

Cultural Hybridity and Politicization of Female World in Meena Alexander's *Nampally Road*

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Abstract: *In the current era, the world seems to give little space for women in terms of freedom and safety. India, the seventh biggest country in the world with the second highest population, has developed so many socio-political problems for itself. Meena Alexander's Nampally Road centers on various issues including feminism, political terrorism and cultural retention. It is a fictional work with different locales that tries to establish identity of the protagonist, Mira, and at the same time discusses the challenges she faces as an immigrant. The novel is set in India, but the Indian culture has been viewed from the lenses of western culture. Mira tries to transmit her knowledge of western literature to the political situation. Her ideas exhibit the amalgamation of both Indian and English cultures. The peace and serenity of this contemporary India is however quickly eclipsed by the infiltration of the new culture and corrupt government. This paper aims to analyse the issues related to women and conflict of culture.*

Key Words: *culture and society, multi-culturalism, violence, immigration.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

The word 'hybridity' stands for an offspring of two different ideas that have been mixed up such as plants or animals, urban or rural, mixed racial or cultural origin and Western or Eastern. Hybridity reflects a conscious discontinuity that comes from immigration and displacement. It is the theory that studies the mixture of identity and culture.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW:

Indian English writing is a colourful spectrum of poetry, drama, and fiction. It represents the transition of India from the colonial to the post independence period. It interweaves the complexity of Indian experience through its regional involvement and international affiliations. It is presented through English and is enriched by the experiences of diasporic writers. The particular identity crisis of the writers and the clash between traditional cultures and western modernity is mostly found in the writing during those days. Even disillusionment creates great literature. One of the greatest impediments in the way of the growth of indigenous literature of India after independence was the dominance of double standards.

3. DISCUSSION & ANALYSIS:

Mira Kannadical is a native writer who is sensitive about the happenings, injustice and suffering around her. Further, her higher education in the land of the colonizers gives her the strength to rebel against the Indian institution of arranged marriages. As a diasporic subject who has returned from the international space, she struggles to reinvent her identity with the package of her diasporic experiences.

In England, Mira enjoys freedom from the cultural and ethnic bond of her nation. As a free diasporic subject, she attempts to define herself in the west. Dislocation and homelessness are the common tenets traced in her stay in Nottingham. She tries to discover her own self juxtaposing it with the culture of the host nation. The protagonist articulates her dislocation and loneliness through her migratory experiences and experimentation that she undertakes to discover her fractured identity. The shift in location makes her have different experiments. She says, "I went to all-night parties with ear-splitting music and blinding lights" (NR 29).

The issue of identity crisis gets more complicated as Mira tries to teach western classics and writers like Wordsworth. These western classics no longer suit the situation on hand. The social upheaval around her disturbs her so much that she fails to explore her identity as a teacher. Though the novel is set in India, Indian culture has been viewed from the lenses of western culture.

Feminism, as a concept, has vastly different meanings in the west and in the east. In the west, Feminism is a movement in itself, extending to the idea of women's suffrage and dictation of the notion of what are women's areas of sovereignty and of seclusion. Feminism in the west has become not merely a demand for the recognition of woman as

individual. A charter asserting that women's role and therefore status should not be confined but made equivalent to that of men. Feminism is a social, economic and political battle for equal rights and the negation of all tradition-associated feminism values. In the East, however, feminism exists only in the term. There is only a nascent awareness that woman is an individual, not subservient to the needs and desires of men, and that alternation of social rules with regard to the status of women is necessary. Far from being a battle, or even a movement, it is only developing awareness. It is found that the literature of women writers more than anything else, reflects the fact-that-it-is-only the thinking woman in India. Feminism is the natural and evolved reaction to the enforced stunting of growth consequent upon the fact of feminine birth.

Meena Alexander highlights the plight of women who are subjected to the dominating mechanism of disciplinary power of patriarchy. They also demonstrate how in patriarchy prison disciplinary and institutional surveillance and employed to-keep women always under control. She also describes the efforts of resistance offered by women, their revolt against gaze. Lydia Sargent, a noted feminist critic conceives patriarchy as a social structure in which women are systematically dominated, exploited and oppressed. It is the striving of men for power and domination over women. Patriarchy considered women inferior, a woman represent the otherness of man and his negative. Cixous's binary analysis provides an excellent basis for the view that women are constituted negatively in patriarchy. She cites a list of binary oppositions: Man/Woman, masculine/feminine, father/mother, activity/passivity etc. Each couple is based on the repression of one of its terms, yet both terms are locked together in violent conflict. Cixous argues that the binary oppositions are heavily implicated and in the patriarchal value system the feminine side is always presented as negative and powerless.

