

---

**NEGOTIATING TRANSNATIONAL AREAS AND PSYCHOLOGICAL ANALYSIS  
OF MIGRANTS THROUGH MEENA ALEXANDER'S SELECTED WORKS**

---

**Dr. A. Cruz Thivagarar,**

Assistant Professor and Head, Department of English, JP College of Arts and Science,  
Tenkasi. Tamilnadu, India.

---

Revised Date:09/10/23, Accepted Date:26/10/23, Published Date: 28/10/23

---

**Abstract**

Contrary to what many people believe, the term "indigenous" refers to more than only tribal relationships. It also refers to the connections among their land, culture, and people. Both indigenous and modernity are complex and much-debated concepts in India's postcolonial context. Additionally, even as the Indian postcolonial area yearns for its indigenous heritage, colonial modernity has shattered the concept of the indigenous. The goal of the current paper is to highlight the issue of the contemporary global community in a few of Meena Alexander's poetry. Additionally, it will look at the extent to which the poet has used the indigenous past to justify contemporary concerns. In his poetry, Alexander captures the longing for the past, the yearning for moments gone by, and the shifting memories of a generation tied to its ancestral home. The purpose of the essay is to investigate how Meena Alexander handles the themes of identity, memory, and migration in her poems. She has dealt with the change of a homogenized nationalist identity into a dual or hybrid identity where the presence of the in-betweenness is always being questioned. *Illiterate Heart*, *Raw Silk*, *The Shock of Arrival* and *Poetics of Dislocation*, *Nampally Road*, *Manhattan Music*, and *Fault Lines: A Memoir* is among the works by Meena Alexander that are discussed in this essay. Giving voice to these voiceless stories becomes a social, cultural, and literary need, and her work is still unknown. This essay explores how women of the Indian diaspora in the West deal with the shifting roles that they assign themselves and those granted to them by society, frequently caught between upholding an older, shared tradition and paving the way for a new one. It does this by analyzing the writings of diasporic writer Meena Alexander.

**Keywords:** female identity, diaspora, dislocation, migration, time and space, fantasy modernity.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Throughout human history, migration has played a significant role in the formation of several affiliations and identities. Humans have continued to endure temporary, periodic, or everlasting migration from their ancestral territory even after they were first organized into communities. As it addresses the movement or dispersing of individuals from their country of origin to various regions of the world, migration is a dispersion process.[1] These excursions or migrations may be compelled or spontaneous. In contrast to the former migrations, which

are caused by social and political oppression, economic hardship, and religious discrimination, the latter migrations are the consequence of a variety of circumstances, such as improved opportunities, marriage, and the chase of fortune.[2] The effects of such migrations vary depending on factors including the nature of the society's border, the reasons behind population movement, the disposition of the host population, the size of the exodus, the area that the emigrants go through, and other factors.

Diaspora is not simply a geographical phenomenon that involves navigating some physical landscape;[3] it also emphasizes perception and perspective. The word "migration" may have originally referred to the traumatic deportation of Jews from Palestine, but it is now more commonly used to describe both involuntary and voluntary migrations and "evokes visions of multiple journeys." Diaspora in the twenty-first century refers to not only a shift in population but also culture, sensibility, and geography. The term "diaspora" has become more difficult to define over the past few decades as a result of concerns with the global movement, multiple dislocations,[4] technological improvements, and postmodern awareness. The readers come into contact with a variety of dislocation and displacement strata as they attempt to understand the concept of diaspora.

Meena Alexander is renowned for her poetry work that tackles migration-related themes, with a heavy emphasis that suggests a link with her own experiences, and the occasionally ruthless, occasionally helpless situations that drive individuals to cross borders.[5] She looks to Indian poets Jayanta Mahapatra and Jayanta Mahapatra as a major source of inspiration and instruction, and she additionally discovers American poets Galway Kinnell and Adrienne Rich to be quite inspiring. Her well-known works include many poetry collections, including *Raw Silk* (2004), *Illiterate Heart* (2002), *Poetics of Dislocation* (2009), and *Quickly Changing River* (2008), which won the PEN Open Award.

