



CULTURAL INADAPTABILITY AND IMMIGRANT SENSIBILITY IN MEENA ALEXANDER'S NAMPALLY ROAD

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ABSTRACT

Many Asians, especially the Indians immigrate to Western countries for various reasons. The target country for most of these immigrants is the United States as it provides a base for earning more money or higher studies or for professional development. Hence these immigrants happily settle in the alien land with their big dreams. But there will always be nostalgia about their mother land. This is the major problem found in most of the Diaspora writers. Meena Alexander is such a writer who has produced a few novels and poetry anthologies. Her first novel Nampally Road won her wide acclaim as a writer. The novel set in the 19th Century depicts the pathetic condition of people under the power politics of Indian Government. It also throws light on the emergency period and how people suffered during that time. The protagonist Mira Kannadical, returns from England to settle in her native country India. But she faces many critical situations and tries to adopt herself to the conditions that prevail in her native place. This paper is an attempt to express the struggles undergone by the immigrant in her mother land. It also discusses how the immigrant Mira Kannadical was unable to adapt to the situations that prevail in her native place.

Key Words: *Diaspora, Immigrant, Culture, Dislocation, Suffering, Alienation*

Diaspora writers of the past centuries concentrate on the problems faced by the immigrants in the alien land. This is chiefly due to the cultural differences that prevail in the native land and the land they settle in. After some time, the immigrants are able to cope up with the culture of the foreign land but in contrast when they return to their native land they could not adapt to the culture of their own land and they get a culture shock which leads to problems in settling in their own land.

Meena Alexander is a widely acclaimed writer of Indian diaphora. She has to her credit many poetry anthologies, a memoir, essays and novels. Her first novel is *Nampally Road*. In this novel, Mira Kannadical, the protagonist is indistinguishable from the writer, as she attempts



to make sense of her own troubled past and the future she would like to be a part of. The novel has elements of diaspora like immigrant sensibility, alienation, sense of loss, problems faced by the immigrants in adapting to the circumstances in the native country, cultural divergence and so on. It also deals with the issues of contemporary India such as political corruption, colonial education, police brutality, subjugation of women, racial experiences, subaltern voice, history, myth, death, resistance and notions of lost language, etc.

The protagonist Mira Kannadical returns to India after her short stay in England, where she pursues her higher studies. After her studies, she returns to India and settles in Hyderabad, her native place, where she joins a college as a lecturer. There she meets Ramu, who works in the same college in another department. Both of them become close as Mira finds in Ramu a suitable friend than others. Most of the diaspora writers are nostalgic about their past life in their native land. This is reflected in this novel through the character of Mira, where Meena Alexander says:

I returned to India determined to start afresh, make up a self that had some continuity with what I was. It was my fond hope that by writing a few poems, or a few prose pieces, 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. (30)

The above lines clearly show the longing of an immigrant to connect with the past life they had in their native land. Similar situation is portrayed in *Nampally Road*, where Mira arrives at Hyderabad with lots of dreams. Mira becomes disillusioned with the picture of India she now resides. A critic remarks on her disappointment in India thus:

Similarly, for Mira-all her hopes and dreams are shattered to see a totally different picture of India which teems with violence, civil unrest, and turbulence. The protagonist struggles to overcome her naive idealism and attempts to recognize and assimilate the changes in her country. (2)

For Mira the India she left was quite different from the India she now lives in. she had positive thoughts about her native country but all her imagination are collapsed by the political turmoil she visualizes in India. For most of the immigrants their native country means a lot like peace, quietness, happiness and so on. So it is quite natural for an immigrant to expect a happy life in their native country. But on the contrary when their expectations are shattered, that leads to the trouble in their otherwise normal life. The only solace that Mira finds in her country is Ramu, her colleague. She is attracted by the revolutionary ideas of Ramu and attempts to reform the society. She feels that there is a wide gap between the India she was born and the India she is now living. She recollects her past life in India as a child,



where she had a carefree life and compares it with the present. Her identity crisis and misplaced reminiscences of the magnificent past and her own confusion is described by Mira:

As for the Indian past, what was it to me? Sometimes I felt it was a motley collection of events that rose in my mind, rather like those bleached stones in the abandoned graveyard the boy picked his way through. 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. And there was no way out. (28)

The novel 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 novel also recreates some of the historical events happened in the 1970's and also 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 Emergency period in India.

Mira begins to question her own perceptions and writings in an environment where poverty and misery co-exist with an extravagant display of power and wealth. This becomes a major element that creates an aversion in Mira, who begins to doubt her own writing and she also questions her perception of life. Finally she realizes much to her disappointment, that her world of writing will not bring her to any positive position.

When the turmoil within Mira stops and becomes composed and recollects, "when I began my English sojourn I found myself at a great disadvantage as far as the loneliness of life was concerned. I suffered from dislocation" (29). The words of Mira prove that alienation and dislocation of self are common problems faced by the immigrants. Besides the immigrants are also troubled as they are unable to adapt to the new situation that prevail in their native land. Hence, the immigrants become dislocated and this becomes a major problem for their survival as they feel alienated in their own land.

Mira too is not an exception as she questions her teaching of romantic poetry in India, "why study Wordsworth in our new India?"(54), is a question she poses to her students in the chapter titled "Wordsworth in Hyderabad." This gives the readers an idea about her originality of thoughts and as an immigrant she has not adopted the alien Culture and forgot her native culture. 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 that "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"(92). Unmistakably demonstrates the power to adapt to any circumstances in her mother land. The writer finds comfort in the alien land but is unable to adapt in her native land. This is reflected through her words, where she says:



(In the) British culture . . . I always felt that what I really was, was being left out as an Indian woman and also as someone . . . from the third world . . . I couldn't have survived in England. And not because of anything in other people; I felt that I had to go back to India. (Alexander Dispatch 25)

An effort to place Meena Alexander as a diaspore writer leads to the conclusion that she is the inseparable part of the tradition with some distinctive features. Her novels have a wide range of reference because of her short stays in foreign countries for many years and yet her roots are firmly planted in her native soil, Kerala. A strong political awareness is the striking feature of her works. She persists that; "It must be possible for all human beings to struggle towards equality and social justice, to live in a world without unnecessary suffering" (Alexander FL 117).

The writer's views shows her multicultural attitude and this further can solve the problem of cultural inadaptability when one embraces multiculturalism.

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