

Transcending Barriers in Meena Alexander's
Nampally Road and Manhattan Music

VARSHENE G.S

(17PEN020)

Thesis submitted to

Avinashilingam Institute for Home Science and Higher Education for Women,

Coimbatore-641 043

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Master's Degree in English

April 2019

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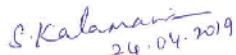
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24.04.2019
Signature of the Supervisor


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Signature of the Head of the Department

Acknowledgement

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Abbreviations Used:

1. NR – Nampally Road
2. MM – Manhattan Music

Chapter-1

Introduction

Indian writing in English is one of the voices through which India speaks. It upholds the rich traditional and cultural heritage of India and also introduces them to the whole world. It is Indian in sensibility, thought, feeling, emotion and experience, but submits itself to the discipline of English for expression.

Indian English Literature refers to the body of the work by writers in India who write in the English language whose native or co-native language could be one of the numerous languages of India. Indian Writing in English as a body of literature has arrived at the global market place with its own brand and name. Writing by women writers in English in India constitutes a sizeable portion of Indian English Literature. Ever since its origin, women writers have been forming a part of this new medium.

Post-Colonial literature comes from Britain's former colonies in the Caribbean, Africa and India. Most of the post-colonial works are based on aspects like independence, emigration and allegiance to national identity. Postcolonial theory is also built around the concepts of resistance, of resistance as subversion or opposition, or mimicry but with the haunting problem that resistance always inscribes the resisted into the texture of the resisting as it is a two-edged sword. The concept of resistance carries with it or can carry with it ideas about human freedom, liberty, identity, individuality, etc., which may not have been held, or held in the same way, in the colonized culture's view of humankind.

Indian fiction in English, since its inception in the latter half of the nineteenth century till date, along with other issues has also been dealing with issues related to women. The changing place, position, roles and problems of women and their

relationship with others have drawn the attention of writers. Women in the patriarchal society have been oppressed, victimized and marginalized in the matters of sharing the available opportunities for the fulfillment of their lives, despite the fact that they possess equal capacities, skills and intelligence and work whole-heartedly for the development of their family and the society.

The writers, both male and female of almost all countries and cultures have been dealing with culture and context specific problems and issues related to women and their struggles to retrieve their subjugated positions and the resultant conflicts and trauma suffered by them in the process. It is a long journey undertaken by them to assert themselves and bring about a transformation. The writers of the 'Indian Diaspora' take up issues like identity crisis, nationalism, alienation, marginalization, etc., as Indian writing in English is associated with the works of the members of the Indian diaspora also.

The origin of Indian Writing in English by women can be traced to the last quarter of the 19th century. This emergence is an important milestone with regard to feminism in India. Access to English education paved the way for the modernization of the thinking process of the modern women. The broad scope for higher education motivated and inspired women to pursue English education, which made a great impact on the status of women.

In the post-independence period, the feminist awakening extends to women prose writers too. Novel as the main prose literary form has gained popularity among women writers as well as women readers. It is a medium through which women can voice forth their feministic views, focusing on the injustice done to them in the society. Tales of women fighting for their respectable positions in the society, tragic narratives, rebellion,

suicide etc., are common issues in the novels written by women. They also attempt to inspire women to face the challenges and lead a meaningful life. A new kind of woman emerges as a result of all these changes – honest and powerful in expressing her views and experiences.

With the emergence of the New Woman, Indian women have gained equal status, opportunities and rights in all fields through the constitution and since then many laws and acts have been passed to give them their rights including that of equal share in property. The growth in the consciousness and awakening among Indian women since the 1870s regarding their miserable plight, their desire and determination to better their lot and assert themselves can be seen in Indian English fiction. Women started raising their voice and fighting for their rights by rejecting the oppressive system. Women got more opportunities to participate in social and public life. The formation of Indian Women's Association in 1917 by Annie Besant was an important event in the national awakening and women's resurgence.

The middle of the 19th century witnessed the emergence of a set of educated, intelligent and independent women in the western countries with new and progressive ideas and thoughts. They were fully convinced that women are capable of doing things as efficiently as men. This kind of awakening in women led to a social revolution. They tried to redefine themselves in their writings and started questioning partiality and gender arrangement. They felt that more women should be bold enough to enter the new movement and write about their social problems. To avoid the possible embarrassment in their conventional surroundings, they disguised themselves in a way, as fictional heroines

of their writings and expressed their own experiences. Their literature not only depicted the new woman who refused to be submissive to man, but also exalted her.

The word “Diaspora” takes its origin from the Greek word “dia” and “sperio” which literally means “scattering or dispersion.” The term was first used in the context of the experiences and predicament of the Jews who were rendered homeless after the Babylonian conquests. Of late, the application of the concept of “diaspora” has grown by leaps and bounds in the wake of globalization, and the word has come to be used more or less loosely as an inclusive term which is applied as a “metaphoric designation” for all displaced people – expatriates, immigrants, exiles, refugees and other ethnic minorities. Thus “diaspora” refers not only to physical displacements but also to the sensibility in which nostalgia, alienation and sometimes cynical celebration which are deeply engrossed in the minds of the people. It is this sensibility, this sense of shared dislocation through which a diasporic writer comes to terms with a new space for imagination.

Normally, diaspora fiction lingers over alienation, loneliness, homelessness, existential rootlessness, nostalgia, questioning, protest and assertion and the quest for identity; it also addresses issues related to the amalgamation or disintegration of cultures, discriminating margins of two different social milieus and internalizing nostalgia. Diaspora cultural development often assumes a different course from that of population in the original place of settlement. It tends to vary in culture, tradition and other factors between remotely separated communities. The last vestige of cultural affiliation in diaspora is often found in community resistance to language change and in the maintenance of religious practices.

The diaspora writers tried to convey their feelings through their writings; rather they took a solace in writing about their own condition and experiences and won accolades for their works. More than fifty such writers have their root in India and some of the diasporic writers are Stephen Gill, Chitra Banerjee, Githa Hariharan, Meena Alexander, Jhumpa Lahiri, Rohinton Mistry and Salman Rushdie to name only a few.

Rohinton Mistry is a double diasporic writer. Living in Canada, he writes about his homeland where he grew. A person who knows about his birth place, experiences and everything about the place can write better. There is a sense of nostalgia in his writings. His novels focus on the Parsi identity and the challenges it faces in the form of political parties and Shiv Sena. The Indian diaspora in the west has experienced a physical displacement but in a globalized world migrants are not treated as aliens; moreover, the newer migrants have migrated of their own will, and hence there is little cause for them to feel the sense of being in exile.

The diasporic writers very often engage themselves in the process of self-preservation resorting to history or memory or through an act of transformation. A group of women writers of the global Indian diaspora have emerged as significant voices.

As Indian women came into contact with the Western culture, ideas, philosophy, literature and movements that were appealing and thought-provoking, they also started having progressive ideas. Most of the novels of early 20th century by Indian women writers in English are also autobiographical projections. Toru Dutt's *Bianca*, or the *Young Spanish Maiden*, published not in the form of a book but in the columns of the Bengal Magazine, Krupabai Sathianadhan's *Suguna*, *Kamala: The Story of a Hindu Child-Wife*, Swarnakumari Ghosal's *An Unfinished Song*, Cornelia Sorabji's *India Calling* and *India*

Recalled etc., are some of the noted examples of this category. *Suguna* is the first autobiographical novel in English written by an Indian woman. It was first published as a book in 1895, and translated into Tamil in 1896. This vibrantly descriptive novel deals with issues of religion, colonialism and women. *Kamala: The Story of a Hindu Child-Wife* published in 1894, deals with the author's deep commitment to the cause of women's welfare. *An Unfinished Song* published in 1913, portrays the story of life among the Reformed Party of Bengal, the members of which have adopted western customs. Sorabji, India's first female barrister, in *India Calling* dealt with colonialism, racial and cultural identity. This book is a significant contribution to the field of women's studies.

Thus women writers started voicing their concerns about their role in the society, expressing a note of dissent, wherever they found it necessary. Their interest in dealing with the problems of women and the assertion of women's point of view reflected their feministic awareness. Till then a woman had no freedom of thought, her participation and advice have not been given due credit. Elders in her childhood and later her husband controlled her. With the new awareness, women organized themselves to rebel against the society that imposed restrictions on them.

Indian expatriate women writers have their diaspora images represented through writers such as Meena Alexander, Bharti Mukherjee, Sujata Bhatt, Suniti Namjoshi, Uma Parameshwaran, Chitra Bannnerji Divakaruni and Jhumpa Lahiri. Their representations of diasporic discourses are important because they offer a fresh outlook and alternative perspective to female realities. Search for identity is a universal phenomenon and many things have close association with it.

Bye-Bye Blackbird by Anita Desai is a psychological analysis of the immigrants who suffer mixed feelings of love and hate towards the country of their adoption. This novel deals with the east-west encounter. 'Blackbird' used in the title is none other than the immigrant in London. Desai highlights the physical and psychological problems of Indian Immigrants and explores the difficulties they face in adjusting their life in England.

Bharati Mukherjee's novel *Jasmine* traces the story of the eponymous heroine in her American odyssey. Jasmine, the Hindu widow, who leaves India for the US after her husband's death in a terrorist attack, is found to undergo a cross-cultural metamorphosis in her fractured life as an immigrant. In Jhumpa Lahiri's novel *The Namesake*, the Bengali diasporic community in Boston celebrates Durga puja and Saraswati puja. They also have westernized thoughts and less spiritual feelings at the same time.

Meena Alexander, one of the major diasporic women writers of the new Indian diaspora, constructs the diasporic consciousness and brings to light the facts and the truths of her femaleness she probed in the diaspora context.

Meena Alexander was born in Allahabad, India, on February 17, 1951. Though she was christened Mary Elizabeth, she has been called "Meena" since her birth and, she officially changed her name to Meena in her fifteenth year representing her own multilingual nature, "Meena" means "fish" in Sanskrit, "jewelling" in Urdu, and "port" in Arabic.

Meena Alexander was raised both in Kerala, South India and in Khartoum, Sudan. She spent her childhood in Allahabad in North India. Her father had his first posting as a meteorologist there. Still the very regular visits to Kerala connected her deeply to the

homeland. At eighteen, she went to England for her higher studies. She has a B.A. Honors in French and English from Khartoum University and a Ph.D. from Nottingham University. It was in Hyderabad that Alexander met her husband, David Lelyveld. In 1979, the two moved to New York City, where they lived with their two children – Adam Kuruvilla Lelyveld and Svati Mariam Lelyveld. Alexander was a Professor of English at City University of New York and taught in the MFA program at Hunter College and the Ph.D. Program at the Graduate Center.

Meena's poetry has been widely published and anthologized. She was the recipient of the 2009 Distinguished Achievement Award in Literature from the South Asian Literary Association (an organization allied to the Modern Languages Association) for her contribution to Literature. She has tackled the questions of exile, race, gender, sexuality, violence, cultural differences, and multiple identities in her poems and novels. She makes use of her various cultural experiences and memories of the past to cope with the present. Through an articulation of her multifarious experiences, she provides clues to her complex identity. She lives in the alien space and writing in search of place becomes her voyage of self-discovery.

Meena Alexander's visit to Kerala energizes her and to Tiruvella and Kozhencherry provides the touch of the native soil of Kerala. She feels that her physical, psychological, religious, spiritual, and social roots are anchored there. After her early childhood in Allahabad, with her shifting to Pune and regular visits to Kerala, there came the crossing of borders to Khartoum days as her father got his job in the newly independent Republic of Sudan. She celebrated her fifth birthday on the Arabian Sea during her first voyage across the ocean. Since then her life became the story of multiple

crossings with her spending six months in Kerala and the other six months in Khartoum. Amidst all these, Kerala has remained in her memory with closer affections and associations and enriched her imagination. She started her career as a teenager in Khartoum and it is in the days she spent here that the two fold processes of protesting against and liberating from the burden of being born in female body and initiation of creative sensibility are started.

Meena's writing at the age of ten or eleven caused great anxiety to her traditional mother because she felt that the writing life demands expressiveness, which is in Meena's words in *Fault Lines* "quite contrary to the reticence that femininity requires" (113). Meena Alexander's contribution to Indian writing in English is mainly through her poetry. Her poetic volumes are – *Bird's Bright Ring*, *Without Place*, *I Root My Name*, *Stone Roots*, *House of a Thousand Doors*, *The Storm and Night Scene* and *The Garden*. The theme of reflecting the cry and torment of a woman's soul is predominant in her poems. Like modern Indian women writers who have become increasingly conscious of their identity crisis, Meena Alexander has also focused on women's issues and their inner conflicts.

The trajectory of Meena Alexander's narrative passages offers some interesting insights into the multilayered aspects of her diasporic identity. Composed of multiple migrations – her birth in India and upbringing in Africa, Europe and America – her diasporic imagination has suffered alienation in its most physical sense. She relates herself to the consciousness of the new diaspora through her conscious possession of "liminal zone" which is epitomized by her tension in the diasporic subject.

Alexander's first poetry was published in India by the Calcutta Writers Workshop. In the US, her first book of poetry, *House of Thousand Doors*, came out in

1988, followed by *River and Bridge* (1996), *The Shock of Arrival: Reflections of Postcolonial Experience* (an anthology containing lyrical essays and poetry), *Raw Silk*, *Quickly Changing River*, *Birth Place of Buried Stone*, and the last collection *Atmospheric Embroidery* (2018). Alexander published her two novels *Nampally Road* in 1991 and *Manhattan Music* in 1997. Among her works of prose, it is her memoir *Fault Lines*, published by Feminist Press of the City University of New York, first in 1993 and then in revised form in 2003 that has received the most sustained attention. Her scholarly works include *The Poetic Self: Towards a Phenomenology of Romanticism* (1979) and *Women in Romanticism: Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelly and Dorothy Wordsworth* (1989). She was deeply influenced by the British Romantic Poets whom she studied in her youth; however, she struggled to accommodate this aesthetic sense into the development of her own poetic voice.

