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Unsettled Belonging: Recognition, Desire, and Loss in *Tomb of Sand* and *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*

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Abstract
The present study examines Geetanjali Shree's *Tomb of Sand* and Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* through selected concepts from the psychoanalytic theories of Jacques Lacan and Sigmund Freud. It argues that both novels represent belonging as a relational and continually negotiated condition rather than a stable social status. Drawing on Lacan's concepts of the Symbolic Order, the Other, and desire, the study analyses how identities are shaped through symbolic structures, processes of recognition, and experiences of exclusion. Freud's concept of melancholia is used to examine the continuing influence of loss, memory, and unresolved attachments on individual lives. Through comparative textual analysis, the paper demonstrates that belonging emerges through ongoing negotiations between self and society, recognition and exclusion, and memory and absence. The selected novels reveal that borders extend beyond political divisions and continue to shape identity, desire, and experiences of belonging. The novels reflect that belonging remains unstable because it is formed through symbolic systems of recognition while also being shaped by enduring experiences of loss and absence.

Keywords: Belonging; Identity; Recognition; Desire; Melancholia; Contemporary South Asian Fiction; etc.

Introduction

Contemporary South Asian fiction frequently explores the continuing effects of borders, displacement, and social exclusion on individual and collective life. While the Partition of the Indian subcontinent remains an important historical reference point, many recent novels are less concerned with the event itself than with its enduring impact on identity, memory, and belonging. In these narratives, borders operate not only as political divisions but also as symbolic structures that influence how individuals understand themselves and their relationships with others. As a result, questions of recognition, exclusion, and belonging have become central concerns in contemporary literary representations of South Asia.

Among the most significant contributions to this discourse are *Tomb of Sand* (2018; English translation 2021) by Geetanjali Shree and *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017) by Arundhati Roy. Although differing in narrative style and thematic focus, both novels examine lives shaped by historical divisions and social marginalization. *Tomb of Sand* follows an elderly woman whose journey across the India-Pakistan border reopens memories associated with Partition and unsettles conventional assumptions about identity and belonging. *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* centres on characters such as Anjum and Tilo, whose experiences reveal the difficulties of belonging within dominant social and political frameworks. Together, the novels explore how individuals negotiate identities that exceed established categories of nation, citizenship, gender, and community.

Existing scholarship on these texts has largely focused on Partition memory, nationalism, gender, trauma, marginality, political violence, and identity formation. While these approaches have generated valuable insights, less attention has been paid to belonging as a psychological and symbolic process shaped by recognition, desire, and loss. The question is not simply where individuals belong, but how belonging is produced, negotiated, and experienced within social structures that simultaneously enable recognition and generate exclusion. The study addresses this question through selected concepts from the psychoanalytic theories of Jacques Lacan and Sigmund Freud.

The paper argues that *Tomb of Sand* and *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* represent belonging as unstable, relational, and continually negotiated. Through shifting borders, marginal identities, and enduring attachments to the past, the novels demonstrate that belonging depends upon forms of recognition that remain incomplete and contested. By bringing Lacanian and Freudian psychoanalysis into conversation with contemporary South Asian fiction, the study highlights the ways in which historical divisions continue to influence identity, desire, and experiences of belonging in the present.

Research Question:

How do *Tomb of Sand* and *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* represent belonging as a relational and continually negotiated condition shaped by symbolic structures, social recognition, and experiences of loss?

Hypothesis:
Tomb of Sand and *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* portray belonging as a relational and unstable condition produced through symbolic structures and processes of social recognition. The novels further suggest that belonging remains incomplete because identities are shaped not only by recognition and inclusion but also by enduring experiences of loss, memory, and absence.

Aims and Objectives:
1. To analyse how symbolic structures, including borders, social norms, and systems of recognition, shape experiences of identity and belonging in *Tomb of Sand* and *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*.
2. To examine how processes of recognition, otherness, and social exclusion influence the formation of individual and collective identities in the selected novels.
3. To explore how desire, memory, and experiences of loss contribute to the representation of belonging as a relational and continually negotiated condition through the application of Lacanian and Freudian psychoanalytic concepts.

Research Methodology:
The present study adopts a qualitative research methodology based on textual analysis and close reading. The primary texts selected for analysis are *Tomb of Sand* by Geetanjali Shree and *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* by Arundhati Roy. The study employs a psychoanalytic approach, drawing on selected concepts from Jacques Lacan and Sigmund Freud, particularly the Symbolic Order, the Other, desire, and melancholia. Through close examination of characters, narrative developments, and significant scenes, the study investigates how the novels represent belonging as a relational and continually negotiated condition shaped by symbolic structures, social recognition, memory, and loss. Secondary sources, including scholarly books, journal articles, and critical studies on psychoanalysis, belonging, and contemporary South Asian literature, are used to support and contextualize the analysis.

