

# **The Poetics of In-betweeness: A Study of Selected Poems for Meena Alexander**

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**شعرية البينية: دراسة في قصائد مختاره لمينا ألكسندر**

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## Abstract:

This paper deals with Meena Alexander (1951-2018), one of the most influential Indian English poets. It focuses on her poetry which explores the relationship between Indian culture and the British culture, as well as the bond between memory and present reality. In this paper, a study was undertaken to investigate Alexander's works that dramatize postcolonial tension and resistance in independent India. The many power dynamics that marginalize individuals in the postcolonial era on the basis of class, culture, gender and religion are discussed. As a result, it is clear that colonial power abuse has vanished, only to be replaced by interior exploitation. This paper also deals with her diasporic experience and her perspectives on creating a home, both living and literary, as well as an independent identity of her own via her literary productions.

**Key words:** dislocation, In-betweenness, hybridity, identity, and nostalgia

## ملخص:

يتناول هذا البحث مينا ألكسندر (٢٠١٨-١٩٥١)، وهي إحدى أكثر الشعراء الهنود الإنجليز تأثيراً. كما يركز على نتائجها الشعري الذي يستكشف العلاقة بين ثقافتين، وكذلك العلاقة بين الذاكرة والحقيقة الراهنة. وفي هذا البحث، تم اعتماد دراسة تتقصى أعمال ألكسندر التي تتعلق بمواضيع التوتر الذي أعقب الاستعمار والمقاومة في الهند المستقلة. تتم مناقشة ديناميات السلطة العديدة التي تهمش الأفراد في حقبة ما بعد الاستعمار على أساس الطبقة والثقافة والجنس والدين. نتيجة لذلك، من الواضح أن أساء استخدام السلطة من قبل القوى الاستعمارية تلاشي، ليحل محله الاستغلال الداخلي. يمكن للقارئ أن يلاحظ تجربتها المتعلقة بالشتات والمنظور المتعلق بها حول إيجاد وطن للعيش وللإنتاج الأدبي، بالإضافة إلى هوية مستقلة خاصة بها من خلال نتائجها الأدبية والشعرية.

## الكلمات الافتتاحية:

Alexander has also been regarded as a typical post-colonial author, owing to her focus on the notion of homeland within the context of diaspora, or dispersion, among peoples formerly dominated by Western powers. Her personal migration from the East to the West in the aftermath of India's independence after World War II influenced this core theme in her works. (yamini,2016:4). Meena Alexander's life and work have been characterized by many, passages, departure, and arrivals. she is a multi-displaced or multi- located poet. (Sabo, 2016:68). Alexandre's dislocations that ended with a tension with several civilizations, have resulted into "many souls, many voices in one dark body" (Alexander,1996:2). So, not surprisingly, She, like many other influential South Asian diasporic authors, exemplifies versatility in an era of migrant flows (Sabo ,2016:68). She appears as a major voice of the female psyche as a result of the trauma of her migration. Having an ancestral home in Kerala, Alexander received numerous awards, and her writings is unmistakably a reflection of her inward sensation (Walia,2017: 639).

The Third Space is a liminal space, the "cutting edge of translation and negotiation between the colonized and the colonizer". The third space "carries the burden of the meaning of culture" is a position where we create our identifications in regard to diverse and often contrasting frameworks of meaning. He suggests that "cultures are never unitary or dualistic, where you and the other are". Rather, there is an interpretation of the process of defining a cultural document or action and it gives rise to a different sense (Bhabha:35-36,38).

The In-Between role is a situation in which a diasporic /migrant person lives while he or she adheres to two spheres. The home of origin is one of them and the host home is the other. There are two types of this attachment. The first form is one that involves a serious misunderstanding about both locations and how to identify with both of them. This confused approach can either lead to integration with the host nation and a sense of powerlessness about everything related to the homeland, or it can lead to an exclusive lifestyle in which diasporic/migrant persons distinguish themselves from the host community and practice their own religious

heritage while fostering a sense of self-importance over the dominant culture. The second form is the hybrid one in which the diasporic individual maintains a great relationship with his or her home of origin and lives and interacts with a sense of duty towards the host community at the same time. That is, they preserve a sense of connection to both cultures and they reconcile the two halves of their hyphenated self (Al-Abass,2019).