Alexander reflects a succession of transcontinental journeys in her art. Her schooling took her from Pune and Khartoum to Nottingham, and her teaching career took her from Delhi to Hyderabad and ultimately to New York. [6]Starting with her early years and years of youth, which were separated by language and culture between Sudan, her father's workplace, and her grandparents' home in Kerala. [7]Alexander attempts to express her struggle with being a Third World immigrant woman writer living in New York as well as "about being born into a female body... about the challenge of living in space... without fixed ground rules" through her writing. Alexander consistently looks for a geographic and social area to give her life direction and significance.

Her fear of being torn between the "terror of babble" and the "terror of nonsense" is evident throughout Meena Alexander's writings. [8]Her excursions through space and time between these dissimilar places explain her experiences. One comes across themes pertinent to both Indian poetry in English and postcolonial writing when one places her in the context of a lady

poet from South Kerala and an Asian immigrant in America. A range of the author's experiences are portrayed in her writing. Her poetry and fiction are manifestations of this multiplicity and the outcome of the stress brought on by the variety of environments she has lived in and writes about.

In her writing, she weaves vivid descriptions of the raucous bus traffic in New York City, the clamorous subways, and the Hudson River with strong images derived from her recollections of Kerala.[9] Through the tangible episodes provided by the shards of her experience, she moves backward and forwards between these various locations in her texts. Her expression is formed by the conflicts brought on by variety and the intensity of the moment. Alexander embodies the evolution of world civilization. Themes of displacement, migration, dislocation, exile, allegiances, and various identities are explored in the majority of her literature. Her primary focus is tracing the roots of people through the evocation of local settings, occasions, people, and family members, as her books' titles indicate. Her memories are dominated by her grandma, her maternal grandfather Ilya, and their Tiruvella home. Ilya was a kind of intellectual social reformer, whereas Kunju, her strong grandmother, was a Christian who valued Gandhian ideals.

Women experience dislocation as emotions of inadequacy, which makes the process of defining who they are more difficult. [10] This is frequently the outcome of patriarchal expectations of what women ought to be. In turn, this frequently conflicts with who she is or what she wants to be. The resulting separation causes alienation, which is characterized by a loss of self-assurance and compartmentalization of life, credibility, and stifled personal growth. Feelings of dislocation and meaninglessness are added to this, which together cause a sense of helplessness, alienation from oneself, and a shattered awareness. Diasporic women writers grapple with the important issue of ethnic identity in the current postmodern society in a different way than male writers, and their perspectives unquestionably diverge from those of men.

## **2. DIASPORIC CONSCIOUSNESS PROBLEMATIZED: ILLITERATE HEART AND RAW SILK**

To explain the underlying concepts of alienation, rootlessness, the search for one's self and home, dislocation, discrimination, and the ensuing violence, a detailed analysis of Meena Alexander's poetic works *Illiterate Heart* and *Raw Silk* will be presented in this section. Four portions of *Illiterate Heart* are delineated by the poems "Provenance" and "Black River, Walled Garden," which are fenced off from each other.

The first poem in the collection is "Provenance," a ten-line poem whose title denotes "the place of origin" in both English and French. This poem serves as the reader's entry point into this fascinating and captivating book, preparing them for a breathtaking perspective of

Alexander's fascinating life. The anthology's core concept is established by the word "provenance"'s dual meaning. In her evaluation of *Illiterate Heart*, Maureen E. Ruprecht Fadem notes that Alexander demonstrates "how identities are created by and in language, how languages blend with and inscribe female bodies" in this work. The first poem "Provenance" establishes the mood for the new collection of poetry and represents the pulsing beat of the heart. I take you to the page. With you, I enter a realm where verbs/ have limited extension, where syntax smolders, according to Alexander, who claims that words like nouns and verbs which penetrate the page have no significance. The poems in this collection are primarily a trip back to one's roots, to the depths of the self, as well as to the timeless play of words. "Illiterate Heart" appears to take readers into the realm of feminist and postcolonial studies at first reading. Reading the poetry in this anthology immerses readers in the author's incredibly intimate journey.

