

Impact Factor: 8.67

ISSN:0976-8165



THE CRITERION

AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL IN ENGLISH

Bi-Monthly Peer-Reviewed eJournal

16 YEARS OF OPEN ACCESS

VOL. 16 ISSUE-1, FEBRUARY 2025

Editor-In-Chief: **Dr. Vishwanath Bite**
Managing Editor: **Dr. Madhuri Bite**



www.the-criterion.com

AboutUs: <http://www.the-criterion.com/about/>

Archive: <http://www.the-criterion.com/archive/>

ContactUs: <http://www.the-criterion.com/contact/>

EditorialBoard: <http://www.the-criterion.com/editorial-board/>

Submission: <http://www.the-criterion.com/submission/>

FAQ: <http://www.the-criterion.com/fa/>



ISSN 2278-9529
Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal
www.galaxyimrj.com

Threading the Intricacies of Home in Basudhara Roy's '*Stitching a Home*'

Eram Siddiqui

Research Scholar,
Department of English,
Aligarh Muslim University,
Aligarh, UP.

&

Shubham Kumar Pati

Research Scholar,
Department of Education,
University of Delhi.

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14973721>

Article History: Submitted-28/12/2024, Revised-15/01/2025, Accepted-10/02/2025, Published-28/02/2025.

Abstract:

The concept of 'home' has been described from diverse perspectives in Indian English writings compared to other academic domains. The portrayal of 'home' has been illustrated in various disciplines in the proportions of 'places, spaces, feelings, practices, and/or an active state of the state of being in the world'. Besides from the postmodern viewpoint, sociology defines the concept of 'home' as 'complex', 'multi-dimensional', and 'multi-layered', and not necessarily constructed for any specific purposes. L. Fox describes 'five important dimensions' for 'home' as a financial investment, physical structure, territory, identity, and social and cultural unit, but on the other hand, Hohmann defines 'home' as a location for constituting privacy, identity and space. Basudhara Roy, in her collection '*Stitching a Home*', attempts to scrutinise the construction process of a home behaviorally. Beyond the postmodern approach, the poet sees 'home' as one based on elements of binary opposition along with complexities, and through the parallel use of paradox and metaphors, the poems evoke the 'dualities of home'; both 'subjective and objective', 'permanent and lost', 'concrete and abstract', 'signified and

aporia', 'companionship and isolation' and 'homelessness and belonging'. The sociological study of autobiographical elements used in the poems may reflect the concept of 'home adjustment', but in comparison to the prevalent theories, it would be appropriate to look at the notion of 'home' in Basudhara Roy's poems as of an 'essentially contested concept' (ECC) view propounded by Walter Gallie. However, Roy's poems do not establish any constant or concrete ideology towards the concept of 'home', but to construct an identity, the poems carefully elucidate the distinctions between the relationships in the home and the home's relationship with the world and how the 'objects' in-home play significant roles in the creation of 'home'. This paper attempts to locate the approaches of constructing multi-layered relationships, emotions, feelings, and behaviours as portrayed in selected poems of Basudhara Roy's '*Stitching a Home*'. What does it mean to be at home in today's world where spaces and cultures are in a profound conflux - desired and forced? Through this study, the authors aim to locate the concept of home(s), in context to individuals' perspective as well as collective.

Keywords: Home, Relationships, Postmodern, ECC, Autobiographical Elements, Longing, Homelessness, Belonging, Isolation.

