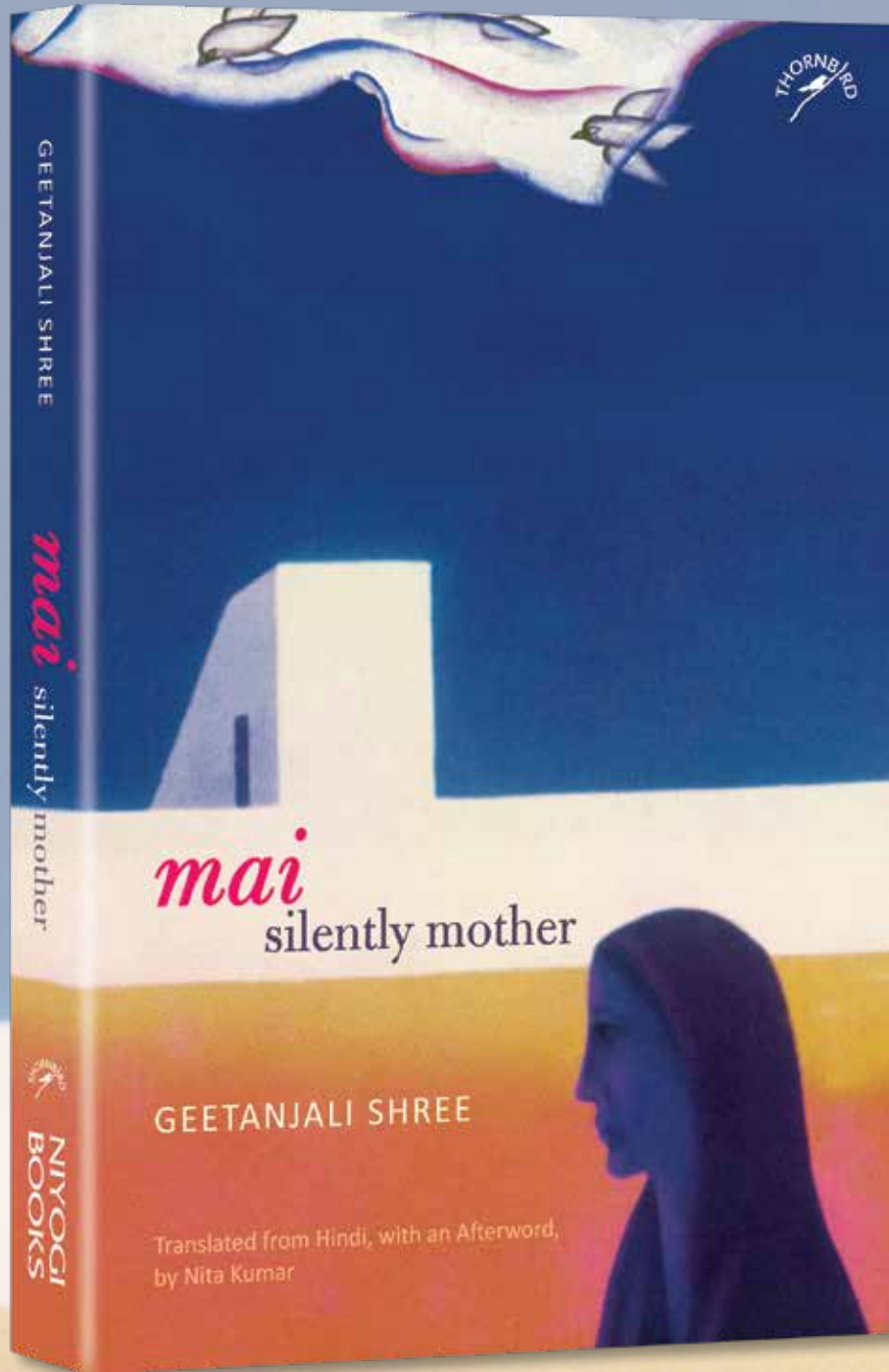


NEW TITLE SEPTEMBER 2017

ISBN:978-81-933935-0-5

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mai

silently mother

by
Geetanjali Shree

FICTION

₹395

ISBN: 978-81-933935-0-5

Packing and postage extra

Size: 216mm x 140mm; 224pp

Book print paper

Black and white

Hardback with dust jacket

Behind the walls of a house in a North Indian town a whole world thrives—of the joint family, their attendants, their visitors. Three generations of women and their men live different strategies of adjustment and achievement to accommodate or challenge patriarchy. They seem to fit in recognised frames, but what are the subtle machinations behind the apparent stereotypes? It is that which the novel uncovers, in a tale told in deceptively simple terms, using smells, sounds, tastes and flavours, scenes and tiny signs, and incidents of a daily and ordinary existence to build, weave by weave, a rich and layered tapestry, saying always more than is apparent.

At the centre is mai, the mother, seemingly weak and silent, but it is she who holds together the subtle patterns of relationships and agencies, and quietly carves out a life for herself as also for those around. Her New Age children are obsessed with rescuing her from the 'prison' and escaping themselves; but as the story unfolds, any simplistic notion of bondage and freedom goes for a toss. Profound stories of love and loss are lightly delivered.



Geetanjali Shree writes novels and short stories in Hindi. *Mai* was her debut novel, this translation receiving the Sahitya Akademi award. Her much-acclaimed novels *Tirohit* and *Khali jagah* have also been translated into English as *The Roof Beneath Her Feet* and *The Empty Space* respectively.

Her novel *Hamara shahar us baras* is considered an important intervention on the issue of communal relations in India, particularly in the aftermath of the demolition in Ayodhya.

Her writings have been translated into multiple European and Indian languages and are a part of the syllabus in many universities across the world.

Geetanjali has written an intellectual biography of Premchand in English. She is also involved with theatre in Delhi, mostly with the well-known group Vivadi, devising adventurous scripts, such as on *Umrao Jan Ada*, the courtesan from Lucknow, and on Jaishankar Sundari, the male actor from Gujarat who played the female lead and was hugely popular. These plays have been performed widely in India and abroad.



Nita Kumar is the Brown Family Professor of South Asian History at Claremont McKenna College, Claremont, California. She is the author of *The Artisans of Banaras* (1988), *Friends, Brothers and Informants* (1992), *Women as Subjects* (1994), *Lessons from Schools* (2001), and *The Politics of Gender, Community and Modernities* (2007). Since 1990 she has also been engaged in innovative education in Varanasi, India, through both service and advocacy, working with children, teachers, and families to develop curricula, fiction for children, arts materials, and teachers' training units.

Mai provides deep sociological insights into the inter-generation variations that have characterized the strategies employed by urban middle class North Indian Hindu women in coping with patriarchal domination in family life. Of lasting interest, *Mai* will surely be counted as a modern classic. —**T.N. MADAN**, Former chairman of CSDS, Honorary Professor at the Institute of Economic Growth, University of Delhi

The unusual prose of Geetanjali's fiction and the subtle treatment of the subject weave for the reader an incredible moment. —**KRISHNA SOBTI**, Sahitya Akademi award-winning celebrated Hindi novelist and essayist