Alexander's writing depicts the struggles of immigrants all around the world. She relates her experience in the foreign area in these selected poems. In "Blue Lotus," which is an outstanding text in her collection *Raw Silk*, Alexander presents a female figure who is probably "the poet in an engaging journey into the past" that evolves with familiar milieu and her ancestral land (Alghadeer,2013:92).

Monsoon clouds from the shore  
near my grandmother's house  
float through my lines. (43)

The oscillation of in-between space and past moment, as well as the writing process, is remarkable. The tone implies a bitter "sense of nostalgia" and desire to return to an imagined motherland. These lines, including "Monsoon" rains and gleaming "shores," depict the female land and associates her with her "ethnic" identity. The next lines becomes more complex "than the previous one" since suppressed emotions of rootlessness flow directly (ibid).

Twilight, I stroll through stubble fields  
clouds lift, the hope of a mountain.  
What was distinct turns to mist,

what was fitful burns the heart,  
When I dream of my tribe gathering  
by the red soil of the Pamba River (41)

when "the female" character reaches "the space of memory", her fragmented identities mix between "twilight," "hope," "red soil," and "tribe" on the one side, and wandering "bodies" and flaming "hearts" on the other side, this stanza combines various feelings, even confusing ones. Similarly, Alexander uses "dream as another layer" hidden within the space of her memory to expose a wish to flee" her foreign" country or even relocate the "red soil of the Pamba River." Nonetheless, her wish is "clearly a figment of a daydream" that may transform into a miserable reality (ibid):

I feel my writing hand split at the wrist.  
Dark tribute or punishment, who can tell?  
You kiss the stump and where the wrist

bone was, you set the stalk of a lotus.  
There is a blue lotus in my grandmother's  
garden,  
its petals whirl in moonlight like this mountain.  
(41)

This stanza helps to discover "the space of memory", in the text, exposing more complicated zones of in-betweenness as we progress. Memory finds Alexander within this space of self-identification when communicating with "her woman self-writing" in an alien country. The communication evolves into a pivotal conflict that speaks to internal truths such as the crisis of rootlessness, the racialized fractured body, and the importance of composing between "tribute" and "punishment." As a result, the text oscillates between various position, various identities, and disparate fragments that are extremely difficult to make meaning "together". Additionally, the constant succession "of these 'in-between' alternations" shapes the role of memory in Alexander's poetry, and it emerges "as a hovering site of internal conflict". Along with, the flow of the poem slows as Alexander refers to "a blue lotus" in her "grandmother's garden" ("Blue Lotus,"41), or maybe as she tries to connect "the female" author constant identification with itself and demonstrates how

recollection reconstructs poetry "from the margins of world". Moreover, a vast range of Alexander's works depict "female" characters caught between isolation and inclusion in an unfamiliar world, attempting to make sense of their problematic status as minority migrants. (ibid:93)

Alexander, in the poem "Cosmopolitan," discusses her identity dilemma and the unforgettable past that haunts her split consciousness. She poses three questions that are rife with dubious investigation:

Who knows my name or where my skin was torn?

If I could would I return to Kashi?

And might the queen of trumps intercede for me? (4)

The first question refers to a possible quest for identification and the loss of one's "self." The answer to the second inquiry is structurally implausible. It is not just a doubt but a hopeful longing, but it is not a realistic step toward 'Kashi' to discover the original color. The image of 'Kashi' represents the paradise in the east, the last shelter for those seeking 'moksha,' and a place to restore one's old belief, religion, and perspective. And the third question reveals that the individual who is dislocated, residing in a position of in-betweenness with double consciousness, is looking for an intercessor to save her from the peril of losing her identity. (Gaspar,2013:25).

On an island on a high room

On a kitchen table, a chopping board (4).