Her main lyrical influences are Indian, and *Raw Silk* (2004) is less private and more political, addressing tragic current events like 9/11, violence in India, and related themes. She is attempting to demonstrate and emphasize that "the dislocation of mothers" is "the sign of a four-cornered world, gammadion, which stands for leaving their homes, for the scattering of people. The poet talks about her sorrow for the loss in the poem "Porta Santa" and the stones from her youth. As a result, all of Alexander's various feelings of exile, loss, and attempts to survive due to suffering from dislocation are fully expressed in her poems.

*Twin towers and a tall skyscraper I once observed,  
Sense breaks free from a bleeding seam,  
Along Liberty Street, among the tangle of debris  
I observe a bird crying in the changing light.*

Meena Alexander describes a racist incident in which a woman left her sari, which served as a reminder of the culture and tradition she inherited from her birthplace. She also discusses how women, particularly migrant women, are disadvantaged in both their home and their new environment. They suffocated and attacked youth as they are brown and regarded to be terrorists. Meena Alexander portrays everyone as a child of the earth who is connected in all strands of existence.

### **3. THE SHOCK OF ARRIVAL AND POETICS OF DISLOCATIONS: DISCUSSION OF "NEGOTIATING TRANSNATIONAL SPACES"**

Alexander uses her own experiences as a woman of color immigrant to illuminate the topics of writing, diaspora, and language in her collection of essays and poetry *The Shock of Arrival: Reflections on Postcolonial Experience* (1996). She compares the several changes she underwent to dislocation by calling them "an exciting abrasion of sense." She also

recounts unpleasant meetings with bigots and racists, and also the murder of a writer by political rivals as one of his works was being performed; two days later, the playwright's wife returned to the crime scene and finished the performance. To make observations on how Western society approaches the topic of migration, Alexander compares this calamity and bittersweet victory with the accessibility of an exhibition of Asian American art.

She has studied the themes connected to migration in her book *The Shock of Arrival: Reflections on Postcolonial Experience*. It is because "one's own body is always there, marked as other in this country, whether one is walking down a crowded sidewalk or descending the tube." Ethnicity can spark conflict. And this is a component of the postcolonial landscape, a part of sadness and sensory understanding. These involve an immigrant's ongoing sense of cultural dislocation and geography; the need to strike a balance between conflicting cultural values and demands; the fear that developing a hybrid identity based on culture may ultimately result in one having no identity at all; the pressure to integrate despite cultural and physical signs of difference; and the belief that the present is less a portal between the past and the future than a state of limbo in which the self remains when the future is uncertain.

In *Poetics of Dislocation* (2009), Alexander describes her unbreakable connection to the land and house of Tiruvalla: "As a young child, how did I attach myself to place? When I close my eyes, I perceive a youngster in a tree. The line "I swayed in a cradle hanging in a tree and all of the apparent world enclosed garden black river - flowed in me" from her poetry "Black River, Walled Garden" captures her memory of that tree from her youth.

Alexander argues that the poet urgently requires mental room in the twenty-first century, which is characterized by large human migrations and continuous trade in products and knowledge. Because she must "think space through her bones and blood" and "figure out how space enables [her] to be, allows language, encodes the poem," female poets have a more difficult time reclaiming the past than men do.

*"A blossoming of words, out of flesh" is another way to describe space, which also refers to an interior frame and an inner index of sense. Her inner world transforms into a palimpsest of made-up vistas and a place where memories reside, without which she would not be able to compose her poems. She allows her poetic creativity to flit over place names since "they are all unknown to us, all names," realizing the close connection between the person and place."*

Her private environment and mental landscape are reconfigured versions of the past, including her grandparents, her childhood, the trees, and the garden. When an immigrant author is physically cut off from her own country, the past—"albeit a lost home in a lost city in the mists of lost time"—becomes her home, and the present—is foreign. The 'poetics of

loss' and a sensitivity enriched by the concurrent geography are both products of the agony and violence of displacement. It involves the potential for existing both in the physical present and elsewhere in the imagination and mind.