Alexander's book of poetry *Illiterate Heart* won the PEN Open Book Award and she received a Glenna Luschei Award for poems published in *Prairie Schooner*. She has received awards from the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation, Fulbright Foundation, Rockefeller Foundation, Arts Council of England, and National Endowment for the Humanities, American Council of Learned Societies, National Council for Research on Women, New York State Council on the Arts, New York Foundation for the Arts, and the Ledig-Rowohlt Foundation in Switzerland. Alexander tries to recapture and preserve what is being irretrievably lost to her: family lore, cultural moorings, and a lived past. Meena Alexander died at the age of 21 Nov 2018 in New York, United States. According to her husband she died of endometrial serous cancer.

Alexander's *House of Thousand Doors: Poems and Prose Pieces* is a collection of fifty nine poems and prose pieces. This book is organized into three sections, the first and third sections serving as a synthesis for the wide variety of subjects and themes treated in the body of the work. The title of the poem *House of a Thousand Doors* uses the title metaphor to describe the variety of forces that operate on the gender, heritage, language, experience, ideology and the search for meaning. This book brings out the exilic configurations of her diasporic articulations. Real conditions and identities are rearranged to suggest the possibilities of diasporic lives. The first part of the book focuses on the lives of Meena Alexander's two grandmothers and the second part deals with the immediate history of the narrative persona of the poet herself. The final section returns to India and depicts the fictionalized life of the last emperor of Qutb Shahi dynasty of Hyderabad under the British Raj.

River and Bridge (1995) is ultimately the same as New York City and Delhi merging in the body and imagination of a woman making poetry near the end of an age. Her imagination thrives in the active cross fertilization of cultures and genres. *The Shock of Arrival: Reflections of Postcolonial Experience* (1996) is yet another autobiographical narrative which furnishes gateways into Meena's psyche presented in her fictional characters – the grief of homelessness. In this book she explores the challenges faced by the post-colonial immigrants in America. She puts together cultures, languages as well as genres to highlight the experiences of her diasporic self.

The poem "San Andreas Fault" suggests the fault created by exile. The poet has travelled in various countries and has realized that there is nothing like her motherland. In *The Bird's Bright Ring*, the poet represents mother as the source and origin of the

feminine voice to be heard. She is always close to the mother as the source of good, the omnipotent and generous dispenser of love, nourishment, and plenitude. Mother has been depicted as the symbol of creativity and production. Migration for the poet is the fatal crossing of border, never to return giving rise to different questions. When her mother country conceived her and nourished her, the foreign country makes her a 'migrated creature'.

“*Raw Silk*” (2004) is a brilliant example of trans-continental feelings. Meena Alexander transcends the personal concerns and worries to embrace the universal perspective. The beauty and brutality, the calm and ferocity of the images are really soul-stirring. Her poetry becomes the perfect medium for expressing anger, bitterness, and hatred against war, riot and communal animosity. The world becomes a dangerous place, losing its stability. The events of New York and India are the microcosm of the universal world struggle for power.

Quickly Changing River (2008) is a collection of poems consisting of rich and satisfying details lyrically rendered. These poems are sustained elegy for homelessness, for the displacement at the heart of human life.

Birthplace with Buried Stones (2013) is written with intense lyricism; Alexander's poems convey the fragmented experience of the traveller, for whom home is both nowhere and everywhere. This poem has rippling effects of violence and dislocation, of love and its aftermath. The poems in *Birthplace with Buried Stones* range widely over time and place, from her native India to New York City, tracing mythology, ritual and other languages. *Atmospheric Embroidery* (2015) is a haunting collection of poems that travel through zones of violence to reach the crystalline depth of words. It is about a

sustained meditation on the journey of the poet as a young child from India to Sudan with themes like migration, war, dislocation, conflict, love and divinity.

In *The Poetic Self: Towards a Phenomenology of Romanticism* (1979) Alexander examines the poetic effort to identify a self – the task of an age without external guarantees of belief, the role of the living body in maintaining the integrity of the poetic self. *Fault Lines* was first published in 1993 and expanded in 2003; it is the geographical and cultural disruptions in Alexander's life that compelled her to write her memoir where she focuses on her own cultural crisis; it also won the title "Best Books for 1993".

Through her novel *Nampally Road* (1991), Alexander takes a look at the fight for independence in India following the partition of Pakistan. This novel details the struggles various groups in the new nations faced while coming to the terms with the national identity. The neo colonialism in *Nampally Road* denies freedom to people and enslaves them. As a modern text it touches upon postcoloniality, race and gender.

Manhattan Music (1997) explores the prospect of outgrowing the sense of rootlessness of Asian immigrants. Alienation, search for identity and emotional insecurity of immigrants have been the dominant themes of diasporic literature including Meena Alexander's. However, in the context of globalization the concept of 'home' as a giver of emotional security cries for a redefinition. *Manhattan Music* analyses the impact of this redefinition on the women characters.

Alexander read at Poetry International (London), Struga Poetry Evenings, Poetry Africa, Calabash Festival, Harbor Front Festival, Sahitya Akademi and other international gatherings.

Indian women have been expected to follow the role models of Sita, Savitri, and Draupadi who always suffered and sacrificed for the comforts of their husbands exhibiting commendable forbearance. Alexander's work entwists Indian and Immigrant experience and hangs out between the two worlds, between memory and present experiences. Her childhood experiences are unusual and her diasporic sensibility is unceasingly creative. She looks back upon the lost time, places, languages, and past events and weaves them with the present day experiences in her poetry. However, her work is not confined to diasporic experience and feminist awareness only. She has a strong political and social awareness and writes about multiple facets of violence including colonial violence, war, state oppression, riots, cultural terrorism, 9/11 attacks, religious violence and partition violence.

Alexander explores the complex issues stemming from the embodied nature of female sexuality. All her works touch the issue of diaspora and involve the transforming power of the memory and imagination in it. Even though she is a New Yorker, she loves to be Indian and all her writings touch upon it, to be a part of Indian diasporic family. Her position among other writers remains high and as a poet she withholds the greatest place. She not only speaks about alienation, diaspora and cultural clash but also about nature, feminism and women's aspirations. Like other writers she is aware of displacement, homelessness, fragmentation of identity, dislocation, origin, race, culture and nationality too.

Critics have recognized Alexander for articulating some of the linguistic dilemmas confronting narrative writers of formerly British administered colonies, noting that her imagery and formal structures, though reminiscent of European romanticism and

modernism are inflected by complex Indian rhythms, dense syntax and South-Asian mythology. Alexander is the product of the memories of past juxtaposed against the present experience of multicultural America. The following review of literature will give an idea about the aspects people have taken up for their study.

M. Dolores Herrero in the article “Meena Alexander’s Transgressive/Diasporic Female Characters: Healing Wounds and Fracturing the Iconic Feminine and the Language of the Colonizer” talks about the way Meena Alexander’s writings reflect her diasporic experiences and how *Nampally Road* is concerned with the inequalities and injustices prevalent in India and how literature helps people to overcome all such traumatic experiences.

Rabindranath Maharaj in his article “Frankenstein in America” talks about the consequences of migration and search for identity in Meena Alexander’s *Manhattan Music*.

The article “Violence as a Leitmotiv in Meena Alexander’s Work” by E Nageswara Rao talks about Meena Alexander’s use of violence as a *leitmotiv* in her works *Manhattan Music*, *Nampally Road*, *River and Bridge* and *Shock of Arrivals* to show her concern over the prevailing inhumanity and to awaken the conscience of mankind against violence.

In his review, “Hyderabad Exoticised” Makarand Paranjape talks about the residents of Hyderabad and the characters in the novel *Nampally Road*.

S.Anitha in her article “Cross Cultural Links and Longings in Meena Alexander’s *Nampally Road*” discusses the voices of the displaced and the struggles of the immigrants and their symbolic identity.

Shilpa Dave in her article “*Nampally Road* by Meena Alexander” talks about the multicultural identities, class, educational and cultural boundaries in *Nampally Road*. It also explores certain pedagogical issues offering possible suggestions.

Ruth Maxey in her article “Mother-Weights and Lost Fathers: Parents in South Asian American Literature” deals with parent-child relationship along with maternal mysteries and the South Asian diaspora in Meena Alexander’s *Nampally Road* and *Manhattan Music*.

R.Rohini in her article “Homi K. Bhabha’s Preface to *The Location of Culture: A Review*” portrays the agonies of the voices craving for identity and the predicament of the minority historical movements.

Sachidananda Mohanty in the book review of “*Nampally Road* by Meena Alexander” analyses how Alexander captures the mood and dilemma of a class of Indians who are educated, cosmopolitan and on the move.

Geetanjali Singh Chanda, Elaine Yee Lin Ho and Kavita Mathai in their article “Women in ‘India’: Four Recent Novels” discussed issues like self-identity, liberation and the transition from tradition to modernity.

A.G. Khan in the article “*Nampally Road: A Volcano of Anger*” points out how Meena Alexander blends fact and fiction skillfully in *Nampally Road* and focuses on the ambition of power drunk politicians.

Sudha P. Pandya in her article “Narrating the Nation: Rewriting the History in Meena Alexander’s *Nampally Road* and Rohinton Mistry’s *A Fine Balance*” talks about the political history of India and Indians in a postcolonial situation, giving a voice to the

marginalized sections and raising relevant questions about the dangers prevailing in a democratic society like India.

P. Kiranmai Dutt in the article “A Reader’s Odyssey into Meena Alexander’s *Nampally Road*” talks about Alexander’s feminism and diasporic consciousness.

Omana Antony in her article “Feminism vs Femininity in the Diaspora: A Study of Meena Alexander’s *Manhattan Music*” talks about the lifestyle of immigrants and the condition of women and their problems which bear a global significance in the study of feminine issues in the Diaspora.

In the article “Meena Alexander. *Manhattan Music* in *Hawai‘i Anthology*”, Peter Nazareth analyses the way Meena Alexander talks about the state of the immigrants and also about the technique used in the novel *Manhattan music*.

John Oliver Perry in his article “Meena Alexander. *Nampally Road*” in *World Literature Today* dwells on the issues and the contribution to South Asian-American fiction by Meena Alexander through her *Nampally Road*.

Gauri Shankar Jha in his book *Yatra of Indian Writing in English After Independence* in the article “Diaspora and Indian Diasporic Writing” talks about the causes and condition for migration and the growth with the new identities and lost homeland.

S. Arockia Nirmal Dorothy in her article “A Study of Marxism, Feminism and Deconstruction in Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s ‘Feminism and Critical Theory’” says about the dissimulation of political economy and the ideology of nation-states, national liberation and ethnicity.

Dr. G. Banumadhi in her article “Creating a Voice and Space for the Subaltern: A study on Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s Critical Concepts” deals with feminism, future of Marxism and the impact of global capitalism.

Aravind M. Nawale & T. Sasikanth Reddy in their article “Dynamics of Diasporic Writing in India and Abroad: A Panoramic View” talks about the diasporic condition of Indians and various diasporic writers works.

Ajit Kumar in his article “New Face of Diaspora: A Study of Selected Commonwealth Literature” points out the miseries and wretchedness of immigrants living in the foreign countries.

Gopika Sankar U. in her article “ ‘Little Asias’ and Larger Concerns: Delving into the South Asian Diaspora Spaces Re-Presented in Select South Asian American Novels” brings out the need to know the background of contextualizing South Asian American fiction and the methodology and analysis of diasporic novels.

Tejinder Kaur in his article “Changing Facets of Indian Women and Women’s Issues in Selected Indian English Fiction: A Study” talks about the Indian women novelists and women’s issues as portrayed in the selected Indian English fiction and also the different phases of the changing socio-economic facets of India.

Sudipta Chakraborty in her article “Fractured Identities / Fragmented Memories: Anglophone Diaspora Literature and Cultural Politics” talks about the new turn in William Safran and Diaspora Consciousness. This article also deals with the black diaspora literary continuum and politics of identity.

Sandhya Rao Mehta's article "Exploring 'Marginal' Diasporas: Indians in the Middle East" deals with the Indian experience in the Gulf and the historical and social complexity.

The article of K.C. Baral "Indian Writing in English: Mapping the Terrain" talks about the components of hyphenated and hybrid status and the way Indian writing in English provided a site for studying relationships and differences.

Suganthi K. in her article, "Meena Alexander and *Nampally Road*" talks about the subaltern voice and the upliftment of women in Alexander's *Nampally Road*.

Archana Hooda's, "Dislocated Self as Reflected in Meena Alexander's *Nampally Road*" talks about Meena Alexander's concern regarding the inclusion and empowerment of women on the basis of gender and class. The same writer in her article, "Female Subjects and Negotiating Identities in Meena Alexander's Selected Works" talks about Alexander's various works and also examines the injustices of race and class as well as politicizing concerns of gender within their communities.

"Excruciation of Trapped Freedom and Crisis of Identity in Meena Alexander's *Nampally Road*" by Sachin Salunke, deals with the psychological explorations of women and portrayal of India after twenty five years of Independence. This article also shows women as fearless and courageous to challenge the atrocities and injustices showered upon them.

Bharathi S. in her article, "Cultural Inadaptability and Immigrant Sensibility in Meena Alexander's *Nampally Road*" expresses her concern over the multicultural attitude of Meena Alexander and the way she strongly takes up political issues in *Nampally Road*.

Sohdev Khoja in the article “Following Gandhi” analyses the two works – *Pears From the Willow Tree* by Violet Dias Lannoy and *Nampally Road* by Meena Alexander and talks about the remarkable similarity in their concern – the idea of commitment in modern India.

Vijaya and Jaya Priya in their article “Diasporic experience in the novel of Meena Alexander” talk about the oppression and inner struggle faced by people who have a multivalent experience of border crossings.

The present thesis entitled “Transcending Barriers in Meena Alexander’s *Nampally Road* and *Manhattan Music*” analyses the two fictional works of Meena Alexander and the way the protagonists search for their identity in the course of which they cross cultural, national and political barriers. The first chapter “Introduction” gives a brief introduction to Indian Writing in English, diasporic writing, a brief biographical background of the selected writer Meena Alexander and her works along with the review of literature. The second chapter “Search for Identity” analyses how the protagonists of the novels find themselves alienated from the society and how they are able to complete their journey in quest of their identity. The third chapter “Triumph of Women” deals with the women protagonists’ attempt to cross cultural, political and national barriers to attain success in their lives. The final chapter “Conclusion” sums up the arguments presented in the previous chapters and concludes saying that self-reliance is of immense importance in women’s journey towards self-realization.