Introduction:

The meaning of Home can be different for individuals, and such multiple perceptions raise from the person's own contexts such as experience, surroundings, beliefs and understanding. Therefore, even if we limit 'home' to any definition from the viewpoint of social science, each individual still sees 'home' from their panoramic lens. For some individuals, it may be a place, a structure made of cement, bricks, and sand, while for others, it may be a structure made of inter-relationships, between people and generations, objects and spaces; for some, Home can be a room, a city, a nation, a person; or it could be a physical or virtual space of bonds and

behaviours. According to Lockford (2016) "to feel at home is an experience often proffered as desirable because it connotes comfort and familiarity, and as such it is often taken for granted as positive." But why and how any emotion or speculation towards home emerges for anyone - is a significant question. More importantly, it is essential to consider how a writer assembles the concept of Home in literary works and what components and methodologies are necessary for this process of literary construction. We cannot say that the concept of 'home' as defined by social science is more empirical and closer in meaning than that presented in the nucleus of literary works. Roy's text 'Stitching a Home' outlines the images, sentiments, attitudes, objects, paradoxes, and philosophies that constitute a Home. In the (selected) poems of the author, this treatment (of Home) acts like a vehicle, which sometimes redirects from the structure of one room to a city like Banaras and sometimes also makes a psychological expedition from depression to recuperation and exhilaration. In this research paper, an attempt is made to find answers to the following questions in the selected poems penned by Basudhara Roy;

1. In Basudhara Roy's poems, how do the relationships within the home, and the relationship between the home and the world have been approximated through multiple mediums and multi-layered tools?
2. How do Roy's poems constitute the structure of 'home' by underlining the relationships of human life in contemporary times?
3. How does Roy explore the impact of 'home' on one's identity in her poems?
4. Has Basudhara Roy integrally reflected 'home' in her poems, or does it fit Walter Gallie's theory of ECC in the absence of any uniform or abiding theme in the context of home?
5. To what extent does Roy effectively distinguish between the abstract and concrete elements that shape the foundation and evolution of 'Home'?

6. Do Roy's poems align with classical social science definitions of 'Home,' or do they challenge traditional perspectives and introduce new interpretations?

According to Mallet (2004), "Home is variously described in the literature as conflated with or related to house, family, haven, self, gender, and journeying. Many authors also consider notions of being-at-home, creating or making home and the ideal home." The author has incorporated many dimensions in her poems to form the vision of 'Home';

The City as Home

Roy dedicates the first two poems of her book to Banaras.

*Returning to an old city, long left behind,
is like coming back to children who have
grown through time and unfurled*

[...]

*Or is it like returning in love to a beloved
long estranged, whose face, though changed,
bears yet un-erased marks of a longing*

(*Banaras I*, lines 1-9)

Through these lines, Roy recounts her own experiences while personifying the city of Banaras. The consistency of 'return' makes the poet's consciousness discern nostalgia. In expansion, it seeks to positively integrate behavioural transformations by emphasizing the human experience of detachment. In the third stanza, the poet paints the interaction between her and the city as the relationship between two pure souls, a kind of relationship in which the shadow of 'un-erased marks of a longing' revives the faded memories in the consciousness, despite the

physical changes that people undergo in the course of their lives, The poet endeavours to rekindle her relationship with the city through memories.

*Returning to your old city is an awakening
to loss unaccounted for, a restoration to forms
best known amidst hazes,*

*surrender to the tender stillness in the
heart of chaos, where, though hopes
come undone, odes to pasts may still be sung.*

(*Banaras I*, lines 16-21)

The poet sees the concept of 'return' as a possibility for adaptation, nostalgia and remembrance. After 'returning' from an establishment, as in the case of the poet's personal experience (*your old city*), it is a standard action for the location to 'do it again as before' or retrieve the memories hidden somewhere deep in the consciousness... In *Banaras - I*, the Roy gently dusts off old memories, revealing that relationships can be mended and deep remembrance has the power to revive the past, even as people, places, and circumstances change. Then, she suggests, 'home' can be rejuvenated as before.

