the Indian socio-spatial matrix. Thus, the repetition of particular actions by the social actors of a particular space, such as men in Bade's home and Ma in Beti's home, transform it into a place.

Cresswell, in his book *In Place/Out of Place* (1996), cites Pierre Bourdieu's work on production of place in his study of Kabyle: "How certain ordering of space provides a structure for experience and helps us to tell who we are in society" (p. 8). So, place is not a passive entity which is formed by human actions, rather it affects the human actions in its response and gives them a particular meaning in a particular setting. The home of Beti is transformed when Ma moves into her house; the social essence of home is changed as "Ma slowly pours herself into crannies and crevices of the house" (p. 194). The silent home which used to welcome work *devi*, as Beti was absorbed in her writing, morphed into an open and inviting space for neighbours, friends, and family with Ma. With change in place's social essence, Beti's actions change and her sexual desires become incompatible with her home: "Her whole house and household was on the move, proceeding agreeably, amiably, properly, orderly, so that thing which they call desire, i.e., libido... has no place in such an orderly household" (p. 292).

Shree takes on the realistic dynamics of place-human relations and stretches it to complement the fictional charm of her text. In the text, places develop the cognitive abilities to judge the actions of characters based on the experiential history of the place. Places in the text, therefore, exhibit sensory abilities as Shree utilises places as means to indicate the actions which are unusual or at odds with social conventions. It is quite often that one finds the descriptions of places as animate beings, as they observe the happenings in their view and manifest their cognition and animation, as Shree writes: "It sees all, hears all, understands the heads and tails of things with no head or tail at all. . . . It is experienced, sagacious, solid, learned" (p. 76). It is no surprise, therefore, that Shree's work is viewed from the lens of magical realism as the objects like doors, walls, roads, and animals are given cognition and language. However, the researchers argue that the spatial elements show animation in relation to the human characters and serve to emphasize the significance of actions against a particular socio-spatial backdrop. Shree explores place in relation to humans as she writes, "a door can hint at so much more: the charm, caprice, awkwardness, romance, aversion, joy, uninhibited weeping, swaying, excitement, prickling sensation of the person crossing the threshold" (p. 160). The places display emotions

and express reactions to unusual happenings by humans; “the door is startled into wondering, what is this? Ousted Beti entering; reigning Bahu departing” (p. 42). Hence, it may be safely inferred that the animation of places in the text is not an imaginative aesthetic addition to the text; it is rather an empirical animation which serves the purpose to structure the actions of characters with their socio-historic relevance.

While places, which have been developed over time, structure the human actions and position them against a certain social backdrop, the text explores the fundamental relation of humans with spaces that bear no social mark. Ma, who as a female is absent from development in Bade’s home, connects on a deeper level with space. Space with no social cognition also lacks social prejudices, so the absence of socio-cultural expectations from “mud wall” (P. 35) which is “hollow” attracts Ma towards it. The emptiness of her heart resonates with the hollowness of the wall and Ma, in her samadhi, becomes one with universal consciousness. She abandons all the social customs of propriety as she imbibes coldness and indifference of the wall beside which she was entombed during her trance. Thus, “the being that emerged from her heart invented itself as it went along, forging a path through the mud” (p. 35). As she wakes up from samadhi, Ma develops an affinity for spaces as well as places which defy social influence. Resultantly, Ma shifts to Beti’s home which is “wall-less” and “door-less”, so that “the gaze never gets stuck” (p. 162), in stark contrast with the Bade’s household which constantly “roiled with controversies over social codes, traditions and culture” (p. 18).

The textual space of the *Tomb of Sand* is dominantly dedicated to Ma and Beti, the characters with no role in the development of social spaces. So, the tale of transgression belongs to women of the family since the socio-cultural expectations attached with the home view submissive women as *proper* and *in place*. When Beti forges a path out of home with the help of Ma amid “constant uproar of No, absolutely not, she won’t go out!” (p 18), she learns to fulfil her desires despite the restrictions imposed by the men of family and reinforced by those in the home. So, when she crosses the boundaries of home, she becomes an *out of place* character, for whom the place inside the home starts to diminish. She continues on the *forbidden path* which is opened with “no” as she realises that “freedom is made of no. No is fun. No is nonsensical. Nonsensical but also mystical” (p. 31). When Beti takes on different lovers and defies social codes of home as well as ultimate authority of Bade, Bade imposes restrictions on her so she “will rue the error of her ways” (p. 31). Cresswell (1996) argues that “transgression is judged by those who react to it” (p. 23), therefore Bade’s reaction and restrictions on his sister mark her actions as transgressive.

Consequently, Beti leaves the home where her actions are *out of place* and are considered inappropriate; she sets up her home somewhere else. In this way, Beti’s non-compliance with social codes of home manifests a social as well as spatial transgression as Cresswell reiterates that “social and spatial are so thoroughly imbued with each other’s presence that their analytical separation quickly becomes a misleading exercise” (1996, p. 11). Beti continues to remain subject of criticism in the family and remains an outlaw for years as she builds a place with complete

indifference for social constructs. She constructs a home with “no middle-class concerns about how one must act like this-that in front of others” (p. 210).

As Beti’s home lacks social prejudices, Ma decides to live with her when she rises up from her samadhi after traversing a path from “no” to “new”. Like Beti, she learns to say no to society. In Beti’s home which becomes Ma’s *place*, she makes Rosie, her transgender companion, a part of the place since it has “no silly taboos” (p. 201). In Beti’s home, Ma becomes a social actor whose actions form its normative geography. By creating a place where women are social actors, Ma and Beti transgress against society’s accepted social actors i.e., men. So, independent in her actions, Ma doesn’t abandon Rosie when she goes missing and she fights for Rosie’s rights after her death. Ma with the help of KK, Beti’s lover and a journalist, secures a space for Rosie in the newspaper who as transgender has “always been missing, we’re forever missing” (p. 333). Ma’s disregard for social conventions about transgenders makes her children uncomfortable as her actions involve “mixing of categories and the questioning of boundaries that separate categories” which is transgression in Jervis’s (1999, p. 4) words.