Meena Alexander depicts women characters that are oppressed, marginalised and silenced by the dominant power-structures of patriarchy. Her first novel *Nampally Road*, set in the city of Hyderabad against the background of Emergency, examines the subaltern status accorded to women in patriarchy. Here in this novel, Alexander presents a host of memorable female characters like Mira Kannadical, Dr.Durgabai, Maitreyi and Rosamma etc who fight the evil of patriarchy. Alexander's women characters are strong and assertive. Her character question and challenge all forms of injustice authority that victimised women.

The protagonist Mira Kannadical, who has come after her studies in abroad, is an English instructor at a local college in Hyderabad, who has come after her studies abroad. She is self-respecting compassionate person. Her problem is not marital disharmony, or male domination. As a poet and sensitive individual, Mira is disturbed by the vandalism and crime shown against women by the powers of authority, during the emergency. Beginning as early as a teenager in Khartoum, Meena Alexander goes through the pangs of growing up. The twin process of protesting against and liberating herself from the pressures of femaleness and stepping on the launch-pad as the writers are initiated in her Khartoum days. From her mother, she receives instruction, method and art of recognizing herself as a woman: decorum, perfect, softer dressing learning the trick of silence, of female invisibility. Womanhood in its intriguing aspect and stiff demands posed a formidable challenge to the author.

The protagonist Mira Kannadical, an extension of Alexander herself, is a rebel. After her years of study in Nottingham, the former comes to India. She rebelled against the arranged marriage her parents had in mind. At Hyderabad, she meets Ramu, a fellow teacher and communist activist. She falls in love with him. Mira could not agree with the conventional morality, patriarchy imposed on women. She is frank and unconventional in her attitude towards sex. She submits herself to her lover Ramu without the traditional security of a marriage.

Patriarchy expects a woman to be silent about her sexuality. She should not desire sex or openly speak about it. Unlike many women characters, Mira speaks openly about her sexual desires. She is not a passive participant in the sexual act; instead she takes the initiative. She describes her passion for Ramu. Alexander observes, in India, the elaboration of female sexuality is complex, woven into the fabric of hierarchical society, a colonial sense of maintaining power of keeping order"(NR 82). The release of female sexuality, by openly describing and indulging in it, marks a radical possibility of female independence.

Violence against women is not a private family issue. It is a community and public health issue affecting not only the abuser and his victim but everyone around them. The most common form of violence experienced by women globally is physical violence by an intimate partner. Women aged 15-44 are more at risk from molest and domestic violence. Molest has long been used as a weapon against women. Molest is the fourth common crime against women in India. Crime against women has continued to make headlines in India. Activists argue that legal system is slow to prosecute rape cases, but officials say the number of rape cases have increased because of the awareness on the part of the victims, who come forward to lodge complaints.

The central image of the novel *Nampally Road* is Rameeza Be, a victim of mass rape. The Rameeza Be incident described in the novel is a real event, which happened in Hyderabad in 1978. Instead of the Adiknet police station where Rameeza Be as actually imprisoned, Alexander changes it to Gowliguda police station. She gives a fictional form to a true episode of the rape of a Muslim woman Rameeza Be. On March 30, 1978, when she was returning from a late night movie show with her husband, Rameeza Be was dragged and detained in the police station where she was raped and beaten the whole night. Her husband was beaten to death when he refused to pay four hundred rupees to the police. The

