

Home and Identity: Remapping the Spatial Manifestation of Female Subjectivity in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*

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Abstract: This paper examines the concept of home and argues that the place of home represented in many a postcolonial literary narrative can be taken as a useful locus to identify some of the intricate and sinuous problems related to identity construction and subjectivity maintenance. To this end, the paper intends to take a close reading of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* to map out areas that fit well within the purview of home. It contextualizes Rushdie's traumatic narratives of deterritorialization and their indissoluble chain to the existentialist predicaments of his characters in the novel in order to show how the incompatibility of the perpetuation of patriarchal and nationalist ideology and the vision of identity legitimacy is closely tied up with a demand for the reterritorialization of domestic domain and the restitution of the female protagonists' rights of identity construction and subjectivity maintenance. And the deployment of key theoretical postulations on the field, in particular Homi K. Bhabha's postcolonial theories, provides a viable analytical frame to consider the problematic representations of traumatic postcolonialism and self-identification unfulfillment related to the stories of the female protagonist Amina Sinai. The investigation of the spatial manifestation of Amina Sinai's existentialist predicaments conceptualized as displacement, estrangement and alienation in the mists of social fissures is attributable to the introduction of the melodramatic elements located in the heroines' life trajectories in postcolonial literary texts and thus aims to highlight the unmitigated sufferings of women at the key moments of the transactions of Indian society. Meanwhile, Amina Sinai's praiseworthy efforts to confront the great challenges of marginalization and elimination require the rewriting of women's roles in an age of political turmoil and social unrest, and her act of transgression and resistance, with intention to highlight the symbolism of journeying-as-surviving, forges an enabling space that facilitates her female aspirations of achieving identity legitimacy and legitimizing gendered and national subjectivity in a treacherous milieu. Furthermore, the portrayal of the evolution of domestic realism in the novel is indicative of a significant departure.

Keywords: Gendered and national subjectivity, ideal of domesticity, patriarchal and nationalist ideology, identity legitimacy, representations of incompatibility, journeying-as-surviving

Over the course of last five decades or so, the concept of home has been deeply rooted in the literary narrative of writers from across the globe. These writers' domestic concern lies in the fact that the diverse representations of the "home" in their fictional imagination are indissolubly chained to the h/stories of their characters and ultimately contributing to the inevitability of their destinies. And more importantly, it appears that the unfolding of the characters' life trajectories against the backdrop of the domestic domain, precisely conceptualized as the "home", seems to acquire distinctive forms which can be seen as responses to the larger social and political realities.

Interestingly, the spatial scholarship in recent years diverts scholars' attention to the changing roles of the home, with special focus on their metaphorical renderings. Notably, it is the symbolic representations of the home that makes it possible for the concept to encompass more complicated and dynamic meanings when considered within the context of postcolonial theory, sociological theory, diasporic phenomena, multiculturalism, and nationalism. The existing research presents a simultaneous enactment and theorization of the multiple representations of the home taking place at a multitude of textual activities. It is based on these insights that the study in question takes its clue and attempts to investigate into the changing roles of the home and their plentiful implications in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981). In the novel, Rushdie writes of varied domestic structures which function as key planes to mirror the ups and downs of his characters' life trajectories. Specifically, the places of home, formulated in the novel primarily include the landowner Mr. Ghani's opulent mansion, Saleem Sinai's grandparents' big stone house in Agra, Saleem Sinai's parents' old house in Delhi and then the Sinais' Westernized house in Bombay, the grand mansion in Rawalpindi owned by Saleem Sinai's aunt Emerald, the bungalow set in a tidy Civil Service Garden owned by Saleem Sinai's uncle Mustapha Aziz. These places of home play their roles in shaping the framework of narrative in the novel. Theoretically, the domestic domain provides the characters with a fixed point of reference to structure a world about themselves. Given the essential and inseparable part of the home in the unfolding of the h/stories of the characters in the novel, it is of great significance to investigate into the stories of the home within the context of certain schools and approaches, in particular the ones that fit well within the purview of postcolonialism, sociology, diaspora, multiculturalism and nationalism. While surveyed from such pluralistic viewpoints, the representations of home in the novel are rendered with a multiplicity of significations in that Rushdie's act of writing is involved in a process of signifying practice. As Stuart Hall contends, "Language, in this sense, is a signifying practice. Any representational system which functions in this way can be thought of as working, broadly speaking, according to the principles of representation through language" (5). In line with Hall's contention, Rushdie's literary narrative can be interpreted as a representational system, using syllabic writing system as a set of symbols to construct symbolic meanings about a particular person, event or scene. In this sense, home is a central locus of symbolism, and in the process of representations through different signifying practices, the place of home is bound to undergo significant changes both in form and style, which results in the loss of its highly traditional connotations as stable, secure, private, protective, supportive, and the like, and the concomitant emergence of rather passive reference associated with terms like instability, insecurity, threat, exclusion, elimination, etc.