Ma’s transgression doesn’t end with the change in her lifestyle and creation of her own place, she refuses to conform to the dividing function of the border between Pakistan and Hindustan. She travels to Pakistan and roams freely according to her own will without any consideration for visas and protocols. Her denial to adhere to any nationality creates a bureaucratic tension between the countries but she insists on her association with the soil. “Where is your home?” (p. 434), an investigation officer in Pakistan asks. Ma replies, “In this soil.” So, her refusal to acknowledge the demarcation of soil becomes a statement of transgression and creates political turmoil. The individual acts of Ma create a mark which is recorded in pages of newspapers for the generations of scholars to examine afterwards. Ma’s perusal of her desire to meet with her husband in Pakistan appears *out of place* to observers in both countries who associate similar social expectations with old women. Her spatial transgression of borders inevitably becomes a socio-political infraction as Weiling Deng notes that “Bordersand deterritorializes the arbitrary and hegemonic boundaries drawn by British colonialism and postcolonial nationalism” (2023, p. 3). Ma meets with the soil, her home, and her samadhi (tomb), when she is killed by a bullet in Khyber. Her death is her last act of transgression as she gracefully falls away from the prying hands of others in the soil which does not belong to any nation. Thus, her every act of defiance against the decorum of a place is translated into an act of social transgression along with spatial trespass.

Deploying Cresswell’s theorization of place to read the text, therefore, demonstrates the nuanced nature of intersection between space and societies, which is the subject matter of GeoHumanities. Places are as complex and dynamic as their inhabitants and play active role in the human conceptualization of morals, duties, and norms. The actions of Ma and Beti are considered transgressive by society as they unintentionally defy the places shaped by patriarchal society and political authorities. But what is transgression in the outside world is an innocent action in Beti’s home. Hence, the socio-spatial nexus for determination of

transgression is Geography-Humanities nexus that contributes to understanding of how societies use places to ostracize individuals who do not comply with the established social bounds and are *out of place*.

In the foregoing pages, this paper has analyzed Shree's novel to find answers to the research questions put forward in the beginning about space, its manifestation in the text, and its implications for the perceived notion of transgression. It has probed the factors involved in the production of place, a space with social consciousness. With Cresswell's theoretical discussion about place, our study has unearthed the involvement of customs and social codes in the development of traditional places in the text. Social traditions and customs which are imbibed by places result from the actions of men, who wield power and are subject of the historical record of family. Therefore, the social decorum of places is maintained by men, represented by the character of Bade in the text. The research has also laid bare the dynamism of correlation between place and society, as places shape society while being produced by the same society. It is argued that Shree draws upon the dynamic nature of place to add a dramatic touch to the atypical actions of Ma and Beti. Therefore, places are given a prominent textual space with empirical animation to highlight the acts of transgression against an active spatial backdrop.

By placing the actions of Ma and Beti against Cresswell's conception of transgression, it has been identified that transgression is a reaction-defined phenomenon. It is the reaction of Bade to Beti's autonomous nature, of society to Ma's closeness with Rosie, and of bureaucracy to Ma's disregard for nationalities and borders that give the actions the status of transgression. Apart from figuring out the nuances of transgression in the text, the study has not only fulfilled its aim to integrate emerging trends and conceptions about space in the interdisciplinary fields of geography and literary studies, but also vindicated the scope of GeoHumanities.

References

- Aggarwal, A., & Naik, G. A. (2022). Narratives of Indian women and their catastrophes: A study of Geetanjali Shree's *tomb of sand*. *Journal of Positive School Psychology*, 6(12), 1735–1741.
- Cresswell, T. (1996). *In place/out of place: Geography, ideology, and transgression*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Deng, W. (2023). Death and life in the bordersand: On the queer remembrance of partition through Geetanjali Shree's *tomb of sand*. Taylor & Francis Online, 1–11. Retrieved on October 14, 2023 <https://doi.org/10.1080/02759527.2023.2253037>
- Jervis, J. (1999). *Transgressing the modern: Explorations in the western experience of otherness*. Blackwell.

- Lefebvre, H. (1991/1974). *The production of space* (D. Nicholson-Smith, Trans.). Blackwell Publishing.
https://monoskop.org/images/7/75/Lefebvre_Henri_The_Production_of_Space.pdf
- Moussi, M. (2023). *Women in the sacred and the profane in Geetanjali Shree's tomb of sand*. Mohamed Khider University of Biskra.
- Shree, G. (2021/2018). *Tomb of sand* (D. Rockwell, Trans.). Tilted Axis Press.
- Smith, J. A., & Nizza, I. E. (2022). *Essentials of interpretative phenomenological analysis*. American Psychological Association.
- Warke, J. (2021, October 14). In place/out of place (geography, ideology and transgression) by Tim Cresswell. The Graticule. Retrieved on October 12, 2023 from [In Place/Out of Place \(Geography, Ideology and Transgression\) by Tim Cresswell \(thegraticule.wixsite.com\)](https://thegraticule.wixsite.com/in-place-out-of-place)
- Wegner, P. E. (2002). Critical geography, space, place and textuality. In *Introducing Criticism at the 21st Century* (J. Wolfrey, Ed.), 1st ed., pp. 179–20. Edinburgh University Press.