Chapter-II

Search for Identity

Literature is a useful resource which provides an understanding as to how settlements which were established illustrating the daily conduct of trade, exploring the relationship between diverse groups of people and also depicting the conflicting and heart-rending emotions felt by a particular migrant community. Hybridity in its most basic sense refers to mixture. The term 'Hybridity' originated from the Latin 'Hybrida', a term used to classify the offspring of a tame sow and a wild boar. A hybrid is something that is mixed and hybridity is a simple mixture. An explicative term, hybridity becomes a useful tool in performing a fearful discourse of a racial mixing that rose towards the end of the eighteenth century. The term which originated from biology, was subsequently employed in linguistics and racial theory in the nineteenth century.

In the immigrant situation, identities are made up of cultural representations, and literature is one of the crucial areas in which this making is done. In the immigrant discourse, a lot of rewriting is done in the making and unmaking of identities. The immigrant writer has to travel back and forth from the personal to the racial, from the local to the distant, in order to forge an identity. The quest for identity initiates both visible and invisible points of events. The socio-political changes in the host country create a new consciousness and enfold in it the fluctuating identities. The question of identity in the case of a woman writer attains complexity for the reason that she has to counter double marginalization under the foreign yoke and the indigenous patriarchy.

The power and ability of literature lies in the way it constructs and protects the cultural space of various communities and it also plays a vital role in providing more

opportunities to people for self-realization by providing necessary information about the cultural, historical and customary practices. Arvind M. Nawale & T. Sasikanth Reddy in their article “Dynamics of Diasporic Writings in India and Abroad; A Panoramic View”, comment on the power of literature in the following manner:

The greater tradition could be visualized, imagined and witnessed through an effective literary presentation. This leads to the self-realization of one’s cultural identity which will make the individual to hold the culture and other identity at the top. It is being adopted as a strategy for social change and social movements by people in power, since literature possesses a greater value in the political dynamics of any state. (2)

The predicament of the modern man is that he has to cross over geographical, national and cultural boundaries. This displacement and dislocation have assumed a new currency in challenging and contesting traditional essentialist notions of culture as being essentialist and fixed, rooted into one specific cultural location. In crossing over borders, the diasporic subject carries his cultural identity transnationally and translates into new cultural terrains. Therefore, his identity is in the process of evolving or ‘becoming’. Through this journey, he conjures up new meanings reflecting his sensory reality which is fragmentary with multiple histories, nationalities and cultures.

Migrations across borders can be wild or forced. ‘Expatriates’ and ‘immigrants’ belong to the former category and ‘exiles’ and ‘refugees’ belong to the latter. Such migrations have resulted in building up a diasporic community who share a common sense of rootlessness, pain and agony of homelessness, and who experience the anxiety and turmoil in a new land and the nostalgia for their homeland. A diasporic person lives

simultaneously in two cultures at the same time. Cultural interactions lead to growth and transformation giving birth to multicultural societies. The characters of these diasporic writers transpose from one nation to another.

Alexander's *Manhattan Music* starts with the immigrant past life of Draupadi on the one hand and Sandhya on the other. The thirty five year old Sandhya Rosenblum, an Indian immigrant, married to an American Jewish man Stephen, is a very strong and independent woman from India. She hates the custom of arranged marriages and likes to find a man on her own; unfortunately, her marriage is arranged and she tries to be happy in her arranged married life with Stephen, the American Jew, performed by the Special Marriage Act.

Sandhya, coming from the patriarchal Indian subcontinent, thinks about the way marriages are arranged in India and how generation after generation people are bound by traditions. Sandhya sits at the edge of a wooden bench at Central Park and watches the streets filled with activities. She starts dwelling in the past memories and Stephen, Sandhya's husband calls her by her name once, twice but to no avail, as she puts her hand in the chicken wire that protects the art work and her feet placed strongly in the middle of no-man's island. She starts to roam with her imagination as the scene shifts all around, like a curtainless theatre.

Sandhya starts imagining about her grandmother's courtyard. Above her head was the blue vault of sky and Sandhya herself was a child of six crouched in the sandy courtyard and after some time spent in her past reveries, she comes back to her present. The bench grows colder and she comes to the reality of busy streets. She notices a poorly laminated plastic card in her bag and as her fingers feel the surface of the card, she could

see that dark skin is buried in the card. She recollected how the immigrant officer, so energetic and cheery welcomed her with “Welcome to America. Be happy here” (MM 7). But she held on to Stephen’s arm trying to smile though with confusion and he tried to assure her by saying “The gates of America are open wide . . . We’ll live here, Sandy, we’ll be happy, I promise you” (MM 7). Stephen set his arms resolutely around her as a sign of guardianship.

After coming to America, Sandhya cannot settle. She is not able to recognize what is happening to her and her life; she feels that nothing goes right. The writer talks about her confused state: “As she walked toward the bus stop, a thought gripped Sandhya. Supposing she were to swallow the green card, ingest the plastic, would it pour through her flesh, a curious alchemy that would make her all right in the new world?”(MM7). She ponders over the immigrant experience and tries to focus her thoughts and murmurs her surname. She holds on to the blooming part of her married name ‘Rosenblum’. Her routine goes along with her daughter Dora. Stephen gives her confidence in the new city and she believes that she has heard people say that America is a land of opportunities. Yet she is filled with doubts and fears like every other immigrant. As Omana Antony in her article “Feminism and Femininity in the Diaspora: A Study of Meena Alexander’s *Manhattan Music*” says “The tension surrounding self-identification is a very serious problem of the immigrants . . . Sandhya has no identity in her maiden name, whereas she is existing in the identity of her married name. . . ‘Rosenblum’ ”(38).

Sandhya’s dreams give her a little respite. Again and again Gautam comes to her in her dreams, only to torment her by vanishing. She always recalls the days she spent with Gautam in Hyderabad. Sandhya was a young woman, in her early twenties, sitting

next to Gautam by the river bank. Gautam sat very close to her. And her new life in Manhattan does not wipe her past; she used to have the same dream of Gautam. Sandhya tries hard to put Gautam out of her mind by turning towards Stephen.

Stephen has married her and brought her to America so that she will learn to forget her past. However, even after three years' stay in America, she feels naked. She feels restless and lost. The tension surrounding self-identification is a very serious problem of the immigrants. In *Manhattan Music*, Stephen advises Sandhya to take her green card with her wherever she goes as her American identity lies there. Sitting in the garden she tries in vain to focus her attention on the present; she brushes hard against a clump of rose bushes. 'Rosenblum' is her identity in Manhattan. She tries to stick on to that by spending her time with her daughter Dora lounging on a bench at the edge of Central Park.

Stephen's mother Muriel also helps Sandhya in all possible ways so that she could live in the present and be happy. She tells Sandhya that she should make use of the opportunities that lay before her in America. However, Sandhya finds it very difficult to be frank with people at home; she has been remaining very reserved and secretive about her boyfriend. This tendency makes her unhappy in the present. Again and again she goes back to her past. When her friend Madhu offered her house to Sandhya for a week to stay as they were going out, Sandhya accepted the generous offer. As she was spending time in Madhu's courtyard she thought about her aunt Sariko Chamma, who had migraines, fits and attacks of swooning. She had a difficult life. Her aunt could not tolerate her children's loud voices and bursts of gunfire. Like her aunt, Sandhya also finds it very difficult to adapt herself to her new surroundings.

Sandhya has schooled herself not to chatter away. Every incident and experience in the past has given her a lesson for her present life in Manhattan. She remembers how Gautam's rare words stole her soul away. Gautam used to spend all his weekends in the jungle somewhere in the north of Hyderabad, at times with Sandhya though he never spoke openly to her. While staying at Madhu's house Sandhya had a good time enjoying the grilled tandoori chicken and the pomfret and vindaloo the old cook prepared each night for her. Sandhya has a love for her native cuisine; even after coming to Manhattan she gives importance to her cooking.

Jay, Sandhya's cousin is a photographer. She invites him and he plans to visit Sandhya. When he misplaced her address, Rashid gives him an idea, "Look up Rosenblum in the phone book, There may be hundreds, thousands. Look up Stephen Rosenblum. That's who she's married to, you said" (MM 19). Jay becomes happy that Sandhya has chosen to cut herself off from her old life but at the same time he is much concerned about her feelings and wonders whether he should speak about Gautam if he meets her in Manhattan.

Jay knows about Sandhya's relationship with Gautam. He also knows that things frayed between those two well before because Gautam was taken into police custody in Hyderabad. Gautam slowly went away from Sandhya and then he totally avoided meeting her; he stopped carrying her books, and did not turn up at the right time to meet her. Sandhya who was unable to understand the reason for his keeping away, felt a crack in her world with Gautam; she trembled without knowing why. It was not that they had made plans for the future, but she had always felt that she loved him, and that he returned her love. When Sandhya realized that Gautam was moving farther and farther away from

her, she could not bear it. When she asked him about his withdrawal, Gautam said, “Amma has someone in mind, from her own village. How can I hurt her, Sandhya, after all she has gone through?” (MM 20). He slowly conveyed to her his mother’s idea of arranged marriage but Sandhya did not trust his words and she felt that he wanted to get rid of her.

Sandhya bade good bye to Gautam at the coffee shop; she had no idea if she would ever see him again. Then she did not meet Gautam for months together. Her cousin Jay tried to keep track of Gautam so he wrote editorial pieces in a local newspaper, mentioning Gautam by name but nothing budged; only later he came to know about the plight of Gautam that he was the sympathizer of people’s war group and he was arrested and imprisoned for the first time. Sandhya did not know the precise details of what had come over him; nor did she ask Jay about him. Then they heard the Inspector General of Police saying in his elegant diction “We will flush out violence, we will purify the land” (MM 20) at a press conference. The theme was “Cleaning House” and many foreign journalists were invited for the press conference.

Sandhya and Jay came to know that Gautam Reddy got arrested, his experience in jail made him careless about wind and the birds and he forgot about Sandhya too. He survived in jail for three months and due to repeated attacks of malaria, and the incessant damp in his cell and brutal questioning of the police, Gautam died. He was wrapped in a prison blanket and was handed over to his mother. A simple cremation followed and his mother was at a loss. When Sandhya went to Gautam’s house, his mother Kanyamma wondered who she was; only then Sandhya realized that Gautam has never told his

mother about her; Sandhya sensed that her own life had fled after him and she accepted the job that Sita travels offered her in Delhi.

After coming to know about the plight of Gautam, Jay focused on photography, in anti-Sikh riot; his photos of young children – mouths open, eyes enormous, fragile, children who had witnessed the stabbing of a parent, the rape of a sister, the lynching of an older brother who had won him acclaim. Jay's photo caught two small hands outlined against the field, maimed birds poised for flight. That picture was taken at three in the afternoon during the assassination of Mrs. Gandhi. Jay titled the photo as "Three in the afternoon" (MM 22). The photo was picked by *Life Magazine* and stood as an icon of childhood innocence violated. The photo brought him several invitations and he accepted the invitation to Berlin.

In Berlin, Jay falls in love with Nathalie, who is working as a volunteer for the Green Party. In Nathalie's house he meets Rashid who invites him to New York. Jay accepts the offer instantly because after going there, he could visit his cousin Sandhya also. He would always enjoy the items cooked by Sandhya.

Sandhya comes back to her present. She cooks rice and sambar for her family members and for her daughter Dora. Her life as woman has been thrusting her almost into the very role her mother would have picked for her. She heard her mother's voice and a scene floated from her past. Sandhya's mother Sosa exclaimed "Arranged marriages are the best, Sandhya. How could you doubt it? Look at all these messy divorces in our cities" (MM 23). Sandhya who had an aversion for arranged marriages, grunted. Her thinking was very much different from that of her mother and that is the reason for keeping her bond with Gautam a strict secret. Even her mother had no idea about her

daughter's life in Hyderabad. Sosa continued to talk about the duty of Indian parents: "People like us really must do their duty. Keep up the family lines" (MM 24). Sosa wanted her daughter to agree for arranged marriage as every Indian parent would wish and Sosa found a match for her daughter - a Kuriakose boy, with an MBA from Stanford and family line impeccable. Sandhya tried to speak but all she had was a hoarse cry.

After her Grandmother's death, the room was left just as it was and then altered for Sandhya. She pulled out a notebook in which she had written down her thoughts. She was a school girl then, but the lines were sharp, written in black ink, the letters lopsided in passion:

"If you want me to live as woman, why educate me?"

"Why not kill me, if you want to dictate my life?"

"God, why teach me to read and write?" (MM 26).

Varki, her father had supported her in all ways to overcome her fight with her mother.

In Manhattan when Jay meets Sandhya they recollect the days of the past; the nostalgic feelings, alienation and search for identity dominating their lives. Thus Alexander's *Manhattan Music* analyses the impact of transplantation from natal to post-marital space in the lives of women characters.

Jay wants to take Sandhya to see the Statue of Liberty or Ellis Island but she refuses because of her kitchen work. He tries to help her in the kitchen as he has already learned to cook in Delhi. Sandhya asks him "Remember how we used to play by the well" (MM 27) and Jay nods. Tiruvella has been the best place to cherish her life. Jay murmurs some lines and questions Sandhya about it.

"If fire is lit in water, who can extinguish it?"

“If fear comes from the Protector, who can protect us from that fear?”

(MM 28).

These were the words of Nagarjuna, known as the second Buddha, words which he has seen in a book on Sandhya’s mother’s bookshelf; she has inherited a collection of books from her father but left them untouched. But Jay knows that Sandhya is restless and wants to ask her why she has married Stephen, because he knows her views regarding marriage; but he does not have the mind to ask her about it and add to her confusion.

Stephen and Sandhya had met only twice before their marriage. Their first meeting was arranged at a hotel and they met along with her six friends. It was the febrile quality that drew Stephen closer to her. The second meeting was under a tree where he approached in great eagerness and she invited him to join her in the shade. During the course of their conversation Stephen told her about Afanasy Nikitin, the tale he had read as a child. He quoted a stanza with the line: “In Hindustan must I burn?” (MM 33). Nikitin’s lines made Sandhya to remember her friend Smita, who had burned in Hauz Khas, in her newly married home; but the women’s group demonstrated it as an accident whereas in reality it happened because of dowry. And her husband Rahul, who was cruel to her remarried shortly after her death. Sandhya could not tell all this to Stephen, but she repeated the words of Nikitin. According to Sandhya, though he was a stranger to her, he was kind and she could not ask anything more.