Theoretical Framework:
The present study employs selected concepts from the psychoanalytic theories of Jacques Lacan and Sigmund Freud to examine the representation of belonging in *Tomb of Sand* and *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*. Lacan's concept of the Symbolic Order refers to the network of language, laws, social institutions, and cultural codes through which individuals enter society and acquire social identities. As Lacan states, "This is precisely why the unconscious, which tells the truth about truth, is structured like a language…" (Écrits 737), emphasizing the role of symbolic systems in the formation of subjectivity. It provides the structures that organize social relations and systems of meaning. His concept of the Other refers to the symbolic field of language, social norms, and recognition through which identity is formed. According to him, "Man's desire is the desire of the Other" (Lacan 235). Individuals understand themselves through the meanings and categories made available by this symbolic order rather than through an entirely autonomous sense of self. He defines desire as a persistent sense of lack that arises from the impossibility of complete fulfilment. Unlike biological needs, desire cannot be fully satisfied and therefore continues to shape human subjectivity and social relations. The study also draws upon Freud's concept of melancholia, developed in Mourning and Melancholia (1917). Freud describes melancholia as a response to loss in which the individual remains emotionally attached to the lost object and incorporates that loss into the self rather than fully relinquishing it. Together, these concepts provide a framework for analysing how belonging is shaped through symbolic structures, processes of recognition, experiences of exclusion, and enduring attachments to loss.

Borders and the Instability of Belonging:
Belonging is often understood through relatively stable categories such as nation, citizenship, community, and home. Contemporary South Asian fiction, however, frequently questions the permanence of these categories and highlights the complex processes through which belonging is produced and contested. Through the lens of Lacan's concept of the Symbolic Order, belonging may be understood not as a natural condition but as a product of social structures, cultural meanings, and systems of recognition. As Lacan argues, "the unconscious is structured like a language" (Écrits 412), suggesting that subjectivity is shaped through symbolic systems rather than emerging independently of them. Both *Tomb of Sand* and *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* challenge fixed notions of belonging by exposing the limitations of the symbolic frameworks that seek to define identity and social membership.
In *Tomb of Sand*, Geetanjali Shree places the national border at the centre of her exploration of identity, memory, and belonging. Following the death of her husband, the elderly protagonist undergoes a profound personal transformation that ultimately leads her to travel to Pakistan. This journey destabilizes conventional assumptions about national identity by presenting the border not as a definitive marker of belonging but as a historically constructed division whose authority is repeatedly questioned. Rather than depicting movement between two clearly separated national spaces, the novel foregrounds the

continuing presence of memories, relationships, and histories that exceed political boundaries. This is reflected when Ma directly challenges the militarized logic of state divides, insisting that: "A border does not enclose, it opens out. It creates a shape. It adorns an edge…A border increases recognition. Where two sides meet and both flourish. A border ornaments their meeting" (Shree 596).

The significance of the border becomes particularly apparent during the mother's return to Pakistan. Her journey reconnects personal memory with the larger history of Partition, revealing how political divisions fail to erase earlier attachments and shared experiences. The categories of "Indian" and "Pakistani" appear insufficient to capture the complexities of lives shaped by displacement and historical rupture. What is politically represented as a fixed distinction emerges as emotionally and historically unstable. In this way, the novel challenges the assumption that national identity can provide a complete or permanent basis for belonging.

From a Lacanian perspective, the border functions as part of the Symbolic Order because its authority derives from systems of law, language, and political meaning. Yet Shree demonstrates that symbolic structures do not fully determine lived experience. The mother's journey reveals a persistent gap between official definitions of belonging and the personal attachments that continue to shape individual identity. Her return to Pakistan suggests that belonging cannot be reduced to legal citizenship or national affiliation alone. Instead, it remains connected to memory, desire, and relationships that exceed the categories established by the nation-state. By foregrounding mobility, remembrance, and interconnected histories, the novel presents belonging as an open and continually negotiated process rather than a stable identity secured by territorial boundaries.