In the poem '*Banaras II*' the poet extends her reasons for visits not only to the city but also to the past;

*I sift the city for anagrams of my past,
for words I left behind
for lovers to find, inhabit, alter*

(*Banaras II*, lines 1-3)

While recollecting memories, the poet tries to establish an association between her feelings of the past and the present. In this way, home—or the act of returning—becomes a bridge between the past and present, preserving history while forging connections that extend into the future. The roots of past events and the branching relationships of the present are woven together by memories, forming a timeless thread that connects a person to both past and present, making them whole. The poet points out that it is the 'bittersweet' and not just the sweet that makes her revisit and fondly remember the city. This idea finds associations to one's lost homeland, as a refugee, seeking familiar grounds, structures, and memorials. Although a lot changes, a lot still remains, though only in the memories. To depart, to leave, becomes inevitable, in the long run of life. In the world today, people pack, pick up and move, for opportunities, safe havens, and some, simply to build other homes. There is always a longing with a separation, but the pain eventually melts into memories that no longer hurt but are still very close to the heart.

*It buttresses hopes of enduring,
of reclaiming meaning from debris of doubt, grief, loss;*

(*Banaras II*, lines 13-14)

Communicating with the poet, the city echoes the contradictions of life and optimistically describes peace as stable and forbearing. The poet portrays home as a 'mirage,' where calm and tranquility exist at its core, yet are disrupted by life's challenges, emotions, and relationships.

*the city has no weariness to questions,
only no answers to offer. In response, it throws up
the paradox of life, the stillness in its restless core*

(*Banaras II*, lines 19-21)

Nevertheless, peace is mostly about stability and sustained tolerance and the author witnesses herself as a moving entity parallel to the city; '*We both must move on, this city and I*'; here

'move on' is not just a physical journey from one place to another, but to restore those relations of history in the present which were concealed somewhere due to the span and differences of time and place between 'home' and 'person'.

The Location of Home: Permanent or Temporary; Concrete or Abstract?

In the poem 'Address', the author addresses an important element of a 'home'. Generally, 'addresses' are classified as permanent and temporary. Superficially, the poem 'Address' seems to be a dialogue between two lovers, but here the author designs the cognitive image of a 'sense of place' while exploring the permanence of the poems and relationships;

*Next time, friend, wherever you go,
choose to leave an address, so that poems
poured on shores may not be lapped up by the waves.*

(Address, Line 8-10)

The poem 'Address' reminds one of those who have left their beloved lands and dear ones, and when they return and the landscape is changed, they want their loved ones to at least have an address of their whereabouts. So that the feeling of being at home can be fully realised because, without family and familiar faces, home ceases to be a home or is only partially a home.

Meanwhile, Roy powerfully depicts homelessness and solitude in her poem 'Home Truths'. In pursuit of permanence, a home is a place that is and is not. This absence is of the relationships and feelings of being at home. The disintegrating 'home' is depicted by the poet through invasive images; *...it can be burnt, vandalised, robbed* (Home Truths, line 8). The sense of losing 'home' resonates in the Banaras poems, where the poet reflects on past experiences and highlights the city's transformation. With change, there is always something—tangible or emotional—that is inevitably lost. That is why the permanence of 'Home' may be in the senses

of the poet, but preserving 'home' incorporated into the physical conditions is a complicated task;

A home is a permanent address.

It is always meant to be lost.

(*Home Truths*, lines 5-6)

In the context to permanence and impermanence, the poet gives a dualistic reaction. While nouns are appropriate for the physical structure of the house, the relationships inside the house are denoted by adjectives only. Like the earthly, concrete and physical things in the Home, affinities and emotions can also be temporary and changeable. Thus, in the same juncture and context, the material and virtual entities appear contrasting and identical to each other;

A home is concrete —

name, place, animal, thing.

It is only abstract —

enjambment, fiction, an apostrophe's wet-dream.

(*Home Truths*, lines 15-18)

The poet skillfully incorporates images of familiar household games, such as "name, place, animal, thing," into her expressions. Interestingly, these games that people play in their homes are also full of associations with their upbringings, associations as well as disassociations that are far-fetched, as if foreign lands, from which they fetch images to fulfil their present needs, oblivious to the possibility of them becoming their homes in the long run of time and life!