Again Sandhya’s thoughts turn to the early days with Stephen, memories shared on the cool slopes of Nainital. Now, she could not even speak openly with him, locked as she was into a world she felt she had not chosen. Whenever she felt low she used to think

of her mother in her alien world. Her memories haunted her as she walked along the Manhattan Street. Her mother requested to send a long list of items like Mouline blender, deodorant, vaseline tubes, yeast in jars, jasmine scent and so on. Sandhya's parents were delighted whenever she took her daughter Dora along with her because their grandchild came from across the seas. With their petting and pampering Sandhya felt that Dora would be spoiled in the hands of her grandparents.

Sandhya has inherited a few qualities from her father- for example the stoical grain. She felt certain that emotional strains had to be borne in silence in the interest of preserving a difficult world. However, in her present life, she feels the emptiness growing in her; even her husband Stephen fails to notice it or know about that.

Draupadi, an African- born freelance performance artist, represents the hybrid women immigrants who have neither a stable root nor a home of their own. She is part Indian and a mixture of other ethnicities. Draupadi wants to make America her home, but it seems very hard at that time. Her boyfriend Rinaldo whispers to Draupadi "Home is where the Heart is" (MM 86).

Draupadi enters Sandhya's life, like a part of whirlwind that is to blow through the brittle order she is struggling to create for herself. Draupadi sings a few lines of a song to an AIDS sufferer – "She steps straight out of Gingee, a parrot in her hair, but oh her throat is bare, very bare" (MM 52). These lines have come to Draupadi the previous night and she scribbled them down though she understands very little of them. She is introduced to Sandhya by her friend Jay whom she also knows. She has read about the cult of Draupadi dancers' in Tamil Nadu where she discovers the mythic heroine by the name Draupadi who often bore a parrot- the symbol of the soul, perched on her shoulder.

She feels that there is some kinship she shares with the heroine of *Mahabharata*. As she realizes about her own homelessness, she senses that there is some emptiness in Sandhya's soul too.

When Sandhya enquires Draupadi about her relationship with Jay, Draupadi does not answer. Draupadi is already acquainted with Rashid el Obeid, the Egyptian scholar and Jay's friend, who had started in the city as a post-doctoral fellow at Columbia. She introduces Rashid to Sandhya when they meet in the subway. Sandhya's map of Manhattan seems useless because she has found it to be the hardest thing. They both go to Dora's day care and have a good time.

Sandhya speaks to her mother over the phone and the communication made through the cheap international rates on Sunday makes her feel a little relaxed. Sandhya shares her experience over her new American dish with some swiss chard Muriel has given her. After her conversation with her mother she starts preparing for the dinner party. Though there are no servants to help her, because of her interest in cooking, she shines at the chosen task.

Because Draupadi knows that Sandhya often dwells in her past in order to forget her painful present, she talks to Sandhya in the small kitchen; her voice sounds disembodied, unreal and does a poor performance. She has been talking about roses and she tells Sandhya "I meant roses. Sandhya, we're women of color. Think of what Emerson, our household philosopher, said. Be like the roses, cut off the past, frisk it, skin it, live in the present! You can't keep on cooking all wonderful Eastern food" (MM 62). Draupadi could understand the plight of Sandhya as she herself is in search of her

identity. She has meant this speech as a joke but Sandhya has kept her face averted but somehow Draupadi manages to console her.

Draupadi represents the cultural nomads who have claims to different homelands but cannot sustain a claim to any. It is due to her hybridized status that she is deserted by her first lover Jimmy. His father warned her father Mr. Dinkins, “Keep your girl away from my lad, Dinkins. Don’t want none of that Paki stuff. Jimmy is going in the Air Force. . .” (MM 92). Thus her affair with Jimmy came to an end. Regarding her affair with Rinaldo, he too in a way rejects her by refusing to allow her have his child. He says, “A child needs a home, Dotti. I have no home for you” (MM 170). Later, she justifies his act by saying, “Who wants mongrel African- American-Asian child, by a woman who strolls through Harlem on full moon lights?”(MM 169). Despite all these love failures and not having an identity to claim and facing all the pains and violence of being a hybridized woman, Draupadi is not ready to give up her spirit. She still has a deep love and attachment towards her Indian identity. The novelist says “she was the great-granddaughter of a woman who had come as a bonded laborer to Trinidad, worked in the cane fields in the sweltering heat. That was her bond with India. India owed her and she would draw what she wished from that world, rework the language, pack it with lore” (MM 52). She lives her life with the strength and determination of the mythological Draupadi.

Draupadi becomes tired of watching her old lover, Rashid in Sandhya’s house. However, she does not open her mouth in that place. During the course of the conversation, Sandhya tells the group about the story told to her by her – of their neighbour’s daughter from her father’s village who lived in Kuwait. There was a bomb

blast and she had to give birth in the sand, in a transit camp. She delivered a boy and also stated it was really hard to survive in that place. After listening to the story, Draupadi exclaims, “Well, we’re safe in Manhattan! . . . Safe and sound, and you have Stephen to take care of you” (MM 71). She also advises her not to dwell in the past. Sandhya says “Sometimes I remember things. I try not to” (MM 71). She decides not to remember her past anymore.

All diasporic deliberations as also readings of Diasporic fiction come to be shaded by the ideology of post-colonialism. The reasons are not far to seek. Sandhya’s grandmother was her biggest support and she used to say “Once a women knew how to read and write, the world was open. “Use your mind” (MM 72). She stares at the pages she has scrawled two decades ago. When Rashid invites Sandhya for lunch, she allows her to be surprised and feels that she unknowingly falls into the life which is meant for her. As their friendship grows, it turns into love. Zahir, Rashid’s childhood friend owns a room in Brooklyn and Rashid makes use of it whenever he needs it.

Sandhya and Rashid’s relationship grows stronger; she makes it a habit to visit him regularly. They also have physical relationship so that she could forget her past life. Rashid says, “the past is a rough instrument we have to play. People like us have to make up the past from little bits and pieces, play it. Imagine strings running through, playing it, *halathi!*”(MM 78). She comes to realize that she has not been not really happy with Stephen and wants to convey this to Rashid; but fortunately she does not do so.

At that night Rashid has a dream: “There was a little girl again, crouched by the banks of Nile. She wore a white dress, curiously unstained, but her feet were in the mud. There was a monstrous-looking male squatting by her. It ambled away, lay on a rock,

shut its eyes. The girl came up to Rashid. “Stab me” (MM 78). Rashid has no idea about his dreams and conveys it to Zahir. He comments saying that it could be Uncle Mustafa’s daughter. Rashid tries to talk about Sandhya to Zahir and about his love for her. Zahir warns him saying, “It’s okay for a while, remember. But she’s a married woman. Move on, old chap” (MM 80). Rashid knows that he needs to control his feelings for her but he tries to impress her. For Rashid it is not something new. He breaks up with women whenever he gets fed up with them – it has happened in his relationship with Uncle Mustafa’s daughter, Draupadi and now it could happen with Sandhya Rosenblum.

Draupadi Dinkins, born as the only daughter of Suhasini of Trinidad and Tobago, does not know which blood she belongs to. She tells her boyfriend Rinaldo about herself in the following manner:

I was born in Gingee, most part Indian, part African descended from slaves, pride of Kala Pani, sister to the Middle Passage. Also part Asian-American, from Japanese, Chinese, and Filipino blood: railroads in the West, the pineapple and sugarcane fields . . . I also have smattering of white- low European-in me. Hence the slight pallor, I suspect. (MM 47)

Draupadi’s grandfather changed his name from *Dineshwaran* to *Dinkins*, thinking it sounded easier on the ear. She always questioned about her name, “Why they named me Draupadi I cannot tell. What did they know of the goddess born of fire, wife of the five Pandavas, she who rode an elephant, was humiliated in the court kings, survived a battle field, lived out her life in exile, then raced into wind, atop a tiger, a lotus blossom in one hand, a sword in the other?”(MM 88).

Whatever happens in her life Draupadi will not bother. She would to stay strong and determined. Draupadi's father has motivated her in all possible ways as he had the instinct that bonded laborers will have as they enter the new land. He would frequently repeat the following words to her; "Born in America, you can be anything, Draupadi" (MM 91).

Omana Antony in her article discusses the plight of Draupadi. She says,

An Indian woman migrant is not safe even from a tramp. Draupadi, though born in America, is a hybrid and that is her bad luck. She is humiliated and denied her love for Jimmy just because she is hybrid. Her status as a colored woman not only complicates her relations with the whites, but complicates her relationship with other Third World immigrants as well. Thus hybridity implies fusion, it describes a splitting also. (240)

Sandhya's father Varki was slowly declining in his health as he was suffering from the blood disease which they had diagnosed six weeks ago; but the mother kept it as secret as she did not want to trouble Sandhya because Tiruvella was not on the main line the satellites could not work their magic as they did directly to Madras or Delhi. Later when her father was admitted in the hospital, the servant Sarla, famous for milk cows informed Sandhya about her father's critical condition. Immediately her soul flew Tiruvella; crossing the sidewalks in Manhattan she thought about her mother's condition in the hospital. Jay came to her help and booked the tickets through some influence. Muriel her mother-in-law took care of Dora after daycare. Sandhya jammed herself into the plane. "There was a slight gush of tears as she parted from Stephen and Dora. The

child did not seem to realize her mother was leaving her for a quite a while” (MM 97). Her cousin Chandu received her from Thiruvananthapuram airport. She could hear her own heart beat in the Mission Hospital where her father was admitted. Her meeting with her father was highly emotional because the bond between father and daughter is one of the blessings that no other persons could have in their life. Looking at the eldest daughter in the hospital room wiped away his tears.

M.Dolores Herrero in his article “Meena Alexander’s Transgressive/Diasporic Female Characters: Healing Wounds and Fracturing the Iconic Feminine and the Language of the Colonizer” says “diaspora can become a resistive site from which to interrogate, as Alexander does, not only class and gender conflicts, but also nationalism and its influence, both on a grand scale and on rather more local spheres” (27-28). He also quotes from Alexander’s work *The Shock of Arrival* “The act of writing, it seems to me, makes up a shelter, allows space to what would otherwise be hidden, crossed out, mutilated. Sometimes writing can work toward reparation, making a sheltering space for the mind. Yet it feeds off ruptures, tears in what might otherwise a seamless, oppressive fabric” (28).

A Diasporic situation involves relocation not in terms of geography alone. Alexander believes and recommends comradeship among women as a strong source of comfort and support to overcome their difficulties . Apart from Sandhya and Draupadi who represent the diaspora women, Sakhi, with her Indian husband Ravi, migrates to America for a better living. Sakhi herself has changed her life in a way that even she could not have predicted it. She undergoes suffering due to racial discrimination in Manhattan. She loves East Brunswick and wants to live and die there. She feels that her

marital life is becoming dry and mechanical. When the jumpiness of the New York City slowly catches hold of Ravi through his business matters and when he is completely engrossed in his business, Sakhi too experiences the pain of neglect, loneliness and frustration of dislocation. However, she is not ready to give up and is determined to succeed. Instead of getting broken into pieces as Sandhya does, she remains positive and assertive about the oddities in the new land. Along with her office work she puts on the guise of a social-worker with a bit of feminist stuff.

It is Sakhi's idea to take her cousin Sandhya to women's meeting in New York City when she becomes depressed after her father's death as she could not go for the funeral in Tiruvella; moreover her mother Sosa has promised her that she would manage the situation. Sandhya's mother advises her to have Jay and Sakhi by her side so that they would offer her their moral support.

To bring Sandhya out of her sadness, Draupadi and Sakhi plan for Diwali celebrations. They plan for food, elephant rides for children and drama piece by Draupadi. These incidents again take her back to her past, when she delivered Dora. Sakhi is the strongest pillar in Sandhya's life, "We're all migrants . . . from the past, I guess that's the big thing" (MM 211). All are on the move to know themselves.

As Sandhya comes near the edge of a lake and observes her own reflection, the tiny fish leaping out of water and diving back, the dragonflies gleaming with moisture, a change comes over her.

She was no longer fearful of the shadows in the trees, of the sharp cries of a strange bird with long tailfeathers. She thought she heard a creature snort near her. She stood her ground. There was a place for her. Slowly she

opened her fists, releasing her fingers, letting the half-light pour through her, letting her hands lie quite by her side. There was a place for her here, though what it might be she could never have spelled out. (227-28)

The world talks endlessly of the diversity of the people of India and how they live together in flawless harmony. Yet it is difficult to perceive how the languages and cultures of these people overlap and what happens when this marvelous, soundless churning leaves its imprints on the minds of the writers. Alexander's works examine the disparate elements of her heritage and her cultural displacement, concentrating particularly on her status as an educated woman of the South Asian diaspora living and writing in the west. Her search for psychic wholeness through language, a prevalent theme of her poetry, also articulates the concerns of postcolonial writers silenced by the dominant literary traditions of the imperial past.

Alexander is known for her lyrical writing that deals with migration and its impact, the subjectivity of the writer and sometimes violent events that compel people to cross borders. Though confronting such stark and difficult issues, her writing is sensual and maintains a generous spirit.

Nampally Road, the first novel by Meena Alexander is a skillful blend of fact and fiction on her own experience; it is also considered as autobiographical. This is a novel of identity, of alienation, of the epochal confrontation of western and eastern cultures. It plunges into the tumult, squalor, and corruption of postcolonial India, yet stands back from it at the same time. The entire novel is set in India.

The novel begins with Nagarjuna's quotation: "*If fire is lit in water, who can extinguish it?*" which is already quoted in *Manhattan Music*. The factors that are

instrumental in setting the water ablaze have been enumerated. Mira Kannadical, a twenty year old woman, is the protagonist of *Nampally Road*. She is a young teacher at a local college, who recently returned to Hyderabad, after four years of study in England. Mira has just spent four years for earning a Ph.D. dealing with Wordsworth at Nottingham University. She now finds herself trying to understand her relationship as a foreign returned academic to the ongoing social struggles in India. Ramu and Mira Kannadical who are almost exactly of the same age, a quarter century old, were born a few years after independence. He was her colleague in Sona Nivas College part of the Central University of Hyderabad and is now doing his final year as a Ph.D. student in Jawaharlal Nehru University in Delhi. His life in Delhi had been very hectic with his reading of Marx and Habermas and his participation in political activities. Mira is a poet, sensitive soul who keenly observes the brutality going on around her. Ramu is an active khadi-clad protestant and often gets arrested and held in custody but let out after a few days. This novel has a mixture of political, historical issues along with the search for identity.