Notably, in its process of moving away from its traditional meanings and coming to take in its core such negative connotations as menace, subversion, and dissolution, the changing roles of the home have become a primary concern in scholarship in the fields of postcolonialism, sociology, political science, anthropology, history, diaspora. In *Midnight's Children*, multiple representations of home are at work, and characters inhabiting in these places of home perform out their roles in responding to different situations around in their own ways. In what follows, the analysis will revolve around the gendered aspects of the spatial practice in the novel, in particular the dialectics of the home and the self, the feminist aspirations and the traditional domesticity, and the subjectivity attaining and the othered contributing, with the female protagonist Amina Sinai lying at centre of the critique discourse. It argues that the place of home does not always serve as a promising site where Amina Sinai can promote her identity assertion and subjectivity maintenance, but at times it is a site infiltrated by elements of threat, menace, and dissolution. With the presence of patriarchal rule, home becomes a site of power manifestation and power contestation, where power relations are at work. And when the enactment of patriarchal domesticity is compounded by the invasion of social division forces, rendering the place of home to the verge of disintegration, the place of home is turned into a site where Amina Sinai resolutely gets in on the act of resistance against the great

challenges of patriarchal oppression and ethnic fissures. However, when the traditional domestic practice cannot confer certain valuable rights of privacy and autonomy on the occupants, Amina Sinai is obliged to take up the act of transgression, and hence breaking down the boundary between the home interior and the exterior, and ultimately journey into a chaotic world which is deemed as an inevitable choice for Amina Sinai to negotiate for her own survival and the survival of her family as well. In this regard, the transgression of the threshold as a symbolic boundary between the home interior and the world outside and the hypothesis of journeying-as-surviving suggests a wider perspective to rethink the spatial manifestation of Amina Sinai's predicaments related to issues of identity re-configuration and subjectivity re-casting.

1. Narrating the Ideal of Domesticity and the Challenges of Identity Construction and Subjectivity Preservation

The female protagonist Amina Sinai, also known as Mumtaz Aziz, lies at the heart of Salman Rushdie's narrative. She is described as a tragic figure in the novel. And her life tragedy is contributed to a variety of factors, including personal factors and factors related to her living environment. Amongst the three daughters of Aadam Aziz and Naseem Ghani, Mumtaz Aziz turns out to be the most ordinary girl who is born with black skin, and not as intelligent and beautiful as the other two girls, either. It is noted that her inborn black skin is deeply rooted in her sufferings through her life. Unlike her two sisters Alia Aziz and Emerald Aziz, both who are born with snow-white skin, Amina Sinai turns out black, which is seen as an abnormal phenomenon as girls born into the snow-covered Kashmiri land normally turn out as fair as mountain snow. In the first place, her blackness makes it difficult for her mother to love her, as in line with Salman Rushdie's description, "Mumtaz, whose dark skin stood between her and the affections of her mother" (Rushdie, *MC* 53). In addition to the absence of her mother's love resulted from her black skin, there are also many embarrassing occasions that Amina Sinai has to confront with out of the same reason. For example, Amina Sinai feels extremely embarrassed and almost loses her control when overhearing the loud chat about blackies initiated by her second husband Ahmed Sinai's distant cousin Zohra who comes to visit the newly wedded couple, saying that, "How awful to be black, cousinji, to wake every morning and see it staring at you, in the mirror to be shown proof of your inferiority!" (Rushdie, *MC* 70). The unfriendly remarks made by Zohra really drives Amina Sinai mad, making her almost get into attacking Zohra's head with the hot khichri. Rushdie presents the blackness of Amina Sinai by using different expressions. For example, he would call her "the blackie" (Rushdie, *MC* 56), or writes that "And Mumtaz, who had come out of her mother's womb black as midnight?" (Rushdie, *MC* 55), etc. Such intense a description of the female character's natural defect in a way bears a foreshadowing of her inevitable unfortunate encounters that she has to go through in her life, so is the case of her marriage.

Admittedly, Amina Sinai's black skin has stopped her making a good match in the marriage market. In her first marriage, she has to face an impotent husband who takes advantage of her out of a hidden agenda and who finally abandons her when his nefarious intentions are revealed, thrusting her into miserable situations of traumatized being and identity crisis as a deserted wife. A note found in the lamplit seclusion in Doctor Aadam Aziz's house which is left behind by Nadir Khan announces the abandoned status of Mumtaz Aziz, which read, "Talaq! Talaq! Talaq!" (Rushdie, *MC* 62). The Urdu words possess sort of thunderclap sound which is sometimes too violent to convey kind messages, as in the case of Mumtaz Aziz. The announcement precipitates the Aziz family into an unexpected crisis, for what the note means in English is "I divorce thee. I divorce thee. I divorce thee" (Ibid.). And as such, Nadir Khan's indecent handling of the situations brings in catastrophic consequences to the Aziz family, and an ensuing chaos comes on stage in the household. In her relationship with Nadir Khan, Mumtaz Aziz tries to make herself an adequate wife by attending to her secret husband in a lamplit secluded marriage chamber, for whom she cares on a daily basis, bringing food and drink to the cellar for him and cleaning away his pots. When showing no hesita-

tion of stepping down into the underworld and assuming the task of taking care of Nadir Khan's daily life, Mumtaz Aziz seeks to legitimize herself as the wife of a hidden man, to win his recognition of her legitimate wifedom. And more importantly, in the marriage Mumtaz Aziz tries to solicit love from Nadir Khan, which she lacks in the early part of her life, for her black skin stops her mother's love for her, as presented in Rushdie's narration, "[...] her daughter Mumtaz, the blackie whom she had never been able to love because of her skin of a South Indian fisherwoman" (Rushdie, *MC* 56). Unfortunately, her assiduity turns out to be futile. Her strenuous efforts fail to facilitate her identity assertion under the circumstances of an unspoken marriage, as Sara Upstone points out, "because of her marriage to a fugitive" (*Spatial Politics* 129). In this sense, Mumtaz Aziz's domestic practice does not function as a means of supporting her identity construction enterprise, as Mumtaz Aziz enters into a negotiation with a fugitive who is also trapped in a situation of identity crisis. Nadir Khan survives the assassination attempt which targets Mian Abdullah, a pro-Indian Muslim political figure who founds the Free Islam Convocation. The cruel experience throws Nadia Khan into a very despairing situation. During his concealment in the Aziz family's basement, he acquires the identity of a fugitive, for by hiding himself from any potential life-threatening situation, he is obliged to confront the consequent issues of identity crisis.