Home, as an Aurora of Love and Feelings

The poet draws parallels between the paths to a beloved's heart and the paths to a home, suggesting that a home can be a person or emotions—a feeling we experience with them or the way they make us feel. In either case, the feeling of home vibrates with warmth and security. However, it is only slowly and steadily that a house becomes a home after many struggles that require patience, love and hard work.

*Only the island of your heart remains unmapped
and my love loses its way to you
on undulating shingles of hesitation.*

(Address, lines 4-6)

Can a sense of belonging be fostered, even after everything is lost? Sometimes, even when people, loved ones, natives, and friends are absent from home, the landscape and the structure still preserve the aroma that gives some solace to the heart that it comes seeking.

Shaping Relationships, Inside and Outside the Home

Roy weaves threads between relationships with depth and subtlety in her poems. In the postmodern period of relationships, the poet has carefully inserted remembrances in the poems. At a glance, the metaphors and images used for associations can take the anthology to the 80s and 90s, where cautiousness and sensibility are essential in relationships in a joint household. In the poem 'To Home a House', the poet expresses the processes of relationships that make a house a home. One treats one's Home with adoration and respect even when the concrete walls do not respond to communication with one who is in the solitude of the house;

*It takes time to home a house,
have its walls love you enough
to not talk back, not give away*

(To Home a House, lines 1-3)

Nevertheless, these same 'walls' modify their relationship in the poem 'Keeping In'; *Home, walled in, loses concavity* (line 4). In 'To Home a House', through the comparative shading of 'Children' and 'Grand Father', an attempt has been made to establish coordination and stability between the age distinction and behaviour modification in human life. The echoes of differences can be seen in the '*cackle of children*' and '*the cough of grandfathers calling for tea*'. In the post-modern epoch, where alienated behaviour is found in relationships, the poet expects consideration and respect from an optimistic perspective of the behaviour in the present time;

summon your past selves
shed, shred, lost—to today's banquet
of being to be honored
with respect, gratitude, regard

(To Home a House, lines 43-46)

In her poem 'Pocket', the image of ordinary commodities used in the house emerges; *Staples, clips, buttons, a watch, currency notes, pencil shavings, a leaf, an unfinished letter, some candies, a book*. The poet compares herself to these entities, believing they shape her memories and relationships by adding form, color, texture, and depth; *Their nature hardly matters, they save each matter to me*. (Lines 13–14). The poet conveys the effect of feelings and thoughts leading to loneliness and solitude through the following lines.;

Putting in rejoicing,
complaint, guilt, memory,
sorrow, laughter—
all together, unsorted, a

mosaic of myself, a mess.

Is that why you left?

(Pocket, lines 19–24)

There are always questions in the poems, left resounding with partings, like the echoes of footfalls walking away.

The poet uses the concept of '*carpe diem*' to show the appearance of life by ascertaining the similarity between existence and relations; *Realize life begins with belonging, and ends there too*. Home is no home with its recipes and culinaries, reminds the poet in her poem 'Dum Pukht'. A home in the Indian culture and context ceases to be itself if devoid of the homely meals cooked with hard work, patience and love. (*Dum Pukht*, line 12)

The book 'Stitching a Home' often uses dialogue manners in verses to depict family and worldly ties inside the 'home'. With the use of dramatic monologue, it is easy to speculate the speaker's personality. The poem '*Dum Pukht*' psychologically describes the strategy of shaping relationships through communication through this dialogue style;

Like you, I answer, except I don't rush them at all.

In a generous pan, I like them to talk to each other

(Dum Pukht, lines 4-5)

In her poems, Basudhara Roy compares the formation and deterioration of relationships within the home, giving central importance to scenes of dialogue exchange in these relationships. Relationships, sweet and sour, stable and unstable, made and broken are depicted. It is an optimistic approach to restoring vandalised relationships from a truly fragmented lifestyle.

Home, Belongingness and Identity

Roy demonstrates the theme of belongingness and identity in her verses with a sense of sanguinity, sorrow and pain. The opening lines of the poem 'Keeping In' find the speaker scouring for a suitable place on the planet to demarcate her identity;

The world shuts up. I follow suit.