Limca Gowda, the Chief Minister of the state, is an ambitious man who wishes himself to be a powerful ruler. Sometimes he would dream as if he was the old Nizam of Hyderabad, returning to claim his kingdom. Ramu has been brought up in a strict boarding school and his grandfather had been an associate of Gandhi. When he joined Sona Nivas College, he thought that he would have a good starting point in his life. Mira returned after four years and is longing for South Indian foods which she could get in the newly opened New Mysore Café. Ramu and Mira spend their leisure time in this café opposite to Nampally Road, discussing the events taking place there.

A clash breaks out between the orange sellers and a group of politicians. Ramu knows the real reason behind; “It’s the new tax, kills them” (NR 6). The hotelier Bolaram and Mira watch the scene carefully. “The orange sellers were scrabbling free, their banner torn and bloodied, running as hard as they could until the street resembled a ditch of water in which living creatures were immersed, struggling for their lives, their arms and legs damaged by the blows falling from the iron - tripped lathis” (NR 7). The Ever Ready men, Limca Gowda’s special branch, start beating the orange sellers, dragging them to the pavement and kicking them.

One morning in Midlands, Mira receives a letter from the Vice-Chancellor of the Central University, when she is on the way to meet Siddharth, her colleague. She is extremely happy to see the cover on which it is written, “On India Government Service” (NR 13). Mira points out the bold orange letters that ran across the envelope which is an offer of a job at Hyderabad. Siddharth is very helpful. He meets his girlfriend Vanessa at a local concert whom he introduces to Mira. However, Siddharth warns Mira not to tell these things to his mother because they already know each other. Mira goes to Siddharth’s mother, Durgabai’s house at Hyderabad. He has already written to her about Mira’s arrival.

Mira addresses Durgabai as ‘Little Mother’. She is an obstetrician, gynecologist, and pediatrician all rolled into one. ‘Little Mother’ has been practising medicine for thirty years. She is a staunch nationalist and would glisten with pride when she delivers babies. “A new India is being born, (NR 16)” she would say. Durgabai is also known to have treated a boy mauled by a leopard with concern, compassion and care.

‘Little Mother’ has a wave of sympathy and admiration for everyone around who tries to offer the world their own space of compassion and generosity. Her house is built around seventy years ago by her father, a physician who had done well serving the late Nizam. It was a large house with whitewashed walls, set around a courtyard. She insists on Mira’s staying there, “Of course you must live here child, Look at this great house all empty now except for me and Raniamma. All the bedrooms are shuttered” (NR 15). Mira does not refuse her generous offer and she agreed to stay paying a sum of three hundred rupees, to cover her meals.

Siki, the nurse helps Durgabai in the clinic and Raniamma, her cook comes as a general helper. Just to the left side of her house is a barber shop and to the right is a bicycle shop. The bicycle man has thirty apprentices aged between five to twelve and they are very thin who wrap themselves in rags and sleep on the pavement. Durgabai shows her concern to them by taking great pleasure in treating them for their ailments; with the offer of a lollipop she is able to vaccinate them in due season.

Nampally Road had grown up around the house, which was once fairly quiet but now it has become a noisy place and suddenly congested with busy people. The bicycle man is good at heart because he picks up the children from the street and provides them with as much as he could. Even ‘Little Mother’ has an idea of keeping a buffalo to provide milk. But both Mira and ‘Little Mother’ know that there would scarcely be space for a buffalo. If they buy one they could tie it only near the window of Ribaldo who lives just behind the dentist’s office, squashed between Durgabai’s kitchen wall and the decor of Sagar Talkies, the premier theatre of Hyderabad.

Isak Katha, the multimillion- rupee theological film based on the life of young Issac of biblical fame is playing in Sagar theatre. The entire area talks about the movie, the songs and cast crew. Mira sees ‘Little Mother’s old friend Swami Chari from the nearby ashram, who is hard of hearing. At first Mira mistakes him to be a stubborn man. He gives details about Rani and ‘Little Mother’.

More information about Durgabai is spilled by her friend, Swami Chari who describes her as a fierce and individualistic Durga fighting with her mother to marry the man she loved. One evening, when the house was hovering in silence, Durgabai opened the baggage of her memories, narrating the death of her husband who was washed away from a tempestuous ship. She had still kept the spectacles he wore safely. Durgabai tells Mira that she could be up for forty-eight hours at a stretch. She is almost sixty, but she still persists without sleep. She comes across many supernatural beliefs in her medical cases and she used to hope that her oldest son will wear those spectacles one day.

Mira tries to attend some dancing parties of the students but they disgust her because of the loud music and the harsh lights. Mira also tries to go out every evening with different boyfriends according to the western culture because Mira has a complex inter-cultural personality – an Indian girl with colonial education. Mira wants to write a few poems so as to have a separate identity for herself. She wants to make up a personality that will have some meaning and significance in it so that she could discover herself.

Mira’s inability to articulate her position arises from the events around her. Since the novel is set in India, Mira is a member of the dominant society. And yet Indian culture has been modified by western culture, the government communicates in English,

Western schools are considered the best educational opportunities, and America is the land where success is possible. But instead of abandoning her cultural heritage and buying herself from her Western education, Mira seeks to relate her knowledge of Romanticism to the politically explosive situation in Hyderabad. Thus, the ideas she teaches and writes are pressed by both Indian and English cultures and influence her expression of her identity. *Nampally Road* set Mira's identity in various forms:

Though I tried I could not really write my story. Each time I tried to write, everything splintered into little bits. I could not figure out a line or a theme for myself. The life that made sense was all around me in 'Little Mother' and Ramu and the young students, the orange sellers and the violent and wretched, ourselves included No one needed my writing. It could make no difference I had no clear picture of what unified it all, what our history might mean. We were in it, all together, that's all I knew. (NR 28)

Mira's inability to write reflects her identity crisis in reconciling the historical past and the present in a language of her own. Her search for a universal language translates into a vision with multiple possibilities and opens up identity and culture to various influences, not just to a monolithic Western culture. Alexander depicts a concept of difference in her novel and supports pluralism as a means of reconciling an individual to a community.

In chapter four Laura Ribaldo, signifies the relationship between Ribaldo and Rani. Mira literally hates visiting Laura Ribaldo, who has been her proximate neighbour. Rani and Ribaldo share a whole world, a fantasy life in Bollywood and their gossip has no limits. They share a taste for synthetic clothing and bright sugary things. In each

other's company, at least once a month, they visit local Catholic shrine or the ashram by the river. Laura is gripped by a desire to flee Hyderabad. Her three sisters are in Canada and their letters are filled with news of shopping malls that kindled her desire to go to Canada. Foreign lives attract her and the life style is what she has been dreaming of. As a mark of great friendship Laura presents Rani with a plastic bag from Calgary printed with the Red Onion Supermarket. Her sisters have sent her some nylons, a pot for rouge, and a long-lasting lipstick in the bag. According to her, Canada is a paradise constructed for her by her sisters. Laura Ribaldo is a woman of few means, who is constantly abused by her husband. She is a devotee of the virgin of Calangute now moved to the church of Bomjesus in Goa. Juxtaposed to all these is the description of Gandhi. It highlights the point that Mira, in spite of all her attachment towards westernized education and culture has to know her identity and perform her role in the much needed Indian society.

The description of Gandhi is effective at the end. He was the one who breathed life into the struggle for independence some thirty years ago. But now he stands lifeless in the form of statues all over India and the world. Mira even though was a teacher of English Romantic poetry, she turns into an activist due to Ramu's influence. Ultimately she abandons her classroom and fights to free Rameeza from both the government prison and the opportunistic national activists who see women only as objects to be used rather than as individuals.

'Little Mother' has been keen on going to Sagar Talkies to see the documentary about promotion of good habits. So, Mira and 'Little Mother' walk down after their supper and sit in the red rexine seats. In the name of creating awareness like, "Do not sit near exposed light switch during thunderstorm. Do not pick up a poisonous snake in your

bare hands (this always provoked a great laughter). Do not drink. Do not try to have more than two children” (NR 49), they are promoting only Limca Gowda’s fame. At the end of the documentary comes a flip clip of Gandhiji before the salt march started. Next to his image comes Limca Gowda’s, Chief Minister of the state, a large figure dressed in Khadi. At the background many people are seen standing and shouting, “Father of Hyderabad”.

Amidst all these things shocking incidents also occur. Rameeza Be has become a prey to the policemen in Hyderabad. This news spread through Hyderabad like smoke from the police station. Her husband has beaten and killed and his body recovered from a well behind the police station. People are depressed and Rameeza is taken home safely. The mob burns the police station and attack the five ‘noble’ policemen. They suffer head injuries and the Ever Ready jingle plays louder than ever in the city. Meena Alexander’s Mira expresses the violent tendencies responsible for the rejection of the acceptance of inner-self:

I wrote on the left, and at the top, where the arrow met in a slightly smeared point, I put “Romantic object”. It gave me some pleasure to watch the students bent over their notebooks copying my picture. I started in a monotone: “Romanticism is the belief in the self, the sense that the object only has value in so far as it is lit by the gaze. (NR 51)

Thus, Mira in *Nampally Road* is trying to answer the question related to the self. While teaching in the class, she asks herself whether she has followed her inner self in her decision of coming back to India. She thinks there is no use of teaching Wordsworth and romanticism in Indian classes where there are a number of crucial problems which need to be solved.

‘Little Mother’ becomes ill day to day and all the color drains out of her face. She cries out loud thinking about her dead husband and sometimes she seems to be calling her son Siddarth who is five thousand miles away. So Mira, on the apothecary’s advice sends for Ranga Reddy, the famous physician. Rani or Mira spend their night in her room so that she will never be alone. Classes are cancelled in Sona Nivas College just because Limca Gowda’s birthday is to be celebrated in a few days.

Mira is expecting Ramu’s arrival but he has no communication with her or ‘Little Mother’. She manages to cook by herself in order to feel free. When ‘Little Mother’ was constructing the house Mira must have been ten or eleven. It was all open and there was no Sagar Talkies, no Laura’s flat and not even Gandhi Park. But now Nampally Road becomes the busiest in the city and they think of the good old days. ‘Little Mother’ asks about Mira’s mother and her cooking. Mira thinks of her mother and feels lonely and Durgabai wants her to know about her mother.

‘Little Mother’ refers to her mother and her elder sister who was five years older than her, who lives in Pune. She was always controlled. She was away in the Nizam’s palace for a whole day delivering his fourth wife’s baby. It was a son almost born dead but, poor Savitribai saved him by pouring her breath from her own lungs, until the baby started breathing better. Even at that time, injustice was rampant in the City of Hyderabad.

The bond that Mira establishes with Durgabai, who offers her helpless services to minister to the poor and helpless women resisting government oppression and with the victimized Rameeza by identifying herself with her, pave way for her evolution and maturity not only as a human being but also as a writer. M. Dolores Herrero in his article

Meena Alexander's Transgressive/Diasporic Female Characters: Healing Wounds and Fracturing the Iconic Feminine and the Language of the Colonizer brings out the message that,

The three women metaphorically fuse so as to become one and the same, but also ultimately complex, thing. It is the notional collective identity that will enable Mira to write in the future. At the end of the novel, Mira identifies with Rameeza. Just as Rameeza's mouth is beginning to heal, Mira's ability to write herself into existence is now seen as being ultimately possible. (42)

Chapter-III

Triumph of Women

Indian fiction in English, since its inception in the later half of the nineteenth century till date, along with other issues has been dealing with the changing place, position, roles and problems of women in various relationships and areas. The historical, political, socio economic, religious and cultural factors play a great role in constructing the traditional images, roles and value patterns. They differ among various cultures and societal groups and as a legacy are transmitted from one generation to another through myths, legends and folklore on which the literary writers too rely, though their perspectives and attitude towards them may be confirmatory, reactionary or transformatory. The values of sacrifice, submissiveness, excessive endurance, series of adjustments and self-effacement have been demanded and desired from them alone as the normal way of life.

The phenomenon of people's displacement is formed when a community is scattered and exists in isolation; this leads to the ailing experience of cultural alienation and queer agony of being torn between two cultures, strange to each other, one abandoned and the other adopted. In the alien land, the people under displacement face great dismay because of their isolation, loneliness, uncertain hazards and perilous risks of the new land. The phase of Indian diaspora during the European colonialism had been a crucial one because the first quarter of the nineteenth century demanded that labor force be accounted and opposition to slavery and eventual abolition were intensified. Moreover, three distinct pattern of diaspora evolved namely 'indentured' labour emigration and 'passage' or 'free' emigration.

Indian diaspora in the post-colonial period is an important phase in which three different patterns can be identified – the emigration of Anglo-Indians to Australia and England, the emigration of professionals and semi-professionals to the industrially developed countries like U.S.A, England and Canada and the skilled and unskilled labourers’ emigration to West Asia. The cause and condition for migration may be broadly categorized as the push forces and pull factors, voluntary or involuntary, due to prevalent economic, political and social conditions.

In the article “Sounding Silence: Transculturation and its Thresholds” John Mcleod mentions in the views of Homi K. Bhabha who, in his book *The Location of Culture* writes, “Our existence today is marked by a tenebrous sense of survival, living on the borderlines of the ‘present’ for which there seems to be no proper name other than the current and controversial shiftiness of the prefix ‘post’ postmodernism, post colonialism, post-feminism . . .”

Bhabha in this article, suggests that the concepts of binary oppositions like black/white, self/other, majority/minority, present/past/future etc., are no more sufficient enough to describe our age. He points out the post-modern era as ‘beyond.’ This is the reality of the multicultural postmodern society, the identity, culture and history of which are mixed up.