While Shree focuses on the instability of geographical borders, Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* explores the instability of social boundaries. The novel's central character, Anjum, repeatedly occupies positions that challenge established systems of social recognition. Born as Aftab and later identified as a hijra, Anjum experiences forms of exclusion that expose the limitations of conventional categories of gender, community, and citizenship. While Anjum's life illustrates how belonging is shaped by social recognition and how those who exist outside dominant norms often encounter barriers to acceptance within existing symbolic structures, Tilo encapsulates the internal burden of these structures. Tilo explicitly frames this challenge of representing non-normative, fractured lies when she writes: "How to tell a shattered story? By slowly becoming everybody. No. By slowly becoming everything" (Roy 442).

Anjum's movement through different social spaces forms a central aspect of the novel's exploration of belonging. She leaves her family home, becomes part of the Khwabgah community, survives communal violence, and eventually establishes the Jannat Guest House in a cemetery on the margins of the city. Each stage of this journey reflects an ongoing negotiation of identity and social membership rather than the attainment of a secure or permanent position. The institutions and communities she encounters repeatedly struggle to accommodate identities that do not conform to accepted social categories, revealing the exclusionary nature of established systems of recognition.

The creation of the Jannat Guest House represents one of the novel's most significant interventions into conventional ideas of home and community. Situated within a cemetery and inhabited by individuals who occupy marginal social positions, the space challenges dominant assumptions about who can belong and where belonging can be found. Rather than relying upon official recognition from state institutions or dominant social structures, the community develops through mutual support, shared experience, and collective care. Roy thus imagines an alternative form of belonging that emerges precisely in response to exclusion. The novel suggests that meaningful communities can be created even when dominant symbolic systems fail to provide recognition or acceptance.

Through Anjum's experiences, Roy exposes the inadequacy of symbolic classifications that seek to organize individuals into fixed and coherent identities. The categories through which society attempts to regulate belonging prove insufficient when confronted with lives that exceed their boundaries. At the same time, the novel demonstrates that the desire for belonging persists despite exclusion. Individuals continue to seek recognition, attachment, and community even when existing social structures deny them full acceptance. Belonging therefore appears not as a secure status granted by institutions but as an ongoing process shaped by negotiation, adaptation, and collective solidarity.

Thus, both novels challenge the assumption that borders provide stable foundations for belonging. In Shree's novel, the authority of the national border is unsettled by memories and attachments that transcend political divisions. In Roy's novel, social boundaries fail to contain identities that exceed established systems of recognition. Through different narrative strategies, both texts reveal the instability of the symbolic structures that organize belonging. Homi Bhabha argues that "It is in the emergence of the interstices- the overlap and displacement of domains of difference- that the intersubjective and collective experiences of nationness, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated" (Bhabha 2). At the same time, they demonstrate that the search

for belonging continues despite this instability. From a Lacanian perspective, belonging remains a site of desire that can never be completely secured, because the symbolic systems that promise recognition are themselves incomplete. Consequently, both novels present belonging not as a fixed condition but as a dynamic and continually negotiated aspect of human experience.

Recognition, Otherness, and Social Exclusion:

Belonging depends not only on where individuals live or which communities they inhabit but also on whether they are recognized within the symbolic structures that organize social life. Lacan argues that identity is formed through the Other, the symbolic field of language, cultural norms, and systems of meaning that exist beyond the individual. People do not develop a sense of self independently; rather, they come to understand themselves through forms of recognition mediated by social institutions, relationships, and cultural categories. Identity is therefore relational rather than self-generated. Both *Tomb of Sand* and *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* explore the consequences of this process by examining characters whose identities are shaped by uncertain recognition, exclusion, and encounters with forms of otherness that challenge established social classifications.

In *Tomb of Sand*, questions of identity emerge through encounters that unsettle conventional distinctions between self and other. When the elderly mother travels to Pakistan, she does not enter a completely unfamiliar world. Instead, her experiences reveal continuities that complicate the political division between India and Pakistan. The journey gradually undermines rigid distinctions between insider and outsider by foregrounding shared histories, memories, and emotional connections that survive beyond national borders. What initially appears to be a crossing into foreign territory becomes an encounter with aspects of the self that had been obscured by official narratives of separation.

The Pakistan episodes are particularly significant because they demonstrate how recognition can occur outside the categories through which identity is normally understood. The mother encounters individuals who recognize dimensions of her past that remain disconnected from her present social identity. These encounters challenge the assumption that national affiliation provides a complete account of who a person is. Recognition emerges not through citizenship or political identity but through memory, personal relationships, and shared historical experience. As Shree observes of the women's changing dynamics, "the contours of the characters merge and collide and by the end, we cannot distinguish between the two" (Shree 279). As a result, the distinction between self and other becomes increasingly unstable.