Only to realize there's no one place

where I fully belong.

(*Keeping Inn*, lines 1–3)

Floundering for social identity, the speaker's saga represents the conditions of emigrated refugees who have to face social and political artfulness to evolve as 'fully belong'. The speaker, like a refugee, seeks a 'home' in a disorganized society for 'self-categorization' i.e., the speaker's self is not reflexive, nor does it qualify itself for belongingness with any social group or class (Stets and Burke). The formation of social identity involves two key processes: self-categorization and social comparison. Through these strategies, individuals shape their identity by aligning themselves with a particular group. Turner et al. pointed out that most theories of social identity refer to intergroup relations, “how people come to see themselves as members of one group/category (the in-group) in comparison with another (the out-group), and the consequences of this categorization, such as ethnocentrism.” In the opening lines of her poem 'Stitching a Home', Roy addresses how relationships and objects living away from 'home' can commune to 'home'. At the centre of these poems are humans and human behaviour, which use their distinct abilities to construct social identity. That is, it is necessary to have a 'home' for inanimate things to belong to the living;

Things that strayed so far alone

have no idea how to belong?

(*Stitching a Home*, lines 2-3)

In the process of identity formation, before self-categorization, it is necessary to have a cognition of self-recognition. Roy considers family links to be important for self-identification;

not a place, not even a hope or a dream.

It is the union of time and mind,

of inhabiting the present with what you are.

(*Stitching a Home*, lines 13–15)

Roy's poems directly address the angst of 'social adjustment' of refugees; When a person considers a city his home before being a refugee, he regards himself as part of a social class to build his social identity with stipulated socio-cultural practices. Mijić explains the difference between identity and belonging, saying that "Floya Anthias, who has undertaken important research on both terms, argues that identity and belonging 'live together but involve a different emphasis': 'Identity involves individual and collective narratives of self and other. Belonging, on the other hand, is more about experiences of being part of the social fabric.'" That is, in order to feel a sense of belonging, it becomes necessary that the refugees should adjust themselves to any social group as soon as attainable, even if they have to compromise with the cultural and social relations and customs of their 'home'. To determine identity, the refugee socially categorises himself by compromising with the identity of others. Roy reflects in the poem 'Dum Pukht', on the process of refugees realizing their belonging by accepting differences;

to know, though different, they are all

in this together; to find love in dissolution

and realize life begins with belonging, and ends there too.

(*Dum Pukht*, lines 10–12)

According to the poet, 'belonging' is a permanent consistency which continues till eternity. However, through the phrase 'in this together', the poet contemplates the process of integration as an important element for identity formation and a sense of belongingness for the refugee where it means "the fundamental dialectical process within which social reality is constructed through the human agency" (Mijic).

This beginning of one (kind of) life signals the end of another kind. One cannot go on living with the monuments of the past. Even though change is tough and painful, it is inevitable in order to continue to survive.

Walter Gallie's theory of ECC and Basudhara Roy's 'Home'

Jed Meers explores the reasons why the concept of home cannot have a fixed or static definition. Meers has concluded that despite all the empirical evidence and academic, logical debates, the connotation of 'home' cannot be found durable in the social science approach. Explaining 'essential contestability,' Meers describes it as a method and process that reveals how various scholars have attempted to define the concept of 'home' in the most acceptable and conceivable manner. Gallie in the explanation, classifies concepts like 'social justice', and 'security' as "essentially contested" because "there is no one use of any of them (definition and interpretation) which can be set up as its generally accepted and therefore correct or standard use" (Gallie). However, researchers share a unanimous perspective on the notion of 'home' in Basudhara Roy's poems. It is not that the poet herself is trying to establish the concept of 'home', or the characters of the poems or the poet are not agreeing to any one idea of 'home' due to some 'identity crisis'. In fact, Basudhara Roy shapes 'home' in her poems as possibilities, rather than attempting to construct it with various mutually dialectical features. That is why, for the poet, 'Home' is a space that continues to explore the possibilities between 'virtual' and 'concrete,' 'permanent' and 'temporary,' 'optimistic' and 'pessimistic,' and so on.

