

**NARRATIVE OF LOSS: DIASPORIC DILEMMA AND SELF-CREATION IN MEENA
ALEXANDER'S *BIRTHPLACE WITH BURIED STONES***

Ashu Ghosh, Dr. Nitesh Kumar Baunthiyal

¹Senior Research Fellow (UGC), Dept. of English, MEOFL, H.N.B.G.U. (A Central University), Srinagar Garhwal, Uttarakhand, India, 246174, ORCID <https://orcid.org/0009-0006-9749-8731>

²Assistant professor, Department of English, HNBGU (A Central University), Srinagar Garhwal, Uttarakhand.
Corresponding Author's Email: ashu_22134479002@hnbgu.edu.in

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ABSTRACT

The present paper delves into the narrative of loss, exploring how the poems of Meena Alexander's poetry anthology *Birthplace with Buried Stones* (2013) are a conflict between the longing for a lost homeland, language, culture, identity and the reality of creating a new flexible identity. This dilemma manifests in multiple forms, including cultural, geographical, and personal dimensions. Studying the diasporic dilemma and anxiety in Meena Alexander's poetic oeuvre is significant in exploring how she is loaded with multiple identities and linguistic knowledge; still, she can connect nothing with nothing. This paper also examines the fragmented nature of memory, place, and identity that arises in a diasporic self, raising the question of self-existence. The paper also reflects upon historical and personal traumas, including the effects of colonialism, war, and social injustices that impact one's psyche and create complexities of identities and place in a migrant's life through the lens of Bhabha's hybridity.

KEYWORDS: Diasporic Anxiety; Cultural Hybridity; Fragmented Memory; Reconstruction of Self

*Who can show,
the working of a heart
by tearing it in two?
(Hala, Gathasaptasati)*

INTRODUCTION

An Indian born at Allahabad in 1951, raised in Sudan, educated in England, and married to an American, Meena Alexander accumulates multiple displacements and diverse experiences and thus emerges as a hybrid self. Her memoir, *Fault Lines*, reflects upon the formation of her hybrid identity as she expressed: "For years, she has used her poetry and fiction to piece together a cohesive identity to figure out what it means to be a woman born in India, educated in England, living in America" (8). As a result, the sense of loss and displacement is the fundamental theme of her writings. This sense of 'loss' is clearly highlighted by other famous diasporic theorists and writers, Homi K Bhabha, Salman Rushdie and Edward Said, who believed that the 'in-between space' occupied by the diasporic subject is pregnant with creative possibilities and potentialities in the condition of diasporic dilemma. Similarly, the tension between the 'temporal fluidity and diasporic identity' originates from Alexander's sense of loss of her motherland gave birth to her poetry, which enriches her creativity, as Autar Brah thinks that "Diaspora space is the intersectionality of Diaspora, border and dislocation as a point of confluence of economic, political, cultural and psychic processes. It is where multiple subject positions are juxtaposed, contested, proclaimed or disavowed" (3). The dislocation from one place to other includes Allahabad, Tiruvella, Kozhencheri, Khartoum, Nottingham, New Delhi, Hyderabad, New York; from one linguistic exposure to another such as Hindi, Malayalam, Urdu, French, Sanskrit, Arabic; Crossing one river to another river such as Ganga, Hudson, Nile, Pamba, Mississippi, Mahanadi all over the world; from dhoti, sari, kurta culture to coats and boots culture, creates the sense of nowhere and everywhere of the poet but her poems springs out of the duality of her personality, "The very practice of remembering and rewriting leads to the formation of politicized consciousness and self-identity. Writing often becomes the context through which new political identities are forged. It becomes a space for struggle and contestation about reality itself" (34).

This paper delves into the narrative of loss, exploring how her poems present a conflict between the longing for a lost homeland, language, culture, identity, personal and collective loss, and the reality of creating a new identity that is not fixed but flexible in an alien land. This dilemma manifests in multiple forms, including cultural, geographical, and personal dimensions, in the poems of Meena Alexander. It is significant to study the diasporic dilemma in Meena Alexander's poetic oeuvre to explore how she is loaded with multiple identities and linguistic knowledge; still, she can connect nothing with nothing as she raised questions on her dual identity, "I am a poet cracked by multiple migrations, uprooted so many times(3)... I am a poet writing in America, but American poet-An Asian American poet-a woman poet, a woman poet of color, a South Indian Woman poet who makes up lines in English, a Third World woman poet" (193).