The pictures 'an island,' 'a high bed,' 'a kitchen table,' and 'a chopping board' attract the reader's attention to the foreign or alien life style in comparison to one's starting point at birth. It is obvious that an immigrant is trapped between a free choice and an unchangeable, indelible mark of permanent color, skin, and the innate structure of one's geopolitical and geographical time and space (ibid).

Alexander draws a continually changing view of the sea. She jots down the constant shift in herself:

∴ I have seen the sea changed three times

into a mulberry field and back again into the sea (5).

It is the 'self' that focuses on the constant, upsetting shift in one's personal life. The metaphor of a mulberry field transports you to your raw or original nature and state of being before losing your "self" due to the sea crossing. It also addresses the sense of insurmountable disruption that a distressed person experiences in the universe of geo-emotional space broken life and reveals a person with multiple identity faces through the tunnel of struggle, transition, loss of self, and eternal attempt to escape the ongoing fight of addressing the primal question- who am I? If poetry is a means for expressing one's innermost self, Meena Alexander has used this vehicle as a flying machine to fly from the starting position to various destinations, to attempt to return and perch on an age old tree that acted as a nest building place for several ancestors, to cross the frontier again, and to grab something to remain on in the raft that is now flowing according to the current of water (ibid:26).

Alexander's use of expression to articulate her steady values shows the geo-emotional aspect of living in a changing setting. All of these changes have occurred at various stages of life to leave a clear impression that losing self in new territories, existing in geo-emotional state of mind, searching for belonging, and maintaining old memories in an earthen urn of deep rooted values hold an individual who is still on the move. This power of transition is noticed in her poems and the images she has used throughout, especially the 'water' imagery to express the liminal space or sense. (ibid)

Alexander depicts an experience of hybridity in "Alphabets of Flesh," from *The Shock of Arrival* (1996b), where the literary texts ponder on a crucial tension between an unknown women identity and her mysterious realm (Algadeer,2013:90):

My back against barbed wire  
snagged and coiled to belly height  
on granite posts  
glittering to the moon  
No man's land  
no woman's either

I stand in the middle  
of my life.

.....

Out of earth's soft  
and turbulent core  
a drum sounds  
summoning ancestors. (13)

The previous lines intentionally illustrate "the fusion of the poetic text" as Alexander portrays her "third space" between two contrasting realms, the alien realm of "no man's land/no woman's either" and the native realm of "summoning ancestors." Regardless of their multiple appearance in the poem, the distance between the two environments seems limitless in this Asian American context. Although the 'in-between' style pervades the poetic text, themes do intersect, ranging from isolation to apartheid, "memory", "home", and historical loss. Regarding the "settings and themes", the poet considers different roles. Though the speaker holds in a solitary place "against barbed wire" in the desolate terrain "the ancestors" "stand" and "dance" against a long tradition of "resistance" (ibid):

They rise  
through puffs of grayish dirt  
scabbed skins slit  
and drop from them  
They dance  
atop the broken spurts  
of stone  
They scuff  
the drum skins  
with their flighty heels. (13-14).

The text's linguistic materiality helps to define the poem's in-between template. Words like "coiled," "middle," "turbulent core," "broken spurts," and "skins slit," are used by Alexander to trigger "the hybrid space" and catch the "ambivalent" area, which tracks two foreign physical places



along with the she splits between fractured identifications. As a result, she approaches "the third space" in "a vague hybrid space", adopting an imagined position that may be viewed as "home", or a residing where her lost or, more likely, modern identification is attuned.

## Conclusion:

Meena Alexander has identified herself as a unique force in the field of postcolonial diasporic authors who have portrayed the experiences of life endured in fragments and migrations. From a feminine perspective, she intensely ponders postcolonial diasporic discourse issues such as ethnicity, fanaticism, migration, violence, women, marriage, and discrimination. Her works reflect the use of some of the main principles of postcolonial theory. Thus, the in-betweenness is prominent in Alexander's work and persists into the fabric third space in which the author presents numerous identities that separate her from the limits of particular identification and national conceptions. Hybridity is one of the poetess's most prevalent ideas, which she used extensively in her writings. Alexander's writings are laced with the agony and yearning of reunion. Through her writings, she hopes to alter the course of terrorism and hostility.

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**Note:**

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