

The Postcolonial Memoir, Language of Dislocation and Fragmentation in the Poems of Meena Alexander

Priyanka Banerjee^{1*}, Krishna Murari Singh²

¹Student, Department of English, Binod Bihari Mahto Koyalanchal University, Dhanbad, India

²Assistant Professor, Department of English, Binod Bihari Mahto Koyalanchal University, Dhanbad, India,

Abstract: South India originated and the United States of America living woman Poet Meena Alexander was one of the greatest Postcolonial poets and in her writings, the profound presence of the language of fragmentation and dislocation can be found. The most important feature of her poems is the creation of questions through fictionalizing the real-life characters and making them undergo the same realistic experiences. Furthermore, the pain of being a foreign-originated woman in such a racist continent of North America, as well as the discriminations woman poets always have to face are depicted clearly in her poems. This research article is the detailed discussions containing lines and examples of the poems written by Meena Alexander as well as her memoir called “Fault lines: a memoir”. In this study, the existence of the fragmented and dislocated mixture of different lingual and cultural features in her writings is discussed. This apart, the different dilemmas and trauma and the postcolonial global problems are analytically discussed in this study. In the conclusion phase, the philosophical approach, the data collection, and analysis method, and the future scope of this research is analyzed and a plan for the success of the research is made.

Keywords: Meena alexander, post colonialism, diaspora, racism, peace, questions, fragmentation, dislocation.

1. Introduction

Meena Alexander was an Indian woman poet who was born on the 17th of February 1957 in Allahabad. Despite being a Syrian South-Indian girl, the childhood of this lady was spent in Sudan, and the poetic journey started at the early age of ten. The young poet was admitted to Khartoum University in 1964 for pursuing English and French literature. Later, she completed her Ph.D. at the age of twenty-two in 1973, and the topic was “Self-identity in the Early Romantic English Poetic Literature” (Sarkar and Haque, 2018). After this, she came back to India and in her own words; the causes were extreme dislocation and Alienation felt while staying in England. During her five years of teaching in the Universities of Delhi and Hyderabad, the poet wrote three books, and after marrying David Lelyveld, a Jewish American Historian, she moved to America, where she stayed and wrote till her last breath on the 21st November 2018, when

there were 11 Poetic Anthologies written by her, as well as two novels and a memoir. The woman had moved here and there during most of her life. The different cultures, social elements, educational tendencies, languages, and characteristics had affected her, not only as a human being but also as a poet. The proofs of this lifelong turmoil are found in the tendencies of her writings. Her writings show imageries of tension, different lingual usages, as well as cultural titbits (Varanasi, 2018). During her journeys, the poet came to experience a lot of events and issues that ensured becoming parts of her poems. Issues like migration, displacement, femininity, and surviving as an independent Indian woman poet in such a racist country like the United States, were seen in her poetry. Another main tendency that was seen in her writings is the frequency to fictionalize her experiences with a lyrical touch in it and elaborating the issues based on those experiences.

2. Research Aims and Objectives

The main aim of the research is to analyze the tendencies like creating imageries of post colonialism, the language of dislocation and fragmentation, and rhetorical devices in the poems of Meena Alexander. The research focuses on the following objectives:

- To evaluate the hidden pattern of post colonialism in the poems of Meena Alexander
- To analyze the tendencies of using languages of dislocation and fragmentation in her poems by Meena Alexander
- To decipher the rhetorical devices in Meena Alexander’s writings.

3. Research Rationale

Rhetorical devices like alliteration, epiphora, anaphora, as well as usage of anadiplosis, are seen frequently in the poetry of Meena. Alliteration refers to the usage of consonant sounds repetitive. On the other hand, anaphora means the usage of a single word or a phrase repeatedly in the starting points of

*Corresponding author: mukherjee.trayee1989@gmail.com

successive clauses (Alexander, 2018). The question can be assertive, interrogative, optative, exclamatory, and imperative but the usage of the word or the clause should remain constant. On the contrary, in case the repetitive word or the clause is used at the endpoints of the clauses, it is known as epiphora. On the other hand, repetitive use of a word of a line or a clause to begin the next one is known as anadiplosis. The focus of this study remains in analyzing the hidden causes and tendencies of these usages, as well as postcolonialism and dislocation, in the poems of Meena Alexander.

4. Result and Discussion

The post-colonial memoir in the poetry of Meena Alexander Not only a poet but Meena Alexander was an excellent memoir writer and a novelist. The writer in her acclaimed memoir "Fault Lines: A memoir", contains the description of the complexities and the problematic experiences she had faced while her journeys to different countries, precisely, to different continents (Rustomji-Kerns and Sharma, 2018). She had described that she got accustomed to being termed as "Postcolonial Writer", "Third World Woman", "South Asian woman", even as "a female of colour" to bind her within some barriers. Contrarily the lady was fragmented by lifelong journeys, migration from one country to another and multiple fractures and fluctuating cultures that directly affected her writings and her behaviourism too. Not only the Memoir but all the other literary works by her also indicate her continual searching for stability, eternal peace, and a place which she could call her home.