Interestingly, Salman Rushdie uses a number of derogatory adjectives to characterize Nadir Khan, underscoring his pudginess, his lankish and greasy hair, likening him to "a fat earthworm under the ground" (Rushdie, *MC* 57). Under Salman Rushdie's pen, Nadir Khan is characterized as a man with a plump, lank-haired, embarrassingly grotesque figure. Also, Padma Mangroli, Saleem Sinai's lover, refers to Nadir Khan as "That fat soft cowardly plumpie" (Rushdie, *MC* 51). In addition, his grotesque appearance seems to be significantly intensified when combined with eerie nature of his hiding-place. To escape from the possibility of assassination, Nadir Khan hides himself in the basement of Doctor Aadam Aziz's house. It is a very fine hiding-place for Nadir Khan to escape any possibility of assassination, which is like the secret hideout of Saleem Sinai as being "safe from all pressures, concealed from the demands of parents and history..." (Rushdie, *MC* 155). As a matter of fact, Nadir Khan's refuge is a secluded part of Doctor Aadam Aziz's house, the design of which is based on the spatial architectonics of the Indian traditional architecture, as pointed out by Salman Rushdie, "[...] concealment has always been a crucial architectural consideration in India" (Rushdie, *MC* 53), and it is the extensive underground chambers of the house that makes the long concealment of Nadir Khan possible. In his writing, Salman Rushdie designates the concealed part of Aadam Aziz's house with a variety of names, ranging from the traditional nomenclature of such part of a house as a cellar, a basement, vault, underground, etc., to other names like underworld, seclusion, secluded Taj Mahal, and the like – names implying that a place is deviated from the social norm, becoming the other space. According to Michel Foucault, these other spaces can be conceived as "absolutely different from all the sites that they reflect and speak about, I shall call them [...] heterotopias" (4). Foucault's theoretical postulation suggests another approach to look into Nadir Khan's case. As he is forced to seek refuge in the cellar under the rugs of Aadam Aziz's house, Nadir Khan is doomed to experience a mixed and joint experience in that mythic and heterotopic space. As such, places of this kind is located "outside of all places" and "opens up behind the surface" (*Ibid.*). As the other site is deviated from the social norm and thus deprived of its function of normative developmental trajectories, and what's worse, in line with Foucault's theorization, it may exert "a sort of counteraction on the position" (*Ibid.*). In this respect, the secluded marriage chamber of Nadir Khan and Mumtaz Aziz cannot function as a useful locus to identity Mumtaz Aziz's problems related to identity crisis and self-identification, and although she struggles to construct a ground for her appeals through her imaginatively using her excellent domestic practice as a powerful means to assert her identity and claim for subjecthood, her interactions with the situations within the heterotopia is bound to be a failure. As heterotopic sites lose their role in providing a ground for the negotiation, Mumtaz Aziz's domestic discourse fails to open up the possibility of reconfiguring and redefining her identity and sustaining her subjectivity.

As Dilek Qz Turk-Yagci claims that most of the times home in *Midnight's Children* “[...] is a site of dissolution, menace, and of *uncanny* as what is regarded ‘homely’ often turns out to be ‘unhomely’” (4, emphasis original). That’s to say, in times of political turmoil, home is inevitably invaded by divisive forces from the outside, which precipitates crisis upon the location with the resultant dissolution of the closed border between the home and the outside of home by destructive forces of as such. Inferred with this logic, Nadir Khan is symbolic of a uncanny and menacing force from the outside world, and the penetration of which into Aadam Aziz’s household has made the place a chaotic scene, as exemplified by Mumtaz Aziz’s marriage with Nadir Khan, a circumstance described by Rushdie as, “Consider the circumstances—extenuating, if ever circumstances were. Things seem permissible underground that would seem absurd or even wrong in the clear light of day” (Rushdie, *MC* 56–57). Under such circumstances, Doctor Aadam Aziz’s home in Agra appears not as a site which provides safety, protection, promise, but a site in which the tension of the private and the public are at work. Home, in this sense, no longer assumes the role in providing hope and promise; instead, it leads to depression, despair, and ultimately disillusionment, with the result that Mumtaz Aziz is obliged to subject herself to a disorienting state as what is called a homely home is turned into unhomely. That home often turns out to be unhomely is a frequently-discussed topic in postcolonial literature and postcolonial critique, and Homi Bhabha perceives such unhomely moments emerging from the colonial and postcolonial processes as performing the functions of relating “the traumatic ambivalences of a personal, psychic history to the wider disjunctions of political existence” (11). According to Bhabha, the invasion of politics into the home has endowed the place with a political dimension, as echoed in Dilek Ozturk-Yagci’s idea, “home is most of the times a space for political representation, a site for anti-colonial resistance and an open ground serving for the politics of time” (16–17). As a result, the unhomely and political nature of the home renders it impossible for Mumtaz Aziz to create a ground for her attempts at identity assertion and the subversion of the patriarchy both at the familial level and at the level of wider social reality of India; instead, she is doomed to relocate herself in “a lost home in a lost city in the mists of lost time” (Rushdie, *I. Homelands* 9), in her broken relationship with a political fugitive, an insufficient husband.