Conclusion:

Basudhara Roy has tried to shape and (re)construct 'home' through the medium of her poems. Even if we momentarily consider the 'house' as a physical unit, Roy does not confine it to a mere two-foot space but expands its dimensions to an undefined yet universal scale. In the journey from the area of two feet to the universal level, Roy makes the most reasonable use of her autobiographical elements in poems dedicated to Banaras, where the poet's feelings and emotions flow like the Ganges for identity and permanence. The poems on *Banaras* transport the poet to past generations while striving to reconcile with the conflicts and struggles of contemporary existence. Paradox and oxymorons are employed to unify the fundamentally opposing elements of 'home' in the poems. Roy's poems do not desire to specify a definition for 'home' and bind it within the boundaries of rendition, rather her poems are the inclusion of complexities, disagreements, and contradictions of elements and thoughts to define 'home', therefore Roy 'home' might be considered as an 'essentially contested' concept' and the ever-evolving nature of the concept. Building on Meers' work, Roy's depiction of 'home' diverges from conventional definitions established within various branches of social sciences, distinguishing itself from traditionally accepted conceptualizations. This study highlights that the notion of 'home' in literature can exist within both individual and collective contexts, shaped by identity, culture, and lived experiences at personal and collective levels.

Works Cited:

Brower, Tracy, PhD. "Missing Your People: Why Belonging Is so Important and How to Create It." *Forbes*, 10 Jan. 2021, www.forbes.com/sites/tracybrower/2021/01/10/missing-your-people-why-belonging-is-so-important-and-how-to-create-it.

Gallie, W. B., editor. "Essentially contested concepts, Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society." *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 1st ed., vol. 56, 1956, <https://doi.org/10.1093/aristotelian/56.1.167>.

Heckmann, Christina. *Concepts of Home and Belonging in Postcolonial Literature Compared in the Novels "Small Island" by Andrea Levy and "White Teeth" by Zadie Smith*. 2009.

Lahiri, Gopal. "Book Review: Basudhara Roy's 'Stitching a Home.'" *Cafe Dissensus Everyday*, 8 July 2021, cafedissensuseveryday.com/2021/07/08/book-review-basudhara-roys-stitching-a-home.

Lockford, Lesa. "Leaving Home." *International Review of Qualitative Research*, SAGE Publishing, May 2016, <https://doi.org/10.1525/irqr.2016.9.1.4>.

Mallett, Shelley. "Understanding Home: A Critical Review of the Literature." *The Sociological Review*, vol. 52, no. 1, Wiley-Blackwell, Feb. 2004, pp. 62–89. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-954x.2004.00442.x>.

Mandelbaum, Maurice, and W. B. Gallie. "Philosophy and the Historical Understanding." *The American Historical Review*, vol. 70, no. 1, Oxford UP, Oct. 1964, p. 95. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1842102>.

Meers, Jed. "'Home' as an essentially contested concept and why this matters." *Housing Studies*, vol. 38, no. 04, 2021, pp. 597–614. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02673037.2021.1893281>.

Mijić, Ana. "(Re-)Construction of Identity and Belonging After Forced Migration: A Sociology of Knowledge Approach." *Journal of Refugee Studies*, vol. 35, no. 3, Oxford UP, Jan. 2022, pp. 1107–25. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/feac020>.

Roy, Basudhara. *Stitching a Home*. 1st ed., Red River, 2021.

Stets, Jan E., and Peter Burke. "Identity Theory and Social Identity Theory." *Social Psychology*

Quarterly, vol. 63, no. 3, SAGE Publishing, Sept. 2000, p. 224.

<https://doi.org/10.2307/2695870>.