The phrase "Narrative of Loss" is taken from one of her poems "Man In A Red Shirt" of a poetry anthology, *Illiterate Heart* (2002) in which the poet expresses the journey of a diasporic poetess all over the world; as a narrative of loss to articulate the dilemma between loss and gain in a postcolonial diasporic world where one can be loaded with multiple identities and never ending stories of pangs in dislocation: "From Thursday on till never / This Journey is a narrative of loss" (15-16). Thus, this research paper also seeks to study the diasporic dilemma through her exploration

of fragmented memory, place, and identity. In her article, “Exploring Third Space: Place and Memory in Meena Alexander’s Memoir and Poems” A. Alghadeer says:

Straddling between cultures and countries, from India, through Sudan, England and America, is a poignant experience initiating multiplicity and dislocation in Alexander’s past and present, and consequently re-framing both her life and writing career. Against a backdrop of dissimilar geographical territories, Alexander depicts several migratory experiments to convey numerous literary languages expressions of the hybrid languages expressions of the hybrid condition. (86)

Meena Alexander is a multifaceted poet, specifically after the 1970s when the Indian diaspora gained its currency. And after the 1990s movement of globalisation, she was recognized as a distinguished poet. Though she has started her life with memoirs and novels, she is known to the world today because of her hundreds of poems to express the female voice in the field of diaspora. Very little work has been written on the experiences of female immigrants by female diaspora poets, and undoubtedly Meena Alexander emerges as one of the best literary luminaries who pens down the experiences of females through her poetry. She is also known as an acclaimed postcolonial poet who always talks about the ambivalent migrant’s life. She travelled across the world beginning at the age of five. Her poetry springs from her powerful diasporic consciousness, which has been expressed in all the anthologies of poems. The uniqueness of her poems is that these poems talk to the reader about the daily socio-political issues from the perspective of feminist consciousness. Alexander belongs to India, and India was there in her mind and heart, and she represents herself in various facets: postcolonial poet, immigrant poet, female poet, South Asian American poet, and obviously a poet of colour.

The growing complexity of international migration has been both prompted and facilitated by globalization. Apart from the growing disparity in the levels of livelihood possibilities and human security, other factors contribute to the current magnitude, density, velocity, and diversity of human population movements. These include improved transportation, communication and information technology; the expansion of transnational social networks and diaspora formations; and, at times, the emergence of a commercial and often criminal industry devoted to facilitating human movement across international borders. (258)

Born in Allahabad in India, she has always been fascinated by Indian socio-cultural aspects, including language curiosity. Her birthplace is a heartland for Hindi literature, which has great religious significance along with the deep impact of religious festivities, rituals and ‘Kumbha Mela’ etc. Brought up in Khartoum, Sudan and Kerala, all the experiences in different places with multiple linguistic exposure made her one of the perfect diaspora poets. She learned Malayalam from her family in Kerala, Hindi, the major language in India, Arabic and French, the official language of Sudan and English in both the accents of the United Kingdom and the United States of America. In an interview with Russell Leong, upon asking her language of dreams, she replied that “**she could dream in all the languages she had learned so far**”. Meaning sometimes in English, Hindi, Malayalam and Arabic. As a result, these languages mixed at the level of sound in her inner self in such a way that she failed to differentiate among various languages, and this affinity with all languages made her one of the great South Asian poets, because without having a proper understanding of the sound of a language, writing poetry is not easy. She learned several languages, such as French and Arabic, in schools in Sudan. She chooses English instead of her mother tongue, Malayalam, which she neither learned to write nor read, to express her diasporic self. In an interview entitled “A Lonely, Glorious Art: Q & A with Meena Alexander” with Shoba Viswanathan, the poet says, “The borders are not just geographic, they are also within us. They can cause pain and difficulty, but can also grant us the exhilaration and the challenge of self-invention. I write what I have experienced, transmuted of course through dream and the sometimes flowing, sometimes broken syntax of the poem. . . And in that way writing is discovery” (2018). This paper presents a textual analytical approach to explore the diasporic dilemma of the selected poems from the anthology *Birthplace with Buried Stones* through the lens of diaspora.