2. Mediating the Incompatibility of the Perpetuation of Patriarchy and Violence and the Vision of Domestic Normality

After entering into her second marriage, Mumtaz Aziz is turned into Amina Sinai, a name given by her second husband Ahmed Sinai, in the hope of helping her to lead a new life since then. As Ahmed Sinai says to his wife, “Time for a fresh start. Throw Mumtaz and her Nadir Khan out of the window, I’ll choose you a new name. Amina. Amina Sinai: you’d like that?” (Rushdie, *MC* 64). The change of her name indicates a change in her identity, and this will ineluctably reorient Amina Sinai to a new way of leading her own life. When Ahmed Sinai persuades Amina Sinai to settle down in his Old Delhi House, he is in fact not aware of the imminent dissolution of their home yet owing to the constant upheaval of the Indian society. And later, their decision to settle in the Methwold Estate left behind by the departing Englishman William Methwold not only confronts themselves with the curious terms set by the whims of the Englishman, but also subject themselves to the toleration of an unhomely state of their Westernized home space, due to the continuing presence of the colonial domesticity. In light of these observations, the idea of home-as-the-unhomely and its connections with the construction of identity and the maintenance of selfhood will be put into detailed discussion in great detail in the following part. An examination of the afore-mentioned hypothesis will revolve around the gendered aspects of the spatial practice in the novel, with a special focus on the issues related to the female protagonist Amina Sinai’s domesticity. After reading the novel, there is an abiding image in my mind concerning Amina Sinai’s assiduous domestic practice. Admittedly, Amina Sinai endeavours to create a ground to remedy her traumatized selfhood and broken identity resulted by a failed marriage, but she is unaware that the unhomely nature of her homes fails to open

up an enabling space for her pursuit of the maintenance of her female selfhood and identity redefinition under the context of tumultuous Indian society. And it is worth underlying that examples abound throughout the novel to testify the proposition raised above.

In spite of her congenital defect of black skin, Amina Sinai is fortunately endowed with some precious qualities such as gentleness, assiduity, meticulousness, nobility, forbearance and dutifulness. Although her dark skin stands “between her and the affections of her mother”, but her qualities of “gentleness, care and fragility endeared her to her father with his inner torments which cried out for her form of unquestioning tenderness” (Rushdie, *MC* 53). That Rushdie repeatedly writes of Amina Sinai’s qualities seems to help dilute her misfortunes on the one hand, for example, “[...] those gifts of assiduity, nobility and forbearance which were to be her hallmarks throughout her life” (Rushdie, *MC* 58). Her son Saleem Sinai also praises her for her gift of assiduity by saying that “my mother was by nature the most meticulous person on earth” (Rushdie, *MC* 68). Assiduously, Amina Sinai plays out her roles as a good daughter in her early life, later a good wife – be it to get married with an impotent husband Nadir Khan or with a dealer of leathercloth Ahmed Sinai, and a good mother whose assiduity acquires different goals after her son Saleem Sinai is born, to whom she devotes her inexhaustible assiduity. With her gifts of assiduity, nobility, forbearance and dutifulness, Amina Sinai inscribes idiosyncratic marks on the domestic space of her own home while dominating the domesticity of her own household as a homemaker therein. The literary treatment of Amina Sinai’s engagement of dutiful domesticity suggests a new perspective to look into the connection between the home and the homemaker. That’s to say, in Amina Sinai’s case it is that by investing her qualities in making a cosy domesticity of her own, such work undoubtedly entails the task of establishing an intimate connection between herself and the domestic space of her own, for in her intervention in the spatial transformation of her home, or to put it differently, in the spatial practice of her domesticity she obtains a fixed point of reference to structure a world about herself. In light of this view, a tentative and initial exploration into the subject is conducted to see how Amina Sinai takes her domestic practice as a powerful means which helps to take her to the centre of the narrative, and by constructing her own discourse of domesticity Amina Sinai strives to form a platform on which she can open up negotiations for the legitimization of her female subjecthood in the context of the larger patriarchal and colonial issues.

So, bringing her gift of assiduity into full play, Amina Sinai meticulously performs her role as a domestic goddess. Through her assiduous engagement of domesticity, viz., by deploying her excellent ability of cooking, cleaning and keeping her home well organized, she unconsciously helps to reinforce the conventional roles played by the female domestic actors, and in establishing her own version of domesticity, Amina Sinai creates resonance for the patriarchal domesticity set by the Indian tradition. In her continual exhibition of her domestic talent like food preparation, house arrangement and decoration, etc., Amina Sinai, throughout her life, struggles to create a stable and private location as a place of home, which is characterized by such stereotypical references as shelter, haven, and the like, that are associated with such connotations as protection, care, love, support, privacy, security, nourishment, etc. In so doing, Amina Sinai intends to create a sense of home and achieve a sense of belonging, which is meant to remove her status of displacement, dislocation, estrangement and alienation in a chaotic world, and construct a space of safety, peace, protection to her life while being situated in a larger unstable reality. In this sense, the concept of home is endowed with more insidious connotations when compared with its traditional meanings as located, fixed, stable, secure, protective, pointing to a polemical reading of more complex domestic discourse involved.

In this sense, the domestic interior appropriated by Amina Sinai is a territorial core for her to achieve material satisfactions and spiritual peace and well-being. J. Douglas Porteous’ theorizing the concept of home suggests another approach to the inextricable connections between the self and the home in Amina Sinai’s case. Porteous lays emphasis on the physical form of the home and argues that the control of the physical entity can confer its occupants three essential satisfactions, namely iden-