Besides gender discrimination and the racism that pricked her every time she wanted to stand alone and free but also the sexual abuse, that almost all the girls face in their domestic atmosphere are described by her in her book (Patil and Rathod, 2019). She mentioned that her maternal grandfather abused her at an early age, turning from one of the beloveds to a demon she would want to destroy. The question the lady asked at the beginning of the memoir, first published in 1993, was something like "Where did I come from? How did I become what I am?" expressed the hidden inner pain of her failure in finding belongingness. After 2001, when the writer revised the edition of the memoir and published it again, the search for her home was not changed. She was searching her maternal home, not only in Sudan, where childhood was passed but also in Tiruvallur, where her ancestral home was situated, and Allahabad, where she took birth (Parikh, 2021). Another important point regarding her writings was that her writings were never just a personal account drawing, but always she made it connected with the larger global perspective. In the new edition, the newly created dangers that were destroying the world, like terrorism, the attack of 9/11, and the national trauma that shook the United States of America.

The contradictory writings of her, regarding the central role of her maternal Grandmother, Ilya, being the most hated, as well as most admired human, in her life. In her own words, "I could not conceive life without Ilya". In the 2003 version, that man has remained her godfather in reminding her of her roots, her nation, and her family (Thakur and Singh, 2021). Alexander

said about two types of fragmented memories in her memoir, one, according to her, was of "Flesh and Blood", and the other one is typically fragmented. She had mentioned it as "bits and pieces of the present, it renders the past suspect, cowardly, baseless." The eternal pain, the thirst for peace, and the trauma have always depicted the postcolonial disorder in her memoir.

5. Language of Dislocation and Fragmentation in the Poetry of Meena Alexander

The poet Meena Alexander was not an isolated personality from her realistic memoir. It is also discussed in the above sections about her tendency of fictionalizing herself by the central character of her poems, and expressing her pain, her questions through their voice. In her poem, "Fragments in August", she asked, "Why am I a body?", that also reminds the fragmented soul of her described in her memoir (Sulimma, 2021). In the same poem, she said, "Even the Buddleia bush sheds its shadow when the moon glows", which indicates the pricked and targeted existence due to the racism and gender discrimination she had faced all along with her life. In another poem called "Question Time", the poet had said, "Hand raised in a crowded room- What use is poetry?", indicating her dilemma regarding her works. Moreover, this question also showed the everlasting dislocation she felt during her whole youth. The failed search of her for peace, through her poetry, was clear from these types of lines. Running from one continent to another, and failing in gaining the desired stability, the changes of location, the search for the roots, and the discrimination faced in every step were depicted her every time (Menozzi, 2020). Poems like "Dog Days of Summer", "Blue Lotus", and "Muse" indicated her tiredness and the broken soul the writer carried throughout her life.

6. Conclusion and Recommendation

From the above discussion, it is found that a poet is not only affected by the scenes and incidents they come across but also the poetry of a poet is affected by the philosophy and the reaction to the social, economic, domestic, and cultural stimuli of the poet. Alexander was not an exception and her diasporic traveling experiences, the racialized and gendered behavior towards her by the American community, and the initiation of searching the roots of postcolonial history in her mind; everything was to some extent affecting her writings. The crisis a poet goes through those forces them towards writing their own pain through the fictionalization of a character is a very important topic of study. The future research on this topic mostly will focus on a positive philosophical inductive approach that will focus on the analysis of the poetry and the articles about the poetry by Meena Alexander. Moreover, the most important point for the successful conduction of the research will be the secondary qualitative analysis of the literary resources. These resources include the poetry and the memoir of the poet herself, as well as the articles and journals already published about her poetry and memoir. Furthermore, the psychological trauma and philosophical point of view of the poet that affected her literary works need a light of focus upon

them also.

References

- [1] Alexander, M. ed., 2018. *Name Me a Word: Indian Writers Reflect on Writing*. Yale University Press. P.288.
- [2] Menozzi, F., 2020. *Dislocating Time: Nampally Road and the Politics of Non-synchronism*. In *World Literature, Non-Synchronism, and the Politics of Time* (pp. 47-73). Palgrave Macmillan, Cham.
- [3] Parikh, C., 2021. *Hemispheric Imaginings and Global Transitions: The Geopolitics of Asian American Literature in the Americas*. *Asian American Literature in Transition, 1965–1996*: vol. 3, p.345.
- [4] Patil, M.V. and Rathod, R., 2019. *Identity crisis in Meena Alexander's nampally road: an exploration*. *Literary endeavour*, pp.194, 2019.
- [5] Rustomji-Kerns, R. and Sharma, R., 2018. Meena Alexander. In *Living in America* (pp. 85-90). Routledge.
- [6] Sarkar, S. and Haque, A., 2018. *The Home and Identity: A Postcolonial Journey in the Poems of Meena Alexander*. pp. 22-25.
- [7] Sulimma, M., 2021. *Scripting Urbanity through Intertextuality and Consumerism in NK Jemisin's The City We Became: "I'm Really Going to Have to Watch Some Better Movies about New York"*. *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, pp.1-16.
- [8] Thakur, S. and Singh, S., 2021. *Diasporic Distresses and Female Expression in the poems of Meena Alexander and Sujata Bhatt*. *Journal of Contemporary Issues in Business and Government*, vol. 27, no. 1, pp.3804-3813, 2021.
- [9] Varanasi, U.P., 2018. *Women Solidarity and Sorority in the Poetry of Meena Alexander*. Anish Kumar Verma, p.44.