From a Lacanian perspective, these encounters illustrate the role of the Other in the formation of identity. The mother's sense of self does not emerge in isolation but through interactions that allow previously neglected aspects of her history to become meaningful once again. The recognition she receives enables her to reconnect fragmented elements of her past with her present identity. At the same time, the novel demonstrates that identity can never be fully secured within a single symbolic category. National identity provides one framework of recognition, but it cannot entirely contain the complexity of lived experience. The mother's journey therefore reveals that belonging and selfhood remain dependent upon relationships that exceed official systems of classification.

The novel consistently resists simple oppositions between familiarity and difference. Characters who appear separated by nationality often discover forms of connection that complicate political divisions. Recognition frequently occurs across boundaries that are presented as fixed within public discourse. Rather than emphasizing separation, Shree foregrounds relationality and interconnectedness, suggesting that identity is shaped through encounters with others whose lives intersect with one's own. The novel thus presents recognition as a dynamic process that challenges rigid forms of belonging and opens possibilities for alternative understandings of selfhood.

While *Tomb of Sand* explores recognition through unexpected forms of connection, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* examines identity through experiences of exclusion and social marginalization. Roy's novel is deeply concerned with individuals whose lives cannot be easily accommodated within dominant symbolic frameworks. The character of Anjum provides the most sustained exploration of this issue. Born as Aftab and later identified as a hijra, Anjum confronts systems of recognition that repeatedly fail to acknowledge her identity on its own terms. Her experiences reveal how social categories can render certain forms of selfhood difficult to recognize or understand.

Anjum's early life illustrates the relationship between identity formation and social exclusion. Although she seeks acceptance within family and society, the symbolic categories available to those around her often position her as different or unintelligible. The difficulty lies not simply in personal prejudice but in the limitations of the social frameworks through which identity is interpreted. Existing systems of recognition struggle to accommodate experiences that fall outside normative expectations of gender and social belonging. Consequently, identity develops alongside an awareness of exclusion from dominant forms of recognition.

The Khwabgah occupies a central place within this process because it provides an alternative symbolic

space in which identities marginalized elsewhere can be acknowledged and understood. Its significance extends beyond the idea of inclusion alone. Within the Khwabgah, Anjum encounters individuals whose experiences challenge dominant social norms and who offer forms of recognition unavailable in the wider society. The community creates a framework through which identities that have been rendered invisible or unintelligible can become socially meaningful. Recognition therefore becomes possible because an alternative symbolic order exists within the community itself. Judith Butler's statement that "recognition is not conferred on a subject, but forms that subject" (Butler 226) highlights that identity emerges through social recognition.

Roy repeatedly contrasts such spaces with encounters in the broader social world. Public institutions and social interactions often expose the mechanisms through which exclusion is produced and maintained. Individuals who do not conform to accepted expectations of gender, religion, or citizenship are frequently positioned as outsiders. The novel demonstrates that otherness is not an inherent quality but a social construction generated through systems of classification and recognition. Exclusion emerges when dominant symbolic structures fail to acknowledge identities that fall outside normative categories.

This dynamic becomes particularly visible as Anjum moves between different social environments throughout the novel. Her experiences reveal that identity is shaped by the forms of recognition available within particular contexts. In some spaces she is marginalized and denied legitimacy, while in others she is accepted and valued. The contrast demonstrates that exclusion is not a natural consequence of difference itself but a product of the symbolic frameworks through which difference is interpreted. Roy therefore exposes the social processes that determine which identities are recognized and which remain excluded.

The establishment of the Jannat Guest House further develops this critique of dominant systems of recognition. Situated at the margins of conventional social life, the community creates a space where individuals excluded elsewhere can form meaningful relationships and collective identities. The significance of the space lies not only in providing shelter but also in offering recognition to those denied it by mainstream institutions. By bringing together diverse individuals who exist outside normative categories, the novel imagines alternative forms of belonging that challenge established definitions of legitimacy and social membership.

Taken together, *Tomb of Sand* and *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* present identity as fundamentally relational and dependent upon recognition by others. In Shree's novel, recognition emerges through encounters that blur distinctions between insider and outsider, revealing connections that transcend political and national boundaries. In Roy's novel, experiences of exclusion expose the mechanisms through which otherness is socially produced and maintained. Although the two texts approach the issue from different directions, both demonstrate that identity is shaped through the symbolic structures that determine who is recognized, who remains unintelligible, and who is permitted to belong. From a Lacanian perspective, selfhood is inseparable from the Other, and both novels reveal how belonging remains contingent upon the unstable processes of recognition through which social life is organized.

