

Meena Alexander's Poetry: Reflection of Diasporic Consciousness

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Meena Alexander (1951) is better known as a poet but she has touched other genres of literature also. Her poems have been translated into several languages such as Malayalam, Hindi, Arabic, Persian, Italian, Spanish and German. She is internationally recognised and reputed poet. She is one of the prominent and genius diasporic poets of the South Asia. She is expressing her own lived diasporic experiences in her poetry. She is known to be having rich multi-lingual and multi-cultural experience. Her poetry revolves around–uprooting and alienation, migration and trauma, separation and loneliness—all the way from India to Sudan and USA. Alexander in her *Fault Lines* has nicely depicted herself as “a woman cracked by multiple migrations, uprooted so many times (who could) connect nothing without nothing” (*Fault Lines* 2).

Her poems convey the fragmented experience of the traveller for whom house is both everywhere and nowhere. Her poems are well composed and with minimum of words. She evokes layers of meaning. For her poetry has important role to play in modern violence world. She considers poetry as a social concern. In an interview with Ruth Maxey in *Kenyon Review*, she argues, “In a time of violence, the task of poetry is in some ways to reconcile us to our world and to allow us a measure of tenderness and grace with which to exist” (Maxey Feb. 2005).

Meen's poetry is marked by diasporic sensibility which finds highly emotion, charge expression in sensual, lyrical and metamorphic language. She has undergone multiple identities in multiple places. Her poems express her own lived experiences. She asks herself: who Am I? Where am I? When am I? These are the questions which all diasporic writers should require to find amidst violent densities of place. In modern times, world has overlapped and one has co-existed in fluid diasporic world. The biggest challenge for a creative writing is to make a real integration between one's personal history and the experiences in alien countries. She argues, “What does it meant to carry one's house on one's back” (*Fault Lines* 193)?

She has to move from one continent to another. She has trampled four continents and has been a frequent visitor to India. This, on the one hand, provides her

immense enrichment, but at the same time a feeling of belonging nowhere, she writes:

Creatures of here and there

We keep scurrying

Madurai, Manhattan, who cares (River and Bridge 25)?

She elaborates “. . . as I have been travelling from one place to another, as something that gives me access. At the same time there is this need always to return, sometimes to a place that is constructed in the mind I mean shelter. Shelters are actual but also become part of what mind makes up, almost imaginary homelands” (Govindswamy 90-100). She lives in the USA but returns to India to mourn its state. She writes in a poem “Fragile Places” the places ‘fragile’ as:

I have come to ground

in my own country

by the Pemba's edge

in a field of golden rice

where shades gather (Raw Silk 50).

She is a women poet, a women poet of colour. In one of her poems “News of the World” she writes about multicultural world in America:

We must always return

to poems for new of the world

or polish for the lack

Strip it

block it with blood

the page is not enough

unless the sun rises in it

Old doctor wilily writes

.....

I get lost underground

By onkee stadium

I stumble out

hands loaded down

fists clenched into balls

A man approaches

much on his shirt

his head, a battering ram he knows who I am

I stall:

the tracks flash

with a thousand suns (Fault Lines 195-99).

River and Bridge contains poems that express nostalgia for homeland, memories of childhood and also

monotonous life of a migrant in the USA. In a poem *Softly My Soul*, the poet describes the American Milieu:
*Softly my soul, softly my soul o so softly
the herons have fled, but the planes keep coming.
Above Liberty's torch the sky is pink
And George Washington would laugh in his sleep
to mark the gazelles on Fifth Avenue
tiny miniskirts hoisted to their thighs (River and Bridge 4-5).*

She has written several poems on the burden of English in one's own language. Although, she is polyglot and knows several languages such as Malayalam, Hindi, Arabic, French and English, but she felt the English had alienated her from what she was born to; the language of intimacy. In a poem "Muse" she laments the ruin of 'our language' and the sense of having 'no home' and says:

*Our language is in ruins
vowels impossibly sharp
broken consonants of bone
She has no home (River and Bridge 24).*

Again, in a poem entitled "Lost Language", she expresses an intense longing for the losing language as:

*It comes in flight
towards me
brushing against
an old stone wall
father's father raised
Language so fine
it cannot hold the light
for long and beats
as water might. . . (River and Bridge 29).*

She believes in universal brotherhood. She wants to see New York apart from discrimination to longing to be faced of the limitations of skin, colour and race. In a poem "Fragments" she writes:

*I want to write:
The treasure bursting into bloom
I felt it, though it did not come in that particular way, the
sentence end-stopped
could sense come in feverish script?
finicky with rhyme, sharp as a wave (Illiterate Heart 27)?*

Again, in "Art of Pariahs" from *River and Bridge*, she deals with the issue of racial tensions prevailing in the United States:

*Back against the kitchen store Draupadi sings;
In my head Beirut still burns-
The unseen of Nubia, God's upper kingdom the Rani of
Jhansi, transfigured, raising her sword are players too.
They have entered with me to North America and share
these walls (River and Bridge 35).*

Meena in her collection, *River and Bridge*, raises thematic and ideological issues about the return to Indian

roots in pure forms, the marginal self who interweaves through both India and foreign location, and the crucial issue of assimilation into American culture.

Thus we can say a multiple layered persona that surfaces in different forces and situations. This process of metamorphosis or of 'relocation' of assuming of one identity after another has been described as a biological analogy of a snake shedding its skin:

*A cobra that pours
Over threshold stones
.....
and we smelt ebony flesh.
The whole darting heat of him,
The blessing (Kavya Bharati 27).*

It can be summed up the words of Mena Alexander that tells how migrant memory shaped and gave birth to her poems, "Home for me is bound up with migrant's memory and the way that poetry as it draws the shining threads of the imaginary through the crannies of everyday life, permits a dwelling at the edge of the world (*Fault Lines* 260).

Here is a writer of promise who colours to add richness to our fabric of multiculturalism. As an expertise writer Indian diaspora she has been making significant contribution.

Works Cited

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