In the poem “Lost Garden”, Alexander emphasised the cultural dislocation and the sacrifices of the female voice and the creativity of her grandmother. This poem reflects the complex intersections of desire, past, loss and creativity of women who have been marginalised in their own families. Her grandfather’s act of burning the grandmother’s poems reflects a sense of loss and dislocation, both geographically and within the cultural narrative which suppressed the voice of women. Her poems are described as ‘of no climate’ (94) and ‘poor things’(94), symbolizing the difficulties of establishing a sense of belonging in a postcolonial, diasporic condition where identity and belongingness constantly shift. Burning the poems reflects the loss of the female voice within a patriarchal structure. Here, the grandmother embodies the silenced voices of women throughout history as the poet writes: “A space without history- / ...By roots grandfather made a fire, tossed in her poems, / Poor things, penned in black ink. / She had folded them into finicky squares, / Buried them in her jewel case with ravenous rubies” (94).

The sense of loss and diasporic conflict is beautifully expressed in the opening poem “Experimental Geography” of the anthology *Birthplace with Buried Stones* where she explores her migratory dilemma: “I became all at once an American. This is a sentence very hard to translate. / One is singing. Two says: one flows” (3). She further comments on the pathetic situation of a ‘nowhere’ and ‘everywhere’ creature in the same poem “No prophesy. Who can gainsay

a bird singing in a suitcase?” (3). Multiple migrations create in her a personality which carries cracks and fault lines within herself. In the poem “Morning Ritual” she states “Everything is broken and numinous”(7). She connects with her conventional Kerala lineage as she reminds of the tradition of Kerala which reflects her longing for strong roots and its culture, “Tiled roofs, outcrops of stone, flesh torn from mollusks. / Far away, a flotilla of boats. A child sucking stones. / There is a forked path to this moment.” (7). In the poem “Night - Scene, The Garden”, the poet expresses her diasporic dilemma and consciousness beautifully with strong imagery of rootlessness: “No Man’s land / No woman’s either / I stand in the middle of my life (5-8). G. Yamini utters in her article “Dislocation and Diasporic Consciousness in the Poetry of Meena Alexander”:

Alexander’s poem, with their intense lyricism, conveys the fragmented experience of the traveller, for whom the house is both everywhere and nowhere. The landscape she evokes, whether walking on a city street or reading Basho in the Himalayas, hold echoes of otherness.... Alexander’s poetry is uniquely attuned to life in a globalized world and serves as an apt guide, bringing us face to face with the power of a single moment and its capacity to evoke the unseen and unheard. Her poetry initiates movements towards a new perception of women and a romantic re-connection with the feminine unconscious as an agency of restoration. Generally, Alexander distils her poetry out of the present, but the present is constantly inflected by multiple dislocations. (151)

Poetry has been the target of attack by philosophers and many noted thinkers since the beginning. There has always been a question on the usefulness of poetry since Plato’s *The Republic* (written around 380 BC) to Stephen Gosson’s *The Schoole of Abuse* (1579 AD). At the same time, philosophers and writers from each era, like Aristotle, Philip Sidney, John Dryden, Matthew Arnold, T.S. Eliot, and many others, came up with strong arguments to defend it. Representing the diaspora poetry and its relevance, Meena Alexander also firmly stood in favour of poetry when she was challenged in an event where a young lady asked “What use is poetry?” (89) and Alexander wrote the poem “Question Time”, to explain the usefulness of poetry by saying, “We have poetry // So we do not die of history. / I had no idea what I meant.” (89). The poetess expressed her diasporic experiences through verse, which reminds one of Matthew Arnold’s prophecy on poetry in his book *The Study of Poetry*, “The future of poetry is immense because in poetry where it is worthy of its high destinies, our race, as our time goes on, will find an ever surer and surer stay... Poetry attaches emotion to the idea; the idea is the fact. Today’s strongest part of our religion is its unconscious poetry” (44-46).

The other features of the diaspora literature are alien location, dislocation, and relocation, bringing about a crisis of identity where the individual is caught between two worlds, i.e. past and present. Alexander’s poems reflect this tension, portraying the diasporic experience as fragmented and multiplicity, and she connects with her past through fragmented memories. Fragmented memories and multiple linguistic exposures work like a dress of her thoughts to give her a sense of belonging in a foreign land. The poet’s identity is not fixed but fluid, shaped by the different cultures and places she has inhabited. In the title poem ‘Birthplace with Buried Stones’, the poet’s sense of self is deeply intertwined with her fractured memories of Kerala heritage as the poet says: “All this flows into me as mottled memory, / Mixed with syllables of sweat, gashed syntax,” (88). In a poem “Morning Ritual” the struggling person is represented as a metaphor for the poet herself, who starts the day with diligence of study to make ‘a home’ and to create ‘an identity’ of staying at a home of culture and nature: “I sit in a patch of shade cast by a pipal tree. / Each morning I read a few lines from the narrow road to the Deep North. // Where did Basho go? / He entered a cloud, and came out the other side.” (7). Like Meena Alexander, the persona in the poem (symbolized the poetess herself) tries to create her ethnic identity in a state of rootlessness, dislocation and ambivalence.

