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# Reading Guide



## Tomb of Sand Geetanjali Shree

Translated by Daisy Rockwell

Tilted Axis Press

[thebookerprizes.com](https://thebookerprizes.com)

## What the judges said

'The constantly shifting perspectives and timeframes of Geetanjali Shree's inventive, energetic *Tomb of Sand* lead us into every cranny of an eighty-year-old woman's life and surprising past. Daisy Rockwell's spirited translation rises admirably to the complexity of the text, which is full of wordplay and verve. A loud and irresistible novel.'

## About the book

In northern India, an eighty-year-old woman slips into a deep depression at the death of her husband, then resurfaces to gain a new lease on life. Her determination to fly in the face of convention – including striking up a friendship with a hijra person – confuses her bohemian daughter, who is used to thinking of herself as the more 'modern' of the two.

To her family's consternation, Ma insists on travelling to Pakistan, simultaneously confronting the unresolved trauma of her teenage experiences of Partition, and re-evaluating what it means to be a mother, a daughter, a woman, a feminist.

Rather than respond to tragedy with seriousness, Geetanjali Shree's playful tone and exuberant wordplay results in a book that is engaging, funny, and utterly original, at the same time as being an urgent and timely protest against the destructive impact of borders and boundaries, whether between religions, countries, or genders.

## About the author

The author of three novels and several story collections, Geetanjali Shree's work has been translated into English, French, German, Serbian, and Korean. She was born in Mainpuri, India, in 1957. This is the first of her books to be published in the UK. She has received and been shortlisted for a number of awards and fellowships, and lives in New Delhi.

## About the translator

Daisy Rockwell is a painter, writer and translator living in Vermont, USA. She was born in 1969 in Massachusetts. She has translated a number of classic works of Hindi and Urdu literature, including Upendranath Ashk's *Falling Walls*, Bhisham Sahni's *Tamas*, and Khadija Mastur's *The Women's Courtyard*. Her 2019 translation of Krishna Sobti's *A Gujarat Here, a Gujarat There* was awarded the Modern Language Association's Aldo and Jeanne Scaglione Translation Prize.



## The author says...

'The trigger that set me off writing *Tomb of Sand* was the image of an old, bed-ridden woman's back – she seemed to care to live no more and pushed deeper into the wall, as if to bury herself in it. The image gradually took hold of me and aroused my curiosity: is she indeed tired of life and the world and so turning her back to them, or is she slowly readying herself for a new and different innings in life? When she seems to want to disappear in the wall, is she wanting the end or actually wishing to burrow through and come out on the other side?'



## The translator says...

'The Hindi edition of the book is 384 pages. The English version is 739! I knew it would come out longer, because whenever I translate, the English is always about 20% longer (a figure my friend and fellow translator Mahmud Rahman came up with for Bangla, but I've found to be correct for Hindi as well). I had also inserted page breaks between chapters, and Tilted Axis uses a small page format, but I still was not prepared to see it mushroom to twice the original size. But this is always what I tell people when they express anxiety about reading such a long book: In Hindi, it was half the size, so it really isn't as long as it looks!'

## Further reading

Krishna Sobti *A Gujarat Here, a Gujarat There*  
Khadija Mastoor *Aangan*

Avni Doshi *Burnt Sugar*

Intizar Husain *Basti*

Ernest Hemingway *The Old Man and the Sea*

Günter Grass *The Tin Drum*

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