Desire, Memory, and the Persistence of Absence:

Memory often appears as an attempt to reconnect with what has been lost. Yet literary representations of memory frequently demonstrate that the past cannot be fully recovered or restored. What survives are fragments, recollections, and emotional attachments that continue to shape the present. Lacan's concept of desire and Freud's theory of melancholia provide productive ways of understanding this condition. For Lacan, desire persists because complete fulfilment remains impossible; it is sustained by absence rather than resolved through satisfaction. Freud's melancholia, by contrast, describes a condition in which loss remains psychically active and becomes incorporated into the individual's sense of self. In both *Tomb of Sand* and *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, memory functions as a site where desire and loss continue to influence identity. The past survives not as something that can be recovered in its entirety but as something that remains unfinished and emotionally significant.

In *Tomb of Sand*, the mother's journey gradually reveals itself as more than a physical movement across national boundaries. It also becomes a return to a past that has never entirely disappeared. As the narrative progresses, memories associated with Anwar acquire increasing importance, transforming what initially appears to be a late-life adventure into a confrontation with unresolved attachments that precede the political divisions of Partition. The journey demonstrates that the past continues to exert an influence long after historical events have altered the conditions in which that past was originally experienced.

The Pakistan episodes are particularly significant because they bring forgotten and suppressed histories into the present. However, these encounters do not provide simple closure or restoration. The mother's memories of Anwar do not recreate a lost relationship in any complete sense. Instead, they reveal the continuing power of an attachment that has persisted across decades of separation and historical change. The significance of Anwar lies not in the possibility of recovering what was lost but in the enduring influence of what remains absent. From a

Lacanian perspective, this dynamic illustrates the relationship between desire and loss. Desire is sustained not by possession but by the absence of complete fulfilment. The mother's return to places and memories associated with Anwar does not eliminate the distance created by time and history. Rather, the journey reveals how the unattainable continues to shape emotional life. The past remains meaningful precisely because it cannot be fully reclaimed. What survives are traces, memories, and fragments that generate a continuing movement toward something that remains beyond complete recovery. The novel therefore resists narratives of reunion that promise restoration and instead emphasizes the persistence of longing within human experience.

This tension becomes increasingly visible through the mother's encounters with people and places connected to earlier periods of her life. Memories return, forgotten histories re-emerge, and aspects of the past become newly intelligible. Yet these moments simultaneously reveal the limits of remembrance. Recognition does not erase loss, nor does memory overcome historical separation. Instead, the novel demonstrates that desire continues because fulfilment remains incomplete. Memory functions not as a mechanism of recovery but as a reminder of what can never be entirely restored.

The novel's treatment of memory further suggests that the past is not a stable archive waiting to be rediscovered. Rather, memory appears as a dynamic and unfinished process through which individuals continually reinterpret their experiences. The mother's journey generates new understandings of her past without resolving its ambiguities. What remains significant is not the achievement of closure but the continuing relationship between memory, desire, and absence. The past retains its power because it remains partially inaccessible, ensuring that longing continues even in moments of apparent return.

While *Tomb of Sand* focuses primarily on the persistence of personal memory and desire, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* explores the ways in which loss becomes woven into everyday existence. Roy's novel is populated by characters whose lives are marked by absences that cannot be neatly resolved. Rather than concentrating upon a single lost object, the narrative presents multiple forms of attachment that continue to shape identity long after the original moments of separation have passed. The relationship between Tilo and Musa provides one of the clearest examples of this condition. Their connection develops within a context of political conflict, uncertainty, and repeated separation. Although circumstances prevent the realization of a stable shared future, the attachment remains central to both characters' emotional lives. What persists is not merely the memory of a relationship but the continuing influence of that relationship upon self-understanding. The past remains active within the present, shaping perception, emotion, and personal identity.

Freud's concept of melancholia is particularly useful in understanding this dynamic. The novel repeatedly suggests that certain losses cannot be fully left behind or resolved. Instead, they become incorporated into the self and continue to influence emotional life. Tilo's attachment to Musa exemplifies this process because the relationship retains its significance despite distance, disruption, and historical change. The attachment survives not through recovery but through persistence. Loss remains present within identity rather than existing outside it.