tity, security and stimulation, as he writes, “[...] this control is secured by two major means. The personalization of space is an assertion of identity and a means of ensuring stimulation. The defence of the private space within the home is the means by which stimulation is achieved and security assured” (383). In Rushdie’s description, Amina Sinai demonstrates extraordinary skills at home-making, as she sets out to decorate her Old Delhi house with beautiful flowers, select carpets, delicate cane chick-blinds, and the like. Amina Sinai makes great efforts to come up with idiosyncratic designs for the decoration of her house, so that she can create an ideal home setting in her own style and for her own use. With her inexhaustible assiduity, Amina Sinai builds up an individualized core in her private house, within which forms of security can be obtained. Amina Sinai is seen to spare no efforts to safeguard her sanctuary against any potential threats from outside and thus render herself more invulnerable to intruders. For example, Amina Sinai expresses her dissatisfaction with the visit of her husband’s distant cousin Zohra to the family, and when in the face of the latter’s disrespectful speech, she immediately applies herself to an act of protesting and resisting. She is ready to repel the uninvited guest while overhearing the unpleasant conversation between her husband Ahmed Sinai and Zohra, as Zohra speaks in high pitch, “How awful to be black, cousinji, to wake every morning and see it staring at you, in the mirror to be shown proof of your inferiority! Of course they know; even blackies know white is nicer, don’t you think so?” (Rushdie, *MC* 70). The conversation arouses a very painful feeling inside Amina Sinai “who had come out of her mother’s womb black as midnight” (Rushdie, *MC* 55). Insulted by the reference in Zohra’s words as a blackie, Amina Sinai involuntarily has a sudden impulse to expel this unwelcome visitor from her private domain. Infuriated by loud chat about blackies transpiring in her own household, Amina Sinai tends to use the hot cooking pot in hand as a weapon to launch an attack on Zohra’s head, but she finally refrains herself from taking the action, and the episode presented through Rushdie’s act of writing is very dramatic, “While Amina with her pot in hand looks at the pretty head and thinks Should I? And, Do I dare?” (Rushdie, *MC* 70). In this regard, home is taken by Amina Sinai as the fulcrum of individualist activities, a locus where psychic satisfactions can be fulfilled. The presence of Zohra has strongly undermined and reduced Amina Sinai’s personal control over the territoriality of her home, and in defiance of such threatening presence, Amina Sinai is necessarily involved in a war against the invasion of unfavourable forces represented by Zohra as a significant act of protecting her home-based personal arena.

Zohra can be interpreted as an intruder whose unwelcome presence has violated the established security codes formulated by Amina Sinai as measures to ensure her physical and psychic security within her private house. When Zohra’s remarks and behaviour serve to raise the anxiety level of Amina Sinai to such an intolerable point, the latter is forced to develop a domestic discourse construct to help ensure her predominant role in controlling her private house, making it a defensible space to satisfy her personal security and satisfactions. Amina Sinai personalizes her private space by creating and maintaining an idiosyncratic décor like delicate rugs, select chick-blinds, and especially a superb silver spittoon inlaid with lapis lazuli, and in so doing she succeeds in facilitating the rejuvenation and flourishing of her identity. As Porteous points out, “Thus personalization promotes both security and identity” (384). As such, Amina Sinai’s spatial manipulation of her domestic interior creates an enabling space for her identity to flourish, and makes identity assertion becomes possible within such a locale, as in line with Porteous idea, “The personalization of space is an assertion of identity and a means of ensuring stimulation” (383). That’s to say, the spatial control is the most significant step taken by Amina Sinai to achieve territorial satisfactions, including identity assertion, security assurance, and stimulation achievement. Furthermore, home which is made into an individualized core in her domesticity enables Amina Sinai to achieve psychic and physical security. Moreover, her strategies to root out the invasion of divisive forces from outside helps to construct virtual fortified walls which serve to protect her home from being harmed by the potential menacing forces from the outside world. Subsequently, the boundary lines between the domestic

interior and the exterior are clearly drawn by Amina Sinai, and the rigid boundaries differentiating interior from exterior allows for the formation of a protected home. Lord Raglan hypothesizes that “the security of the home involves a recognition of the Jungian concept of the sanctity of the threshold” (qtd. in Porteous 383–384). According to Raglan’s hypothesis, the location of the threshold has special meaning, as it provides a point of reference for Amina Sinai to structure a world about herself, and in the meantime to relate herself to the rest of the world. And more importantly, it serves as a significant factor that affects the level of anxiety of Amina Sinai when faced with the approach of strangers to her exclusive private space, and thus helps her to bring the territoriality of her home under control in the face of the invaders. A detailed discussion on the role of the threshold in constructing the discourse of subjecthood will be presented in the following part.

3. Negotiating the Predicament of Economic Precarity and the Symbolic Dissolution of Threshold and the Resultant Fragmented Subjecthood in an Unhomely Home

Unfortunately, the seemingly impregnable domestic space set by Amina Sinai is at times invaded by sudden outbreak of violence induced by the ethnic divisions forces. Amina Sinai’s family inescapably falls prey to the fanatical anti-Muslim movements of the times. A group of rascals perpetrate widespread outrage against the Muslim community. Rushdie captures the scene as “That it sent men out, at dead of night, to paint slogans on the walls of both old and new cities: [...] MUSLIMS ARE THE JEWS OF ASIA! and so forth. And that it burned down Muslim-owned factories, shops, godowns” (Rushdie, *MC* 72). Under such circumstances, Amina Sinai’s excellent skills in homemaking cannot stop the divisive forces from invading the territorial core of her teleological journey. As the result of the religious and ethnic fissures, the topic of cracking is necessarily moved to the core of Rushdie’s narrative concerning Amina Sinai’s household. In the face of social turmoil, home is turned into a plane where tensions between the private and the public are at work and within which the opposing forces are at war. Hence, Amina Sinai’s family is inevitably involved in the clash of the opposition parties and bound to confront the resulting devastating damage at all levels. As a result, the place of home is infiltrated with potentially harmful elements, making it a menacing place rather than safe and stable domain. Rushdie captures the episodes pertaining to Ahmed Sinai’s miserable experiences through the eyes of his protagonist Saleem Sinai, “[...] when my father came home later that night, with a ditchy smell on him which overpowered his customary reek of future failure, his eyes and cheeks were streaked with ashy tears; there was sulphur in his nostrils and the grey dust of smoked leathercloth on his head [...]” (Rushdie, *MC* 89). To this point, Ahmed Sinai’s abject encounters are drawn to the centre of Rushdie’s narratives which help to call into question the problematic situations precipitating the dissolution of the place of home, which blurs the dividing lines between the interior and the exterior, and thus making necessary the act of the transgression. That’s to say, the effects of social division and exclusion turns out to be catastrophic, rendering Amina Sinai and her family as the inextricable victims of such social milieu. In this way, the politicization of the home helps to reflect the existing state of affairs, particularly with regard to social or political issues, on the one hand, and on the other, it reveals the possibility of subverting the traditional domesticity and makes it necessary to open up new pathways for Amina Sinai and her husband Ahmed Sinai to carry out new experiences in a chaotic world.