#### **4. REFLECTIONS OF THE DISLOCATED SELF IN MANHATTAN MUSIC AND NAMPALLY ROAD**

Every female character in Nampally Road exhibits a loss of identity and change. She was born in India, but she fled an arranged marriage because she was a rebel, moving to England where she adopted Western characteristics to forge a new identity. Ramu hears about Mira's adventures.

Mira recognized she could no longer put up with being tolerated while searching for a rebel identity to demonstrate the benefits of being Western. She wants to trace the origins of her identity, which is why she is moving to India. Durga Bai, Mira's Little Mother, is a significant influence on her life. Durga Bai, a widowed gynecologist by trade, is her flatmate. Mira was told by Durga Bai that caring for others is important because women are better able to comprehend each other's problems. She is compassionately treating a helpless and defenseless woman. Mira has become stronger over time, and she is content with her lessons. The strength of a woman who lives in the upstate of the time is exemplified by her little mother. She was raised by reformers, which paved the way for her atypical life as a woman in Hyderabad, where there are countless tales of women being mistreated by males. She serves as Meera's moral compass. She introduced Meera to Guruji, who led her down the road of spirituality. Little Mother, or Durga Bai as she is sometimes known, behaves as a celestial force that is above suffering and agony and the spiritually highest soul.

The great diasporic lyrical novel Manhattan Music represents the 2 bipolar characters Snadhya and Draupadi. "Unhomed is not to be homeless," as Homi Bhabha noted in The Location of Culture. It is often believed that when immigrants relocate geographically, they ultimately feel exiled since they are unable to assimilate into the native society. Sandhya is the ideal diasporic heroine who lives in Manhattan and travels across the ocean to improve her life with the person she loves, but she has a lot of questions about where she will call home. She experiences ongoing psychological dislocation as a result of her reminiscences of the past, which never leave her.

Alexander is a challenging writer because while in Nampally Road she shows a straightforward conflict, in Manhattan Music she chooses to focus on the psychic portrait of two women. The focus of time and tempo has been considerably altered by the work. It portrays the inner psychological world of those who have jumbled up recollections of the past. Draupadi and Sandhya, who have polar opposite personalities, cross each other's paths to elevate their desired identities or, to put it another way, to generate significance. This book uses a wholly diasporic setting to explore all the insecurities of immigrant women who felt unloved or undervalued in their new nation.

## **5. IN FAULT LINES: A MEMOIR, PSYCHOLOGICAL TIES TO ONE'S LAND**

Her candid diasporic experiences are detailed in *Fault Line*, yet there is always an Indian women's condition story in the background. She reveals herself to be "a woman shattered by multiple migration (who) can link nothing to nothing," in her narrative. She seems to battle with lines, limits, and surroundings in her work and her personal life because she feels so strongly that she has been moved or dislocated, possibly as a result of the physical path of her life. Problems with self-location might have an impact on a person's mental health. As fragments must be collected to obtain one's belonging, the concept of home is shattered. Identifying the misplaced is a frequent practice for migrants, however, there is a displacement of the environment, culture, and habits. These migrant groups receive nothing since they frequently experience alienation or longing. In her autobiographical piece, Alexander attempts to mend the various fault lines she thinks run through her life.

She uses fragmented episodes to illustrate her predicament as a woman with ambition, desire, and a definition of life. With all these cross-border moves to Sudan and England, her longing to be in India and find love, her new life in America, and her travels, Meena ends up having everything but receiving nothing. Every time she crosses into a new situation, she feels disoriented and alienated. She also needs to deal with her blackness, her language, her culture, and compromising modifications.