The visible pattern of multi-racial, multi-ethnic settlements in America’s urban spaces produce dynamic and often conflicting forces that define the urban socio-spatial dialects. The bulk of contemporary South Asian American novels are set in urban and suburban spaces. Meena Alexander’s *Manhattan Music* is set in Manhattan as indicated in the title. Jhumpa Lahiri’s *The Namesake* is chiefly set in suburban Cambridge and in

New York city to a lesser extent, Khalid Hossein's *The Kite Runner* in San Francisco, Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* and so on. Meena Alexander's works are marked by diasporic sensibility and diasporic experience which find high emotions, large expressions in sensual, lyrical and metaphoric language. Meena Alexander has undergone multiple identities in multiple places.

Postcolonial theory is also built around the concept of resistance, of resistance as subversion, or opposition, or mimicry – but with the haunting problem that resistance always inscribes the resisted into the texture of the resisting: it is a two-edged sword. As well, the concept of resistance carries with it or can carry with it ideas about human freedom, liberty, identity, individuality, etc., which ideas may not have been held, or held in the same way, in the colonized culture's view of humankind. The very concepts of nationality and identity may be difficult to conceive or convey in the cultural traditions of colonized peoples. There are complexities and perplexities around the difficulty of conceiving how a colonized country can reclaim or reconstitute its identity in a language that is now but was not its own language, and genres which are now but were not the genres of the colonized.

Asian American writings are primarily concerned with the portrayal of sensibilities of the Asians who have migrated to America under various circumstances. Memories of the homeland and the conscious attempts of the individuals to live in the past characterize the works of Asian American writers. The Indian Diaspora is the largest Diaspora in the world with its global presence and history dating back to the Indian civilization. The Indian Diaspora can be divided into three phases – ancient, medieval and modern. The ancient Diaspora was of labourers, crafts men and traders who explored

new lands for work, wealth and adventures. In the medieval times, the British imperialism caused movement of the indentured labourers. In the modern times, skilled, educated and intelligent Indians move to the USA and other European countries for economic and professional reasons. They are considered as they have moved away from their original nations, communities and affiliations. Politics of identity in the postmodern context foregrounds the notions of representation viewed through the lens of cultural diversity.

Meena Alexander is a fine example of such migrants who have crossed numerous geographical and cultural borders. Many of them may not be able to identify themselves with any of the countries in which they have stayed or lived due to various historical, social, cultural, or personal reasons. They could be early immigrants such as the Africans in the Americas, or refugees and migrants in modern or contemporary times. Although they may finally settle down in one of the adopted countries, many of them lack the sense of belonging. At the same time, the native country has become a "place of no return" for most of them, physically and/or psychologically. Alexander's attitude towards colonialism is complex when compared to other diasporic writer's attitude, Meena Alexander's diasporic consciousness tries to harmonize the past and the present and move towards progress. Meena Alexander's works act as the source of reconciliation synchronizing the past and the present so as to proceed in order to bring forth a positive change in the people.

Sandhya of *Manhattan Music* and Mira of *Nampally Road* are Indian women who are portrayed with their capabilities as very strong and powerful women in the society. Sandhya hopes that her cousin Jay who is living in Berlin will visit her in New

York which is the most difficult task for anyone who lives far away from their homeland. Due to racism in the City she has faced many difficulties apart from her struggles at coping with the language. Even when she flipped *The Hindustan Times* for the astrology section she could not know about the riots that were happening in the city or about the communal violence between Muslims and Hindus and the horrible consequences that led people to meet deaths in a cruel manner.

Alexander provides samples of cultural difference in her novel *Manhattan Music*. Sosa, Sandhya's mother, and Muriel, Stephen's mother are different in their attitude to the marriage of their children. As a typical Indian mother, Sosa tries to find a good suitor for her daughter Sandhya. She wants Sandhya to "keep up the family lines" (MM 24) that is the duty of the children. She finds two young men, the Kuriokose boy, an MBA from Stanford, and the public school trained Kandathil lad, for her daughter. Her desperate effort is juxtaposed against the casual attitude of Muriel, who considers "his (Stephen's) life is his own" (MM 35). Moreover, differences in the culture prevent the people of the respective countries to understand the sensibilities of the other. Sosa, on seeing six month old Dora, Sandhya's daughter, sleeping separately shouts at her daughter for not doing her duty as a mother. But children in Western countries sleep in rooms of their own, as a matter of course.

Mira Kannadical recollected the days when she was living in England. She found it very difficult to adjust to the lifestyle of Europeans. She says, "I suffered from dislocation. Somehow I had not gathered into myself the resolute spirit needed for solitary study" (NR 29). Mira was an Indian girl with her own individual ideas about life. But she had to adjust a lot while she studied there. From the very early childhood Mira

was accustomed to eating with her right hand but the Europeans never ate with their right hands because the fork is always held in the left hand. With the knife in the right hand; they cut the food into small pieces using the knife and the fork and finally take them one by one to the mouth with the end of the fork. The Indian way of eating with bare fingers is considered indecent in the United Kingdom. Mira was naturally a right handed person and trying to eat with her left hand was considered by her as pollution.

While Mira lived in England she had to make many other adjustments. Mira was given little lessons in table manners and etiquettes by Miss Foxglove. She taught Mira how to hold her knife while eating, how to swallow food gracefully and how to wash them down with wine. Mira tried to follow the example of Miss Foxglove to the best of her abilities but miserably failed. She then felt herself a great mockery. She once overheard Miss Foxglove whisper to somebody else that Mira was a brilliant child, but out of place in the Midlands.

Like Sandhya of *Manhattan Music*, Mira also did not agree to her mother's decision for an arranged marriage for her. Life in England was like a hell to Mira because it was difficult for her to adjust with the fast lifestyle of the European people

In *Manhattan Music*, Meena Alexander not only exhibits the inner struggle of characters like Sandhya but also their difficulty in coping with the new socio-cultural atmosphere in Manhattan. Rabindranath Maharaj in his article "Frankenstein in America" explains how Meena Alexander's *Manhattan Music* examines

The consequences of migration, the disruption of certitudes and the intrusion of memory in the attempt to create a new, unblemished identity.

The central character, Sandhya Rosenblum, increasingly senses the

incompleteness of her marriage to Stephen for reasons which are beyond his understanding and – because he is a sympathetic man who grapples with the distancing of his wife – has little to do with him. (90)

Sandhya, in the early stages of her marriage and stay in the City was unable to integrate herself with the American way of living and failed to become ‘Sandy’ as her husband Stephen wanted her to be. Being an introvert, Sandhya rarely reveals her emotions, making it all the more difficult to facilitate the process of integration. The following question brings out her predicament very clearly. “Supposing she were to swallow the green card, ingest the plastic, would it pour through her flesh, a curious alchemy that would make her all right in the new world?” (MM 7).

Sandhya thinks about her past and how she started walking fast outside her compound because she did not know about the stuffs that were happening around. She ran fast and reached Madhu’s house to safeguard herself; so she did not tell her anything that had happened to her. As a young mother with an Indian sensibility Sandhya is unable to adapt herself to living in Manhattan due to her memories of the past, which are equally disturbing. When her old ayah Kanthamma and Sandhya were watching television in Tiruvella, Sandhya said, “The Americans don’t sing on their TV, but they have a good coverage: Presidents, nuns, Jehovah’s Witnesses, all that. But no singing Kanthamma, I can’t imagine why not. Someday I shall go there and find out why they don’t sing on their TV” (MM 16). She wanted to find an answer over television. Her talk made the ayah laugh.

The novel portrays Sandhya’s struggles to settle into her new life as an Indian wife of a Jewish American husband and how she fails to achieve it in the early period of

her settlement in America owing to her feelings of homelessness caused by her nostalgia. Various national barriers took part in both the novels as a timeline measure.

One of the important barriers faced by the immigrants is language. Stephen in India tried out Hindi to Sandhya and she rewarded him with a quick laughter. Sandhya's conversation with Stephen is mixed with Hindi, English and a bit of French which she had learnt from the convent school. He takes her to the museum, and the Asian Exclusion Act written up, "THIS IS NOT YOUR LAND" (MM 37). Somehow Stephen loses her in the museum and he feels that she should not have seen those words; unfortunately when she reads them, he feels himself on the brink of tears. He could understand a little of her agony. The narrator says, "For the first time in their years together her sense of lostness had seeped into his own soul, dissolving the clear walls he had constructed to make himself feel at home. She seemed uneasy at seeing him" (MM 37). Sandhya is really worried about her life in Manhattan. She feels that she is isolated and she could not even speak openly with her husband Stephen. Sandhya is unable to read or write in her mother tongue, because she has been brought up in the boundaries of New India, where regional divisions are not considered important.

Sandhya loves Stephen's American English; his accent is soothing to her ears and he seems so whole to her. She is much attracted by the "the notion of a whole soul, something that had previously never touched her, not even in the compulsory churchgoing her father forced her to" (69). She is not very active in her religious services. Like Meena Alexander who belongs to the Syrian Christian community, Sandhya also is a Syrian Christian. Only because of her father's compulsion Sandhya used to visit church. She too longs for such wholeness; but that is not granted to her by

her religion. The war was much talked about in the majority of the novel. Even in Stephen's house everyone talked about the Iraqi attack on Kuwait and the American response to it. By hearing this news Sandhya's thought takes her back to the past; she wondered about her Uncle Reji, the cardiologist working in Kuwait. A week later Sandhya came to know about their escape; she felt happy that her uncle and aunt fled from Kuwait safely. All these political and religious violences shook her terribly.

Draupadi and Sandhya make their friendship stronger in Manhattan. Draupadi often thinks of her grandmother who was very close to her. She is the eldest granddaughter who is living in metropolis three continents away. Sandhya is drawn towards Rashid "when Rashid called to invite her for lunch, Sandhya allowed herself to be surprised. Deep down she felt she was falling into the life that was meant for her" (MM 74). They both start loving each other at their first sight. "As bombs fell in desert lands, the lovers met in Chinese restaurants, ordered hot and sour soup, the lunch of the day"(MM 74).

Rashid considers Sandhya a special one. He tells her that they should benefit from the memory of the past. Even after she has left his place Rashid feels that there is something in her eyes that disturbs him. Draupadi who has known much about Rashid and his waywardness wants to tell Sandhya about him; but she does not. Meena Alexander uses quotations from a surprisingly wide variety of writers belonging to widely different time periods, including Shakespeare, Kalidasa, Kafka, Mahadevi to drive home her messages. She also shows her knowledge of Indian epic stories.

The dark skin and black hair would make a woman immigrant more vulnerable to crimes in the West; but with the same features neither Jay nor Chandu or Rashid face any

difficulty. Once when Draupadi is with her lover Jimmy near pile of coal, a tramp with hair as black as coal, skin mud-coloured and with a bag wobbling on his shoulder comes near them and waving the stick in his hand, and spotting her, he cries out, “Indian, Indian” (MM 91). Jimmy scares him away. If Jimmy has not been there, she would have been another victim of abuse. An Indian woman migrant is not safe even from a tramp. Draupadi, though born in America, is a hybrid and that has brought her bad luck. She is humiliated and denied her love for Jimmy just because she is a hybrid. Her status as a coloured woman complicates not only her relations with the whites, but with the other third world immigrants as well. Thus hybridity on the one hand implies fusion and splitting on the other.

Meena Alexander observes that violence is spread throughout the world. No country is free from it. Not only is violence endemic, but it takes different forms and envelopes all aspects of human society, race, religion, language, region, nation, economics, politics, culture and so on. She does not generate mute-characters, nor are their problems concerned with food, clothes and shelter. Instead, most of her protagonists are alienated from the world, from the society, from their families and even from their own selves because they are not common people but individuals made to stand against the general current of life and who fight and struggle against it to get into the aspired world. Thus they undergo suffering to their personal and social alienation.

The author explores themes of memory, migration, diaspora and displacement through her works. Her creative work lies at the intersection of post-colonial ethnic American, and women's studies. Like her life, this has included multiple border crossings; her poems and novels cross traditional disciplinary boundaries generating

interdisciplinary dialogues. All her poetry has been widely published in the New York Times Magazine. Meena Alexander's genuine diasporic voice expresses her own life's diasporic experiences, uprooting and exile, alienation and identity, migrant memories and traumas, separation and loneliness all the way from India to Sudan and to USA.

Sandhya, even in the beginning did not want to cross borders from Kerala. The writer says about her restlessness after coming to Manhattan "Wings, WINGS, she wrote in the tattered journal Stephen found in her room. She had started writing when her sense of thinking skewed and often the most she could do was walk the streets of Manhattan, stand in traffic islands, or stare into the new shops that had opened on Broadway" (MM 102). Sandhya had no idea of what she was doing. The passersby would give her odd looks which would increase the sense of loneliness inside her. As in India, there was no goddess Kali in front of her, but only a plastic mannequin, with a brilliant smile at a shop.

Several years later and already a mother, Sandhya begins to feel the heavy burden of living in a country which she does not and cannot think of as her own. Her immigrant anxiety, coupled with the death of her beloved father back in India and the rejection by her Egyptian lover in America, lead Sandhya to a nervous breakdown and she tries a suicide attempt in Draupadi's room; however she is rescued by Draupadi. Sakhi comes to know about this incident through Stephen, who does not understand all the reasons behind the suicidal attempt. Sakhi analyses her cousin Sandhya and comes to the conclusion that she has a conflict inside her. She tries to puzzle out and finds out the simple reason; "passion – she loved another man, he didn't want her, she tried to kill herself-didn't pass muster. Immigrants always had their problems" (MM 207). Sakhi

consoles her and tries to support her in her depression, as an immigrant she knows that travelling places is hard and staying still harder.

Sandhya witnesses and hears about many political issues; she ponders over the past. Sandhya went to Kerala on account of her father's illness. "Her father had the radio turned on, something about a lightning storm that had struck the Kerala-Tamil Nadu borders as Rajiv Gandhi was campaigning for reelection" (MM 104). Many of the connections that Alexander weaves into her narrative include the social and political incidents from India and America. Similarly, Meena Alexander talks about the Hindu-Muslim riots in Hyderabad, the threat of Muslim fundamentalism in Manhattan, the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi by a Sri Lankan suicide bomber and racism in New York City.

When Sandhya was in India, Stephen and Dora missed her a little. Sandhya had a hard night in Kerala just because she was away from her husband and her daughter and that aching swelled inside her. Chellama, the servant cried like anything, Sandhya had no clue as to why she was crying. Later she came to know that it was due to the death of ex-Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, who had been assassinated at Sriperumbadur. Sandhya heard the moan of sirens from the back road and the official announcement made by the Congress Party.