In light of this, the rigid demarcation between intimate interior and public exterior which is explicitly marked by the boundary walls on the one hand, and on the other implicitly signified by many indicators that serve to sever the inside from outside metaphorically becomes blurred. The dissolution of the boundary, in a sense, results in a less defensible nature of the house as a private domestic space and at the same time certainly entails an adventurous journey initiated by the individuals who reside in the house and who would make daring attempts to transgress the boundaries of the house and venture into a chaotic world outside their home space. In their efforts to restore, reconfigure and redefine their identities, the individuals involved in such kind of adventure are

undoubtedly obliged to challenge the possibility of the subversion of the traditionally idealised domesticity and a concomitant dissolution of the individual positions of subjectivity. In the novel, the characters' confrontation with the pressing spatial problems emerging from the dialectics of "house and non-house" and "self and non-self" helps to map out the characters' life trajectories which are rendered both as personal and historical predicament.

A case in point to illustrate the argument is the visit of the Reverend Mother to Amina Sinai's household while the anti-Muslim elements target Ahmed Sinai, burning down his warehouse and destroying his leathercloth business. The religious and ethnic division forces victimize Ahmed Sinai and bring chaos to his household, pushing him to the brink of collapse. In the aftermath of the fanatical anti-Muslim movement, Ahmed Sinai "in those days, had taken to his bed; the icy cold of the freeze impregnated his bedsheets; he downed vast quantities of whisky for medicinal purposes, but it failed to warm him up..." (Rushdie, *MC* 136). The freezing of all his assets as the result of the anti-Muslim bigotry thrusts Ahmed Sinai into a abject condition and makes his family into a situation of chaotic disjunction. With the invasion of public chaos into the private sphere, Reverend Mother, Amina Sinai's mother is summoned to help out with the family which is trapped in the edge of disintegration. With her presence in the household, Reverend Mother imposes a patriarchal domesticity upon the family, and her involvement in the running of the housework allows Amina Sinai to be "freed from the exigencies of running her home" (Rushdie, *MC* 138). Reverend Mother's taking over the household duties, on the one hand, helps to relieve Amina Sinai of the burden of running her own domestic affairs, but on the other hand, the former's intervention in the family crisis and patriarchal manipulation of the domesticity leads to the dissolution of Amina Sinai's subjecthood in her private house and as a result the reconfiguration of power structure therein. Reverend mother tends to demonstrate her unchallenged authority by sitting "at the head of the dining-table, doling out food" (*Ibid.*), and in so doing, she places herself in the predominant position of the domesticity in the household and at the centre of domestic discourse. Here, the dining-table is used as a site for power manifestation and identity assertion, around which the patriarchal power plays its role. Although Reverend Mother, through preforming out her role in the domestic practice of the household, succeeds in developing a sense of empowerment and control which helps to temporarily bring to an end of the chaos in the household, the reinforcement of the patriarchal domesticity and the assertion of patriarchal power in the household in a sense undermines Amina Sinai's female subjecthood in her personal space and subsequently relegates her to the margin of the traditional female domesticity.

As being marginalized from the centre of the discourse of female domesticity, Amina Sinai feels deeply disturbed and quite in a loss, and her response to her mother's overpowering presence turns out to be extremely violent. Rushdie presents the episode as:

And now, restored to the status of daughter in her own home, Amina began to feel the emotions of other people's food seeping into her – because Reverend Mother doled out the curries and meatballs of intransigence, dishes imbued with the personality of their creator; Amina ate the fish salans of stubbornness and the birianis of determination. [...] so that, good as they tasted, they had the power of making those who ate them subject to nameless uncertainties and dreams of accusing fingers – the diet provided by Reverend Mother filled Amina with a kind of rage [...]. (*Ibid.*)

As is shown, Reverend Mother's dominant role in the Sinais' household has removed Amina Sinai from the centre of the domesticity discourse and reduced her to suffer from a marginalized identity. Ironically, the influence of Reverend Mother is penetrated in every corner of the house and omnipresent in each detail of the domesticity therein. Food, in this context, in its metaphorical form, is represented as the embodiment of its maker's state of mood, which appears to plague Amina Sinai to such an extent that she cannot help but cry out, "I'm fed up. If nobody in this house is going to put things right, then it's just going to be up to me!" (*Ibid.*). Admittedly, Reverend Mother's unswervingly exercising her patriarchal authority has served to subvert Amina Sinai's central role in the domestic

sphere, who, as consumed by a fit of unnamed rage induced by her resultant marginalized state, painfully seeks a way out. As Reverend Mother's continuing presence poses a stifling atmosphere upon the household, Amina Sinai determines to transcend the boundary of her home and sets out for a journey in the outside world, for the deterritorialization of the house contributes to turning the home into non-home, and the self inhabiting it non-self, as Porteous claims that "Home is thus a major fixed reference point for the structuring of reality. Because of this function as the archetypal reference point it has been suggested that, just as self and non-self appear to be the basic divisions of psychic space, so the fundamental dichotomy in geographical space is between home and non-home"(386). Therefore, reterritorialization becomes an inevitable step taken by Amina Sinai to subvert her non-self status in a non-home predicament.