Which language should she use to make sense of her numerous crossings given that she lives among many different languages? Her native language of Kerala is Malayalam. Her native tongue in Africa is Arabic. The languages of colonial imposition: English and French?

Through writing, she recreates and reallocates the "home" and "self" spaces that she had physically lost as a result of her border crossings. Meena's struggle to define herself began with her dislike of the colonial effects of learning English. She later became a young adult who preferred the language to express herself in literature and eventually encountered language abuse in America. Her story starts as an autonomous postcolonial child who was nurtured, educated, worked, and lived in numerous places. She then constantly changed and shifted her identity to become a woman in the neo-colonial diasporic existential world.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

Meena Alexander advances feminism in these works by focusing on the role of women in society and the country. As she describes her experiences in the 1970s, she mentions the several organizations that fight to protect women from the sexual cycle, domestic violence, and bride burning. She genuinely believed that women needed a broader perspective than just having the opportunity to conduct their lives as they saw fit. Meena Alexander's literary works reveal an awareness flitting between two realities, between recollection and the present, and are illuminated by various tongues. Her uncommon wanderings between the

realms of her adult life and her youth result in captivating pictures and her command of several languages, which provide a novel perspective on the autobiographical aspect of her poetry. Alexander has a very creative migratory memory; she recalls the settings, people, and experiences of her youth. To support the feeling of the woman in the progressive world who still needs to find the self and how it is related to you, Alexander uses the search for displacement and memories of belonging. When Alexander first began to ponder the concept of "history," she speculated that it might "mean a space memory can flow into, a depth of shared awareness, of matters invisible that pierce our regular lives. Being an immigrant who came to this country, I felt as though I had no history in the location I was living.

## REFERENCE

1. Ratti, Manav. "A Postsecular Poetics of Dislocation: Secularism and Religion in the Indian-American Poetry of Meena Alexander." *Ex-centric Narratives: Journal of Anglophone Literature, Culture and Media* 5 (2021): 16-46.
2. Mehta, Parvinder. "Fractured Feminine Selves, Autospecular Affect, and Global Modernity: Meena Alexander and the Postcolonial Artist as a Woman." *Journal of Foreign Languages and Cultures* 4.1 (2020): 127-45.
3. Kaur, Manpreet. *VIOLENCE AS A PSYCHO-SOCIAL DISCOURSE IN WOMEN'S WRITING: A STUDY OF SELECTED WRITINGS OF TEHMINA DURRANI, MEENA ALEXANDER AND ANITA NAIR*. Diss. Central University of Punjab, 2018.
4. Rustomji-Kerns, Roshni, and Rashmi Sharma. "Meena Alexander." *Living in America*. Routledge, 2018. 85-90.
5. Serhan, Qasim. "The Poetics of In-betweeness: A Study of Selected Poems for Meena Alexander." *Kufa Journal of Arts* 1.55 (2023): 536-546.
6. Reddy, T. Sasikanth. "Meena Alexander's Manhattan Music and Nampally Road: A Discourse in Feminine Proximity." *1 INDIAN WOMEN NOVELISTS IN ENGLISH* (2018): 50.
7. Nazari, Fahimeh, Hossein Pirnajmuddin, and Nematollah Moradi. "Postcolonial National Space in Meena Alexander's Nampally Road." *Journal of Language, Literature and Culture* 65.1 (2018): 1-10.
8. Chakrabarti, Paromita. "Talking Texts, Writing Memory: A Bakhtinian Reading of Meena Alexander's Fault Lines." *Bakhtinian Explorations of Indian Culture: Pluralism, Dogma and Dialogue Through History* (2018): 173-184.
9. Dall'Arche, Camilla. "An introduction to Meena Alexander followed by a selection of translated chapters of her novel 'The Shock of Arrival'." (2019).
10. Kushwaha, Pooja. "DIASPORA AND IDENTITY IN THE SELECTED POEMS OF MEENA ALEXANDER."