A comparable dynamic can be observed in Anjum's life. Although she eventually creates the Jannat Guest House and establishes meaningful relationships, these achievements do not erase earlier experiences of exclusion, violence, and uncertainty. The novel avoids presenting belonging as a final resolution to loss. Instead, traces of earlier absences continue to shape the present. Anjum moves forward, forms communities, and creates spaces of care, yet her identity remains connected to experiences that cannot simply be overcome or forgotten. Her life illustrates how the effects of loss continue even within moments of renewal and belonging. Early in her life, the realization that "he felt like a mistake that God had made" (Roy 9) establishes a foundation of exclusion, which later hardens into an inescapable, physical trauma where "the riot was inside her. It would never leave" (Roy 45), reflecting the deeply lingering effects of her past wounds.

What distinguishes Roy's treatment of melancholia is its integration into ordinary life. Absence is not confined to moments of reflection or nostalgia but becomes embedded within everyday experience. Characters carry their losses into relationships, communities, and social interactions. The novel therefore portrays melancholia not as a temporary emotional condition but as an enduring mode of attachment through which individuals remain connected to what has been lost. The past persists because it has become part of the structures through which identity is understood and lived.

Taken together, *Tomb of Sand* and *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* present memory as an ongoing engagement with absence rather than a recovery of what has disappeared. Shree's novel emphasizes the persistence of desire by demonstrating how the past remains meaningful precisely because it cannot be fully reclaimed. Roy's novel illustrates how loss becomes incorporated into identity and continues to shape emotional life long after the original moment of separation has passed. Although the two texts approach absence in different ways, both reveal that belonging is shaped not only by what is present but also by what remains irretrievably absent. From a

Lacanian perspective, desire persists because fulfilment is never complete, while Freud's concept of melancholia explains how unresolved losses continue to inhabit the self. Together, these perspectives illuminate the novels' shared insight that absence is not merely a lack but an active force in the formation of identity, memory, and belonging.

Conclusion:

The present study highlights the way *Tomb of Sand* and *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* represent belonging as an unstable and continually negotiated condition. Although the two novels differ in narrative structure, thematic emphasis, and characterization, both challenge the assumption that belonging is a fixed status secured through nation, community, citizenship, or social identity. Instead, they portray belonging as a dynamic process shaped by symbolic structures, forms of recognition, personal relationships, memory, and loss.

The analysis of borders and symbolic structures demonstrates that the categories through which belonging is commonly understood often prove inadequate when confronted with lived experience. In *Tomb of Sand*, the mother's journey across the India-Pakistan border unsettles rigid distinctions between nation, memory, and identity, revealing the limitations of political boundaries as markers of belonging. In *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, characters such as Anjum occupy positions that challenge conventional social classifications, exposing the exclusionary nature of dominant frameworks of recognition. Both novels therefore question the authority of symbolic structures that claim to provide stable and secure forms of belonging.

The study also shows that identity emerges through relationships of recognition rather than through fixed personal characteristics. Drawing on Lacan's concept of the Other, the analysis demonstrates that selfhood is formed through symbolic systems of meaning and social acknowledgment. In *Tomb of Sand*, encounters across national and historical divisions reveal forms of recognition that exceed official categories of identity. In Roy's novel, experiences of exclusion highlight the ways in which dominant social structures determine who is recognized and who remains marginalized. Across both texts, belonging depends not simply on membership within a community but on the possibility of being acknowledged within the symbolic frameworks that organize social life.

A further finding concerns the continuing influence of absence and loss. The memories associated with Anwar in *Tomb of Sand* and the enduring attachments that shape the lives of Tilo, Musa, and Anjum in *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* demonstrate that the past remains active within the present. Freud's concept of melancholia helps explain how unresolved losses become incorporated into identity, while Lacan's notion of desire
illuminates why the search for fulfilment and belonging remains ongoing. The novels suggest that belonging is never fully achieved because individuals continue to be shaped by attachments, memories, and absences that cannot be entirely resolved or recovered.

Thus, the study indicates that belonging is not a stable condition but a process of continual negotiation between self and society, memory and history, presence and absence. The combination of Lacanian and Freudian perspectives makes it possible to understand belonging not merely as a social or political phenomenon but also as a psychological and emotional experience. Both *Tomb of Sand* and *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* demonstrate that borders extend beyond territorial divisions and continue to influence how individuals understand themselves and relate to others. By exploring recognition, exclusion, desire, and loss, the novels reveal the enduring effects of historical and social boundaries on personal identity. In doing so, they suggest that belonging remains open, relational, and incomplete, shaped as much by what is absent as by what is present.

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