The news of the LTTE made little sense to Sandhya. Rajiv Gandhi's death brought tears in everyone's eyes. Rajiv Gandhi's body was broken to pieces because of the bomb explosion. It is described,

Only the nostrils left. Imagine that. Only the nostrils left on the front of his face. That's because of the suicide bomber, Shalini-Shalu-Thanu,

whatever-her name, last seen before Sriperumbadur hundreds of miles and ocean-crossing away, riding a bicycle in the green plains of Sri Lanka, NALAYANI painted in yellow on the mudguard of her bicycle. Did you know that?. (MM 110-111)

Sandhya listened to Chandu and wiped her face with the end of the sari. The next day the TV screen was filled with the state funeral. Even Sandhya's eyes slipped with hot tears but she hid it from Chandu, because he would feel that he had won. Chandu mocked at her saying, "Sandhya, Sandhya mine, New York City has softened you up. No iron left in you. Just tepid Hudson water" (MM 112). He just brushed her cheeks, just to make realize it was a joke. Suddenly, Sandhya thought about Chandu and his business and his studies. He did his MBA in Colombia, ten or twelve years back but he went to fertilizer side and also did import and export. Again Sandhya's thought was tangled upon the plastic bomb that ripped through a young woman's flesh. Immediately her thoughts flew to Nunu, who has become the follower of Pirabhakaran, a Tamil who operated out of Texas selling Gospel and related books. Sandhya has no clue about him and is worried about Nunu's activities. She wonders if there is anything else behind her activities because violence erupts all on a sudden taking people by surprise.

Alexander, in an interview, acknowledges that through Sandhya's character she tried to deal with a "set of voiceless experiences that have to do with the feeling that nobody knows what you are" (MM 84). Even Sandhya's marriage with Stephen has not given her any identity in her adopted country. The author comments on Sandhya's marriage that "it's not partnership for her but something she has drifted into" (MM 84). She traces the origin of Sandhya's sufferings to the haunting memories of her past and

they wouldn't allow her "the space of entry into new life" (MM 84). The conflict inside is reflected through the outward incidents.

Sandhya's troubled 'self' in America seems to find solace when she returns to Kerala, her homeland, to meet her ailing father Varki. At least, she hopes to find meaning in her life as a daughter by helping her father in the hospital. The very idea that she has come to Kerala "to be of help, to be of use" (MM 101) seems to be soul-satisfying to her. In fact, her return to Tiruvella where she is needed as a daughter makes her feel that she has shed a "second skin, an itchy nasty thing" (MM 105). Later she returns to Manhattan with a renewed hope that her life will be totally different from what it has been hitherto.

Sandhya's longing for freedom from the shackles of her domestic life is expressed by her writing for 'wings' - a tattered journal. Sandhya's friend Sakhi involves herself in feminist stuff and she is able to cope with this problem by indulging herself in social work and organizing meetings of the immigrants where they share their experiences. When she takes Sandhya to one such meeting in Columbia University Sandhya feels that she has entered a new country where she requires no "green card or any other sign of belonging" (MM 211). They come to know of an old woman from Lahore, Pakistan who has migrated to New York and has worked as an *ayah* for two decades; she has become jobless when she could no longer work. But she is fortunate enough to find a shelter and is learning to remake her life. This becomes a source of inspiration for other immigrants who are searching for their lost identity in New York. Sakhi's husband Ravi could imagine that if Sandhya had married an Indian and settled in America that could have been easier. Jay and Ravi quite often discuss about Sandhya's affair.

Meena Alexander suggests that Sandhya's awakening comes by her reaction to Draupadi's proposed dramatization of an episode in *Mahabharata* where the mythological Draupadi was saved by Lord Krishna. In fact, Sakhi justifies her choice of this episode by emphasizing that the mythic Draupadi "spent much of her life in exile" (MM 218), similar to their own lives. In an interview Alexander reveals the relevance of the name Sandhya which means 'twilight' in Sanskrit. She gives the name to express the 'in-betweenness' through the character. After this negating activity which marks her transitional stage, the word 'exile' does not mean anything to her. With renewed hope and awakened sense of reality she is prepared to face life with greater confidence and decides to "find her own way" (MM 222).

Sandhya understands that she cannot depend on others and that she has to know and trust herself if she wants to live her life. She does not want "to be suspended in midair...hung up, swaying" (MM 223), but is inclined to "stay close to the ground" (MM 223). The novel concludes with Sandhya's realization that there is a place for her in New York and that "she would live out her life in America" (MM 228). Violence paves way to calmness.

The novel *Nampally Road* set in the post-independence era, begins with an account of Mira's past in England and also unveils the major socio political events that occurred during that period. The historical context of Shilpa Dave:

The novel revolves around a notorious 1978 court case in India in which a Muslim woman was assaulted and raped by a several policemen in the City of Hyderabad in the state of Andhra Pradesh. The ensuing uproar over the woman's treatment resulted in riots and the burning of the police

station . . . The Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, declared a state of emergency in June 1975 and suspended all civil rights for Indian citizens. All forms of media required government approval, and those who did not agree with public policy were imprisoned. In particular Gandhi's actions led to a wide interpretation of the law and a flagrant misuse of power. (15)

The novel also recreates some of the historical events that happened in the 1970s with reference to several incidents that happened on Nampally Road. The politician Limca Gowda with his Ever Ready men occupies ample space in the novel. Another important aspect is that the novel portrays the Emergency period in India. After her studies, Mira starts living in Hyderabad and during her stay, she faces several problems related to readjusting with the Indian society. Once Mira started eating with her left hand by mistake and this shocked many natives who saw it. She says, "I had come to Hyderabad after four years as a graduate student at Nottingham. When I began my English sojourn I found myself a great disadvantage as far as the loneliness of life was concerned. I suffered from dislocation. Somehow I had not gathered into myself the resolute spirit needed for solitary study" (NR 29). Like Meena Alexander, Mira too has studied abroad and studied English literature and there are many other similarities also.

Mira teaches in college and aspires to write poetry and hopes that: "by writing a few poems. . . I could start to stitch it all together: my birth in India, a few years after national independence, my colonial education, my rebellion against the arranged marriage my mother had in mind for me, my years of research in England" (NR 30). But India does not give her any such opportunity to explore. Even though she has become an

adult fully and her mind too grows stronger, she feels that she could not live her own life. Makarand Paranjape, in his article “Hyderabad Exoticised” says,

There are dreams and portents linking Rameeza with Durgabai and the protagonist, Mira, who is a foreign-returned woman trying to find herself. The other main character is Ramu, her lover, an activist who is in the thick of the civil liberties struggle, but who remains strangely opposed to Mira’s writing. Then there is a Swami, a Kabbadi master, and a Roman Catholic servant who wants to emigrate to Canada. Such is the exotic cast of the novel. Finally, an uncertain end. (31)

Mira’s happiness cannot be measured when she gets her job in her native place, Hyderabad. “I’m legit now!” (NR 13) she sings to Siddharth, ‘Little Mother’s eldest son. Mira and Siddharth who belong to Hyderabad become friends in England. Mira feels nostalgic, when she thinks about the protests. She tells him, “You were in that student protest shouting Mrs. Thatcher, Milk Snatcher! Mrs. Thatcher Milk Snatcher! Over and over again. She’d just cut the milk for the school lunches. Your voice was quiet hoarse. And now imagine, you’re giving me directions on how to reach Nampally Road in our own country!” (NR 14) .

Siddharth and Vanessa had met in a local concert, and he does not want to reveal their relationship to his mother, Durgabai. When Mira comes to Hyderabad, she accepts the generous offer of Durgabai to be with her in her house by paying sum of three hundred rupees to cover her meals. Later she becomes happy that she has taken such a decision because it would be hard to live anywhere else in Hyderabad with all the upheavals, riots and commotions.

Limca Gowda, Chief Minister of the state is the representative of many politicians and business tycoons who play their own games in disguise so as to continue in power. The novel is a novel of protest and anger and even at the Initial stage; disagreement is registered through mild protests. The novel tries to prove that the anger of the meek and the humble could rise to the level of mass rebellion, which will acquire the power to ultimately decimate the perpetrators of injustice. The organization of – ‘Orange Sellers’ would stand for every person in the country who is sidelined, whose voices are unheard.

Mira is projected as an independent and self-thinking person. Her illusions about poetry start crumbling quite fast because peace and calmness that could foster poetry are missing there. Lima Gowda, the Chief Minister, with his ambition to gain fame and popularity in Hyderabad approves all forms of coercion and atrocities. His henchmen on motorcycles with iron-tripped lathis, the ‘Ever Ready’ men, help him in this and brutally put an end to all forms of protests and dissidence, even when expressed peacefully, as in the case of the ‘Orange Sellers’ who dared to protest against a new tax levied on them. Ironically, Limca Gowda wears Khadi, representing the cheap and petty politicians who try to copy Gandhiji, but only in attire. The writer says,

Limca Gowda was an ambitions man and wished to turn himself into an absolute ruler . . . The notion of unquestioned power vested in a single man pleased him enormously. Sometimes, at night, he dreamed that he was the old Nizam of Hyderabad, returned in new flesh to claim his kingdom . . . His party which had been voted in four years ago, now ruled with an iron hand. Dissent was strongly discouraged. (NR 4-5)

Limca Gowda assumes an almost Hitler-like persona and suppresses the marginalized. The city of Hyderabad is presented in all its splendor and hues by the writer. Nampally Road, the nerve center of the city is immortalized, with a vivid description of it – the Sona Nivas, the CLS book shop on the opposite side, the flower-seller squatted on the stone steps leading to the book shop, the New Mysore Café with its marble topped tables and Sagar Talkies. The place is portrayed through a mixture of imagination and reality.

As Sachidananda Mohanty in his review points out, “In *Nampally Road*, political power is seen not simply as a fight against tyranny and oppression in society; it is also an attempt to appropriate the power to read and interpret an alien culture for our own ends” (18). It also sets complex issues and offers literary, political and existential solutions. Rameeza Be, a poor Muslim woman has come from mountains along with her husband to watch *Isak Katha* at Sagar Talkies. On March 30, 1978 when she returns from the late night movie show to her home in Gowliguda, she becomes a prey to the drunken policemen. She is gang raped and her husband is beaten to death by the policemen. The Curfew ordered due to the anticipation of untoward incidents, is lifted when there is just twenty four hours to Limca Gowda’s birthday celebration. Ramu and Mira go to meet Rameeza Be through dark alleys and winding ways. Curiously, when they meet Rameeza, she is drawing a picture – almost in a déjà vu manner – where blocks and rectangles make a pyramid where flesh soared out. A replica of what Mira has dreamt about the other day.

Rameeza’s story, spreads through the City of Hyderabad like forest fire. The brutal attack against members of disenfranchised minority triggers a series of violent

events: the police station is burnt down by the angry mob and the city is besieged by riots that bring people together from the lower castes and classes. Rameeza's rape has become a turning point in Mira's life too. Alexander depicts the grim reality of senseless political violence, where the authoritarian rule and reign of the corrupt chief minister Limca Gowda creates a political climate that goes to the extent of curbing freedom of expression. This is where the novel offers a perfect blend of fact and fiction, portraying an India that teems with terror, violence, confusion and turmoil.

Mira observes the poverty and brutality prevailing around her and is filled with pity when she visits Rameeza. She describes the way she finds her:

Her sari was stiff with blood. I could tell by looking. She curled upon the mud floor of the cell just behind the wooden desk. Her face was held up by the mud. In spite of the mosquitoes buzzing over her, both eyes were open. She was breathing in jagged, irregular breaths. I gripped the cell bars and stared and stared at her. (NR 57)

Rameeza is lifted up and taken away as a safety measure and the police station is burnt. Rameeza is taken to the house of Maitreyamma where she is given good rest and medical attention. It is a long and painstaking process but Rameeza finally emerges healthy because of the strong herbal medicines of Maitreyamma. Ramu and Mira visit her there in the house and her pathetic condition touches Mira so much that she wonders if she could give up her own life in order to help her. She identifies herself with Rameeza.

Mira slowly comes to realize her own self. She understands that she is nobody else than an ordinary Indian. She feels that the suffering of Rameeza Be is the suffering

of an entire nation and that her mission in life will be to seek and find a solution to give relief to millions of Rameezas in India. Mira's pride of having her education outside India and the other advantages she has had in life could be nothing if people like Rameeza go on being victimized by the system itself. By returning to India and deciding to settle down permanently here she strengthens her identity. She becomes a full Indian when she understands that her mission in life is to serve India, her motherland.

Mira questions her teaching of romantic poetry in India –“why study Wordsworth in our new India?”(NR 54). She was inspired by the lake poet William Wordsworth in the same way Meena Alexander was also influenced in her life; there are many such authors in both of their lives. Mira's life in England was one of dislocation and exile and this made her realize that “the self is always two. Always broken.” and she remarks “given the world as it is, there's nowhere people like us can be whole. The best I can do is leapfrog over the cracks in the earth, over the black fissures” (NR 92).

The incidents that happen in real India terribly shake her out of her stupor. A new awakening dawns in her and she wonders, “Our thoughts were filmed over with so many images that the real no longer mattered: the march on the street just a day ago, or the rape of an unknown woman, could vanish into thin air, and someone like me could stand in front of a class with book open, mouthing unreal words” (NR 47). Mira joins with her boyfriend Ramu and the students and becomes more or less an activist trying to transform India.

Limca Gowda has transported peasants from country side to the City of Hyderabad in order to add their voices to the citizens. There is a voice, “There is no doubt that all troublesome elements will be subdued. A new world will arise” (NR 76).

The 'Ever Ready' batteries price reaches high and people start to protest against it. Thus, there are so many issues demanding their attention.

When Mira and Ramu go to Maitreyamma's house to see Rameeza, Mira could see the pain in Rameeza's eyes, even though her body is cured by the herbs. She says,

I sensed that she was struggling with something or someone inside her. Over and over this thing pounded at her from the inside and threatened to swallow her back into the silence from which her cries and whispers saved her. All her energy was drained in the struggle. And she did not trust words . . . Nor could one touch her easily, so wounded and torn was her body that touch must surely have been a source of fear. (NR 80)

They try to help her come out of the past. Through Rameeza's drawing she tried to convey something to Ramu and Mira. But Mira shuts her eyes as she does not dare to look at the picture. Rameeza is drawing the great pyramid with stones of flesh that Mira has seen in her dreams. Ramu tells Mira, "Look, she's drawing the cell. It's the police station . . . She's showing us where she was raped" (NR 82). She could not continue her drawing but Mira wants her to complete it.