In fighting for self-maintenance and identity reassertion, Amina Sinai strives to open up an enabling space within which she can position her struggle for reterritorialization. As Aparajita Sagar points out, "To be at home is to have a sense of a terrain – spatial, epistemological, cultural – which one expects to navigate with smoothness and ease" (237). In line with Sagar's claim, the highly traditional connotations of the home as secure, private and protective have almost been lost in the case of Amina Sinai, for the terrain has been appropriated by her mother as a spot for power manifestation and thus no longer assumes a promising site for Amina Sinai to carry out productive daily routine, as again shown in Aparajita Sagar's writing, "[...]homes, like other civic institutions, are sites for producing and reproducing bodies, borders, subject positions, discourses and ideologies [...]"(Ibid.). In this sense, it can be suggested that in the face of deterritorialization Amina Sinai is forced to break through the threshold of her home and sets out for a teleological journey for the purpose of reterritorialization, which can be observed as an urgent act to keep herself alive, rather than trying to manifest her subjecthood. In this sense, "home" has been turned into a plane where power contestation is on stage. From the changing role of "home" from a rooted and stable place to a site infiltrated with menace, instability and uncanniness, etc., it can be suggested that home does not always provide protection and hope, but it can bring about despair, hopelessness, helplessness, etc., a series of negative factors, when patriarchal or hierarchical power is at work, and dual or multiple relations are at clash.

4. Interrogating the Aesthetics of Transgression and Journeying as a Means of Surviving the Traumatized Becoming and Fragmented Being in a Chaotic World

Such highly personalized and actively defended a home confers Amina Sinai a sure haven for her traumatized self from being further inflicted by the outrage of the outside world, and in the meantime provides both space and time for the redefinition and reconfiguration of her identity. That's to say, her emotional investment in the place of home helps to construct a fortress which not only defends her against the potential threats from outside, but more importantly, a secure home with emotionally-invested quality helps to nourish her being and creates in her a sense of belonging, thus separating her from the situations of extreme estrangement and alienation. In her insightful observations, bell hooks captures the scene as "At times home is nowhere. At times one only knows extreme estrangement and alienation. Then home is no longer just one place. It is locations"(47). hooks' unique insights point to the existence of ambivalent feelings prevailing the place of home, attesting to the attentive role of the home in conferring the three essential territorial satisfactions on the occupants, i.e., identity, security, and stimulation, on the one hand, but on the other, directing to the concomitant negativity imbued therein promoting the chances of undermining and even submerging the ego. It is these combined factors that compels Amina Sinai to venture beyond the confines of her home for considerable periods for the purposes of reconstructing identity and achieving stimulation. Amina Sinai fails to claim her personal identity after losing her manipulation over the domesticity of her own household, especially when confronted with the stultifying grip of the patriarchal domesticity. In this case, her journey into the chaotic exterior world becomes a necessity. As J.

Douglas Porteous contends, "Home, in fact, cannot be understood except in terms of journey" (389). Porteous's idea serves to illustrate the image of Amina Sinai as a daring journeyer and her act of transgression is endowed with far-reaching implications. Notably, Amina Sinai's trap in the dilemma of being homely and homeless between journeys opens up a new ground for the negotiations of the dialectic triad of home, journey, and identity.

Amina Sinai, in the face of the overwhelming presence of the patriarchal rule in her household and the constant invasion of the ethnical and religious division forces afflicting a multitude of commoners in the post-independence Indian society, performs out a daring act of breaking down the boundary between home and the outside world. This gesture of rupturing the boundary of the inside and the outside is symbolic of an act of defensive and resisting attribution. In her teleological journey, Amina Sinai chooses the Mahalaxmi Racehorse as a useful locus where she strives to attain the valuable rights of self-identification. Taken as a means of saving her family from being disintegrated into chaos by the elements of the patriarchal rule and the ethnical division, Amina Sinai involves herself in the games of gambling at the race-track and unexpectedly has a sudden streak of luck to win fortunes on the horses. Braving the stiff competitions at the Mahalaxmi Racecourse which is absolutely a male-dominated domain, Amina Sinai not only makes her fortunes in the gambling, but also creates an enabling spatial plane on which she succeeds in carrying out her act of subverting the patriarchal rule and taking her initiative to proactively find solutions to problems related to gender and self-identification. Rushdie describes Amina Sinai's good luck at gambling as "She took wild flutters on stallions who looked fit for the Schaaapsteker Institute...and won, and won, and won" (Rushdie, *MC* 139). Although leaving home and seeking fortunes outside the home temporarily makes Amina Sinai homeless, the exotic landscapes of the Mahalaxmi Racecourse allows Amina Sinai to release the pent-up anger, and more importantly, the journey brings an irrevocably change in the identity of Amina Sinai from an original housekeeper at home to a bold adventurer in a public world which provides a workable space for an exclusive manifestation of her female subjecthood. Porteous argues that "[...] during an absence, both home and the individual may irrevocably change" (388). This idea helps to explain why Amina Sinai appears to slip into more embarrassing situations.