victim in rape is subjected to both physical and emotional assault. Ironically, the portraits of the great freedom fighters of India were only silent spectator of this brutal incident. They are Mahatma Gandhi, the father of the nation, whose life had been an experiment with truth and the other one was that of Mr. Jawaharlal Nehru the idealistic and dynamic first prime minister of India. It was right in front of their portraits, the two vulnerable souls are brutally man-handled. Then there is Maitreyi, the cleft-lipped sweeper woman who rescues Rameeza Be from the police station after the latter is brutally raped by a gang of drunken police men. Maitreyi herself is a victim of society's insatiable greed and want of abuse of power. She was robbed of her land and property because her father did not have the muscle power to fight the tyrannical feudal power. She was an ordinary sweeper woman but in her, she has the fire and determination of snake's eye, when she took charge. Regarding *Nampally Road* and its transnational journey, it seems to lead into Subaltern via reinventing history in presence. Alexander in compliance with the subaltern promoter Gayatri Spivak in which she argues that post-colonial narrative or its voice is signated by the primary—hegemonic context as experienced by Alexander's heroine Mira. Indoctrinated and privileged by her English education, Mira returns to teach literature in India, where she confronts her 'Western/colonial knowledge' with the concrete Indian reality set in concrete historical moments. Alexander places the story Hyderabad in the time of social commotions and riots. Mira is exposed to confront at notions of Western authoritative orders with post-colonial Indian social-political violence and chaos. In her journey into the heart of the Subaltern turmoil, she uses all figures of a guide—a radical Ramu, with whom she develops unconventional and un-Indian Western-like free romance. Ramu, on the other hand, is not a Western liberal hero, rather, he is a kind of disturbingly patriarchal figure, to whom she succumbs, and she doesn't really confront. He, as a true guerrilla-radical, only appears and disappears in her life, but in his every appearance, he is given much uncritical credit by her. Mira doesn't ever question his authority on the surrounding chaotic issues, or his agency. As in ancient and still valid Laws of Manu, where man is treated as the unquestioned God. Ramu-God is uncritically respected and praised by Mira. Nevertheless, Mira experiences a great change; reconnecting with her homeland, she feels estranged. After all, Alexander via Mira's doubts and cultural blocks, calls for vocal leftist skepticism of Western privilege and its loose taxonomy in literary science, historiography and other institutionalized disciplines, Nevertheless, culturally lost and unbelonging Mira observes the riots, violence and social injustice that take place in Nampally Road, Hyderabad. The political turmoil in Hyderabad reflects the city's dismal with the authoritative regime, which is thoroughly corrupt (including a chief representative— the Chief Minister Limca—a businessperson, who fits in the Westernized frame of commercial success, deviated on the ladder of imposed 'colonial hegemony').

Meena Alexander projects her imagination into the portrait of Miral Kannadical, the Western-educated lecturer of English literature in Hyderabad, India. Deterritorialized Mira tries to reinvent, or re-imagine her homeland, the land of her ancestors. She strives to re-discover the complexities of South Asian identity, ethnicity, and gender roles, which she hopes to understand via lenses of her Western education. Mira's journey of rediscovery of self happens via her confrontations with the Subaltern reality: via her witness-like presence in moments of political chaos, via her internal conflicts via her emotional exposures, via her probes of self-identification with other Subaltern and victimized women, and via shock when experiencing intellectual estrangement with her students, when she discovers how inadequate her Western education proves to be. Thus, she feels truly dislocated—Mira resonates with 4 diaspora's sensibility on questions of displacement, and hybrid identity. Mira's hybrid identity concerns her origins of being South Asian and cross-cultural migrant to West; she is the woman of East and West, who meditates on her own roots. Since the novel *Nampally Road* incorporates Alexander's biographical features, perhaps, in her no-sugar-coated narrative Alexander strives to reformulate features of her own personal, ethnic, female, national/transnational identity. Perhaps the text might be read as a certain confession or a path to rediscovery of roots and impossibility to 'cross over', to experience how it is to be marginalized, and unprivileged as her ancestors in colonial times; how it is to be a truly South Asian woman or even a Subaltern woman. Thus, Alexander via Mira's awakening contends to resist and subvert traditionally expected paradigms of female South Asian characters by incorporating transnationality.

Alexander also presents strong women characters in her novel *Nampally Road*. Durgabai amazes everybody by her tremendous power to work. She practices in the old surroundings and does whatever she can do for the poor. She is also very compassionate towards the plight of women who are burdened with unwanted pregnancies. Durgabai is referred to as 'the little mother' by the protagonist. The author seems to imply that India needs the healing touch of doctors like Durgaba. The little mother is a symbolic representation of Mother India. The symbolism is made evident when Durgabai suffers from illness; the city goes through commotion and atrocities carried out in the name of politics. Durgabai also evidences great interest in all the happenings and her attention is wholly dedicated to a long-awaited transformation of India. "A New India is being born" (92) she claims significantly.

4. CONCLUSION:

As mentioned, Alexander focuses on gender inequality too, and she gives it historiographic relevance within the chaotic turbulence or post-colonial chaos and instability of the Hyderabad municipality. Chaos is projected via gender inequality and brutality committed on female bodies, concretely and in metaphors.

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