What John Oliver Perry says in his review in *World Literature Today* regarding the prevalence of violence today is worth notice in this context:

Police gang-rape scandals are an apparently permanent feature permanent feature of contemporary Indian political and social life, as are the oppressive personality cults and tyrannical behavior of local and national politicians with their elite guards, but neither India nor the Third World has any monopoly on such atrocities. So . . . revolutionary socialist

feminists will find Meena Alexander's subtle, deeply evocative, often poetic novel touching their own wounds from generally less violent but surely politically analogous ravages of body and spirit. (365)

Mira feels very low seeing injustice all around. She says "That huge system of hierarchies, it chokes out life. Meanwhile people are beaten and molested all around us. There's terrible social injustice" (NR 86).

Ramu takes Mira to a meeting. One of the speakers comes from the crowd and reiterates the theme of the meeting – that injustice is rampant in Hyderabad. One by one they give their voice against Limca Gowda and his unjust rule. The next speaker is a woman from a village to the north of the city, who knows Rameeza Be's family. She starts speaking about every day atrocities. Even the day before Rameeza's rape, "five peasants were slaughtered before dawn. They had refused to pay taxes to the landlord. Two sisters were raped and buried half alive in the shifting sands off the Arabian Sea. For fear of molestation nurses were terrified to take up their duties in the far-flung villages" (NR 88). Mira is in a daze as she listens to the long list of atrocities.

The woman's voice cries, "Now here she comes, the woman herself" (NR 88). That is old Maitreyi; she is dressed just as Ramu and Mira have seen her, in dark blue rags. She is the only witness for Rameeza's gang rape. That late evening she was coming out after sweeping the police station with her daughter-in-law about to give birth. Hearing a commotion she had hidden behind the gooseberry bush. Though she was not able to help, she followed the policemen into the building where they used Rameeza and threw her into the cell. The old woman knew that Rameeza could feel nothing at all; she comforted her by ladling a few drops of water to her split lips. After listening to the story

of Rameeza a man comes on stage and cries “The time for revenge is past . . . It is time for action. The spontaneous violence we direct against the police station must be cancelled carefully. We must act, my friends” (NR 89).

It is worthwhile to point out what Sachidananda Mohanty says regarding the epigraph of the novel: “The epigraph to the book carries a quotation from Nagarjuna: ‘If fire is lit in Water/ Who can extinguish it?’ Thus, the question of the search for liberation is never seen separate from the issue of social justice” (18). M. Dolores Herrero in his article “Meena Alexander’s Transgressive/Diasporic Female Characters: Healing Wounds and Fracturing the Iconic Feminine and the Language of the Colonizer” brings out beautifully how “*Nampally Road* is concerned with inequalities and injustices still prevalent in post-independence India” and how these women “strive to do away with unfair and rigid patriarchal – and nationalistic – categories and classifications and celebrate a shared and liberating experience among women, especially women who have been suppressed by the combined oppression of religion, patriarchy, and colonialism” (NR 44).

Chapter – IV

Conclusion

The contributions of Indian immigrant writers in America to world literature are really great and the impact of politics on their writing is a noticeable feature of all ages. Though it is a complex relationship between politics and literature, it is the only outlet for the writer to share his/her feelings. Our nation provides an especially clear argument that a country's literature and politics are inseparable and affect each other on many visible and invisible levels. Meena Alexander's works are no exceptions.

Immigrants undergo various displacements in their lives geographically as well as well as culturally. Meena Alexander's novels are of the individuals who are victims of multiple dislocations. Both the novels *Nampally Road* and *Manhattan Music* throw light on the complexity of identity, the hybrid and hyphenated identities as well as the difficulty in finding a sense of belonging.

Multiculturalism is an important subject that has been discussed and highlighted recently in many areas from education to politics. Multiculturalism means the co-existence of different cultures in a society. Moreover, multiculturalism means people of different religions, languages, races and traditions living together. It perceives the differences that a society has and tries to establish sociability on the grounds created by these differences. The main purpose of multiculturalism is to establish a good society that would acknowledge cultural diversity as richness determining its policies in that direction.

The concept of multiculturalism has become a more inclusive term, exceeding earlier usages, so as to incorporate those groups of people who had long resided in the

United States but who had not yet become fully recognized for what they too could contribute to American culture – African Americans, Hispanics, Asian Americans, and Native Americans. These groups were disenfranchised politically as well as socially as one could not find adequate mention of them.

The diasporic Indian writing covers every continent and part of the world. It is an interesting paradox that a great deal of Indian writing covers every continent and every part of the world. Meena Alexander's novels *Manhattan Music* and *Nampally Road* not only talk about people from Asia and America but also England, Africa and so on. The study of diasporic writings reveals that the common features noticed in the writings of the old diaspora and the new diaspora are nostalgia, homesickness, and sufferings due to being far off from their homeland. The mental trauma and anguish caused due to the pull and push factors of belonging to the land of adoption, at the same time retaining their cultural traditions thereby maintaining their attitude towards their motherland, made the immigrants to reject everything Indian glorifying West and criticizing India.

The impact of colonialism on the culture and society of the post-independent Indian milieu has been scrutinized. The efforts of the women characters to travel beyond the social realities provoke conflicts and the writers do not answer all the questions that confront women in this attempt. The generations exposed to the postcolonial era have developed a conflicting set of values along with a sense of liminal rootlessness. The writers have demonstrated that the various conflicts in an individual's experience would help them to shape their sensibilities and transform their spirits into thinking and liberating ones. Most of the women have within them the capacity and power to confront and transcend the debilitating effects of a postcolonial society. Those

who are not able to succeed in this endeavor become the victims. Thus the evolving feminine sensibility of postcolonial India is a syncretism of colonialism and modernism.

With regard to diasporic women the loss of their identity is complemented with discrimination of gender, colour or race; this discrimination becomes a severe moral shock on the immigrants who are driven to feel that they are misfits. Sandhya who has been considering herself a misfit and seeking consolation by dwelling in her past realizes her mistake. When the mutual sharing of experiences take place in the Asian American women, Sandhya has her eyes opened and realizes that she need not care. This awareness gives her the strength to remake her life and she learns the lesson of self-reliance to go on.

This is the valuable lesson Meena Alexander gives to a large number of women in the present world, who remain discontent with what they have and go on complaining about their shortages comparing themselves with other women who have better living conditions. Sandhya is able to reconcile with the life of diaspora only when she listens to the more painful and bitter experiences of other Asian-American women immigrants like Draupadi and Sakhi.

In the sensitive portrayal of contemporary India through her novel *Nampally Road* Meena Alexander discusses feministic and post-colonial issues along with quest for identity. *Nampally Road* is a sensitive portrayal of contemporary India and Mira comes to realize that her attempt to think of writing poetry will be futile and irresponsible when the urgent need of the hour is some drastic, direct and socially relevant action. Durgabai's faith and dedication and Ramu's pulling her into a more meaningful life full of political actions, Rameeza's plight and Maitreyi's healing touch have shown her the way.

Both novels *Manhattan Music* and *Nampally Road* are records of various violent events over the last 70 years. There are references to the Gulf war, Rajiv Gandhi's assassination, Emergency and India's independent struggle. Crime, guns, bombs, rape, terror and horror have become very common words. No place was free from violence which is endemic taking different forms and enveloping all aspects of human life. Meena Alexander shows her concern over the prevailing inhumanity because she wants to arouse the conscience of mankind against all kinds of violence. Moreover, she feels that it is the basic responsibility of a writer or artist to resist violence in whatever possible way he can.

In the novel *Nampally Road* the protagonist Mira through her talks with Durgabai, the 'Little Mother', Chari, the holy man and Ramu, her boyfriend comes to understand the struggles faced by human beings. The struggles bring to light certain important questions and problems that are not easily resolved. Sandhya and Mira's search for identity reveals that they had an inner conflict and finally they come to realize that roots are stronger than the branches and actions are better than words.

Alexander through her novels tries to break the cultural, sociological, psychological and political barriers. Her novels by moving to and fro between the past and the present analyses the issues of culture, gender, diaspora and identity.

In *Manhattan Music* Sandhya's character shows her rebellious nature and she is the one who defies traditional and cultural discourses. She is not able to settle in New York because of her illusions which clash with her real experiences. Her attempts to take refuge in her past recollections prove to be of no avail and she feels that her life is shattered. Like a typical immigrant she also leads a patch work existence containing bits

and pieces of different cultures. Finally she comes to know her place. It takes a long time for immigrants like Sandhya, Draupadi and Sakhi to come to terms with their own life.

Confrontation of women with violence often takes place in writings by women writers. Their response towards it varies differently. Literature very often mirrors social problems; so are the writings by women writers. Justification of violence and revolt against the traditional and cultural impositions are undoubtedly, new modes to respond towards violence. Alexander often echoes the dual effects of cultural and national discourses.

Draupadi in *Manhattan Music* is presented as a mythic character as having the same courage of Draupadi of *Mahabharata*. She shows the threshold of new era and a new beginning. Draupadi serves as Sandhya's alter-ego and saves Sandhya's life from her suicide attempt when Rashid rejects her. Alexander's Draupadi also shows retaliation to revolt and revolution like Draupadi of *Mahabharata*. She says, "Years later I found out about Draupadi's revenge. How she bathed her hair in blood of the man who dishonored her in the court of kings. Her long black hair scratched the ice of Himalayas. Draupadi opened Duryodhana's chest with her nails. . ." (MM 172) While rewriting history, culture and social norms, at times the protagonist of the contemporary female writers are not docile, meek and silent receptors of violence; rather they are bold enough to reject the marginalized discourses as presented by the dominant powers.

An article "Women in the Epics of India" published in *Literary Endeavour* talks about the mental state of women in *Mahabharata*. "This is the best example to prove that women are treated with respect as a mother and ill-treated as a wife"(47). Alexander's Draupadi does not want to accept the religious submission of wives. The term religion is

difficult to define because there are different religions found in both the novels *Manhattan Music* and *Nampally Road*. Religion very often impacts both social and individual levels of life. For Durgabai of *Nampally Road*, religion is holding on to the faith in God, in spite of the odds; for Rameeza Be, being a Muslim woman and living in India, religion proves to be life-denying. Rameeza's case has not been reported by police officers because she is a Muslim, and a woman, economically poor and communally marginalized. The religious phenomenon becomes more complex in the contemporary world, as religious norms are politicized and exploited for individual needs.

Sandhya, tossing between different cultures and men – her Jewish American husband, her Muslim Egyptian lover and her Indian Christian father – is unable to exercise autonomy. Living in the diaspora and marked by her ethnicity, she is split between her duty to her husband, her allegiance to her tradition and her father and the temptations of unbridled sexual desires for her lover. She not only fights the different expectations of men, but also wrestles being an American mother, an Indian daughter and a South Asian Lover.

Violence by men against women is a long-standing problem and remains widespread. Until recently it was sanctioned by the law's indifference because those who are supposed to be saviors turn out to be predators. Hence, it may not be possible to envisage a complete and comprehensive legal response to violence. Rameeza Be is sexually abused by the policemen in Hyderabad and is in mental trauma. Sakhi undergoes suffering due to racial discrimination in New York City. Every form of violence proves to be a threatening to all women and their limits. Sexual violence is particularly insidious because sexual acts are ordinarily and rightly considered a source of pleasure and

communication. It is often unclear to women and to society as a whole as to who has been victimized.

Alexander's works are marked by a sense of loss and the pain of exile and dislocation. Diaspora literature is the literature of the migrants, expressing their experiences and sense of displacement and loss of social constructs like nation, ethnicity, race, culture, language etc., their identity crisis, sense of alienation, nostalgia, loss and emptiness. They experience social isolation, cultural shock and stress. Therefore, in diasporic literature are found the themes of emptiness, frustration, disillusionment, home sickness, racism and discrimination.

When people like Durgabai in *Nampally Road* feel sorry for the modern young girls and wonder about their fate, the new Indian women like Mira try to find their own voices, their own language and their own discourse and representation. The new Indian woman enjoys a greater degree of autonomy and freedom; but this freedom is more often than not illusory, since it can only be exerted within a demarcated space and in certain circumstances, it greatly depends on self-regulation often relying on coercion and complicity when women are spoken for by a patriarchal society, the main aim of it is to keep them silent and under control.

Sandhya's failed suicide attempt can be read as the result of the exhaustion of trying to equip herself with the arms that can combat the bewildering isolation, violent racism and constant pressures of performing ethnicity. Immigrant women like Sandhya and Mira who are unable to heal the gash of dislocation might collapse under pressure and surrender their rights to claim the ground they stand on or the lives they dream of living.

Alexander's empathetic portrayal of Sandhya and Mira exemplifies the immigrant woman's craving for freedom from repressive marital and parental control but also debunks the idea that postcolonial women are subject to authority only by their men at home or in the diaspora. Their story clearly suggests that cross-race marriages need not necessarily be liberating and relationships with white men might not represent the freedom that America routinely touts to differentiate themselves from others.

Adapting life in a new society in a new circumstance with new people is a real challenge to a woman of diaspora. Those women who have courage and hope can only succeed in the host atmosphere for which some support, love and hope is necessary from their loved ones. It is the loss of trust, betrayal, complicated relationships, and lack of understanding, support and communication that destroy the life of a woman. Only after realising, after exploring themselves and knowing what it is to be self-reliant, Sandhya and Mira are able to regain their hope, strength to move on in their life. If a woman has the capacity to reflect, express and explore herself, she would be able to support and help herself.

M. Dolores Herrero in his article "Meena Alexander's Transgressive/Diasporic Female Characters: Healing Wounds and Fracturing the Iconic Feminine and the Language of the Colonizer" talks about "the combination of secular multiculturalism and feminism" which "can contribute to guaranteeing the survival of the female diasporic self in an ever- changing globalized world. . . . One's cultural roots should never be forgotten, since they constitute such an important part of one's identity, all the more in the case of diasporic subject"(32).

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