It can be argued that the daring journey that results in the transfer of Amina Sinai from homely to homeless turns out to be traumatic. Bereft of the valuable rights of privacy and autonomy at home, of familiar space, of intimate connections with the related ones, Amina Sinai is traumatized by the loss of the sense of belonging and the increasing feeling of estrangement and alienation. In her struggle to confront with her own family's crisis, she is turned into a traveller who has rejected "homeliness" by resolutely transgressing the boundary of the home, abandoning the familiar aroma of a sweet home and plunging herself into a loop filled with threatening uncertainty. In the mists of her dislocation and relocation, she suffers from a drastic decline physically and mentally, as shown in Rushdie's depiction, "[...] she was weighed down by more than a baby-eating. [...] she had become convinced that gambling was the next worst thing on earth, next to alcohol; so, although she was not a criminal, she felt consumed by sin" (Rushdie, *MC* 139). The trauma of homelessness consigns a greater semantic and social logic to the studies of Amina Sinai's disorientation. Leaving behind the familiar atmosphere of the home which is symbolic of boiling pot, burning hearth and cooking pan, Amina Sinai probes her way in an unfamiliar environment to figure out how to deal with the messes confronting and tormenting her. She endeavours to reorient herself in the uncertain situations and structure a world with overlapping zones of the familiar one. As a matter of fact, Amina Sinai is totally ignorant of the first thing about horses, but she projects herself as a seemingly professional gambler who is seen to win on the gambling game all of the time. Rushdie writes that "[...] for month after month, she put her money on a jockey's nice tidy hair-style or a horse's pretty piebald colouring; and she never left the track without a large envelope stuffed with notes" (Ibid.). Amina Sinai's unhomely presence in an alien space, a racecourse tinged with unassuageable masculine scent,

is echoed in Graham Greene's writing of the encounter of one of the characters named "Query". Following Query journeying into the Congolese interior, Greene is shocked by the unusual scene lying distinctly in front of him, and thus Greene represents the scenario from the standpoint of Query as:

In an unfamiliar region it is always necessary for the stranger to begin at once to construct the familiar, with a photograph perhaps, or a row of books if they are all that he has brought with him from the past. Query had no photographs and no books except his diary. The first morning when he was woken at six by the sound of prayers from the chapel next door, he felt the panic of complete abandonment. [...] And so from the first morning he set himself to build a routine, the familiar within the unfamiliar. It was the condition of survival. (25–26)

As is shown, Amina Sinai's very presence in an exotic landscape is symbolic of her homelessness, and she is forced to breed the possibility of surviving the predicament of her divisive being at the interpersonal familiar level as well as the national communal level. Admittedly, her act of transgression helps to promote her ability to deal with the crisis confronting her family at the point of social division, but in violating the rigid demarcation between the private space and the public domain, Amina Sinai involuntarily slips into an identity labelled as a rebellious and revolutionary female figure, corresponding to her proactive response to the context of the larger political chaotic situations. Moreover, Amina Sinai's powerful enunciative process succeeds in introducing a feasible framework of negotiation which will function to further intervene in the bridging of the split between the traditionally stable system of reference and the necessary articulation of the political presence in the context of the larger Indian historical issues. In this sense, the Mahalaxmi Racecourse taken as a battlefield by Amina Sinai to fight for survival unfolds as a split-space of enunciation which makes possible for Amina Sinai's restructuring a ground serving for the negotiations of the subversion of her splitting being and marginalized identity.

Conclusion

The theme of predicament in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* raises the question of the female characters' rights of privacy and autonomy with the context of a postcolonial home. The investigation of the restitution of the female characters' agency in the novel is attributable to the representations of the gendered aspects of domesticity in postcolonial literary texts. Rushdie's narratives of traumatic postcolonialism and self-identification unfulfillment question the problematic representations of female subjectivity exemplified by the stories of the female protagonist Amina Sinai. And the subject of incompatibility of the perpetuation of patriarchy and violence and the vision of domestic normality is closely tied up with a demand for the restoration and reconfiguration of Amina Sinai's female subjecthood in an indefinite lifestyle. Further, the deployment of some scholars' valuable insights on the field, including Homi K. Bhabha's postcolonial theories, offers to create a useful theoretical framework for the exploration of the spatial manifestations of Amina Sinai's predicaments conceptualized as displacement, estrangement, and alienation in the midst of social fissures. As is shown, the enactment of Amina Sinai's powerful domestic practice cracks open a ground to lift the constraints imposed by discourse of patriarchy and postcolonialism and facilitate an enunciative process of identity assertion and subjectivity maintenance. Notably, Amina Sinai's unmitigated sorrow set in a hopeless and helpless world helps to intensify the melodramatic implications in the novel. It appears that Amina Sinai is not resigned to her fate, but turns out to brave the insurmountable difficulties imposed by Indian realities in the process of transformation of social discourse. It has been argued that the act of resistance strengthens the dignity bestowed upon the heroine of a literary canon. Amina Sinai's courage to confront the great challenges of patriarchal rule and ethnic division prevailing in Indian society endows her with extraordinary agency, underlying the theme concerning the competence of women to act on their own and ending up projecting

Amian Sinai as a representative of competent female image imbued in postcolonial literary imagination. The depiction of Amina Sinai's transgressive act as a protest against marginalization and elimination is always fraught with problems and controversies, for Amina Sinai relocates her struggles for the reclamation of her female rights in a rampant anti-Muslimism environment. However, the compelling articulation of Amina Sinai is aimed at highlighting the appeals of women in the mists of the transaction of Indian Society. In this sense, Amina Sinai succeeds in winning the representational possibilities of capable female figure to forge her discourse of resistance. As such, her capability of creating an idealized matrices of her personal aspirations makes it possible for the rewriting of gender roles in the times of political turmoil which commissions women's problematic existentialism to identity politics, impacting their enterprise of pursuing identity legitimacy and legitimizing gendered and national subjectivity in a tumultuous historical scenario. It is noteworthy that Amina Sinai's potent intervention in the chaos forges a zone of negotiation that facilitate a scrutiny of her female aspirations in a universalist paradigm. The intriguing projection of her responses to the grotesque and arabesque milieu not only serves as a tool of characterization, but is also taken as unconventional narratives in postcolonial literature to mark a significant departure, when taking a glimpse of the far-reaching implications of her act of journeying-as-surviving.

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