The sense of belonging to multiple places creates a dissonance, where the poet feels both at home and alienated. This duality is a hallmark of the diasporic experience, where the individual constantly negotiates between the past and the present, the familiar and the foreign. Favas VK observes in “Echoes of Otherness in the Selected Poems of Meena Alexander”:

At the same time as rooting these expressions in the body of her migrant texts, she not only talks the fractures of her self-hood, but also engages into endless scenarios of identity formation. Alexander never isolates herself within the margins of her Indian identity, but rather employs other locales, cultures, and in sharp narratives of a ‘third space’ where self-examination is at the forefront. Doing so, she put together the fragments associated with migrant lives, searches for a more definite integrated identity, and sets out through distinct poetic voices to signify an authentic Asian American identity focusing India Identity. (113)

The fragmented nature of Memory plays a significant role in the formation of the self. The poet relates with her roots through the memories of her father, mother, grandmother, grandfather, Kerala lineage, rivers, the names of places, the foods, the herbs which her grandmother Eli used to make by Turmeric and fenugreek, petals of *neem* (*Azadirachta indica*) for chutney as she recalls in the poem “Migrant Memory”, “When the neem starts to flower, we’ll use the petals for chutney. / Gandhi is coming out of jail soon.” (81). All her poems in this anthology revolve around the past and the present. In an interview with Lopumudra Basu, Alexander speaks about the role of fragmented memory in maintaining cultural heritage, as she says, “The question of memory is one that has always been with me. For people

like us, who are immigrants, it has a particular kind of poignance, a particular kind of cadence one might say. Our memories are what we pass on, they have to enter into a relationship with a very different world. And we have this extraordinary architecture of memory that is part of our psychic lives” (5). She expresses how migrant memory shaped and gave birth to her poems as she says in her memoir *Fault Lines*, “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” (84)

Her memory is wandering from one place to other as the poet herself migrated in multiple places of the world in the poem “Migrant Memory” such as the remembrance of civil war in Sudan described as ‘desert town, / Mirages at noon’ (81); allusion of Marcel Proust; suggestion of parents on how to choose a husband for their girl which depicts patriarchal notions on gender role to confine them within a boundary from their birth itself as she writes “Watching her, amma whispered in the wind- Be real. / Take a husband of good stock. As for love, it’s blind. / Appa’s voice low- No dowry. You’re all you need, / Your own precious self” (81); Grandmother Eli’s gold dress and herbs; the freedom fighter Gandhi released from jail; Eli’s new teapot, pregnancy period and her tree-lined garden; the Italian Mathematician Fibonacci’s theorem of ratio for loss; Fortuny who is a fictional character appears in Proust’s *Magnum Opus In Search of Lost Time*; Syllables of Sanskrit embroidered on her sari to recall her Indian roots “with syllables of Sanskrit.” (82); the nationalist who has burnt the saris woven abroad to protest against British Raj; the imaginary meeting of Her grandmother with Proust in cork-lined room where Proust spent his last three years; the wild wind in Sudan witnessed ferocious civil war where the poet spent her early years, “Grandmother’s gold, sunk in time’s flood, / And in the dusty capital // Where I spent my early years, / A boy soldier bathed in his own blood” (3). The poet has used fractured memory as a metaphor to express her dislocated self in the diasporic climate.

Ancient India’s mythopoeic vision is vividly portrayed in the anthology *Birthplace with Buried Stones*. Meena Alexander places ancient India in the contemporary scenario. The invocation of Indian myths and rituals becomes emblematic of her Indian roots and heritage. In a poem “Cantana for a Riderless Horse”, the context of bomb blast in India makes her reflect upon the clash-ridden world at large as the poetess writes, “The bomb a misshapen egg hurts no one, / The tent in flames // Is a nothing but a rag and bone shop / Sty of memory.” (35). The sight of an old horse tied to a tree triggers up the episode of Ashwamedha ritual in her memory, “In the Ashwamedha rite, a white horse let loose / Roams through territory war must claim. // The horse is sacrifice and a great queen, / I think of Draupadi here, // Lies down beside the smoking parts” (36).

One of the features of Individual history is that it is associated with the myths and legends of the ancient age to transcend time and space. The poem entitled “Mother, Windblown” refers to two historical incidents: first, the year 1230, when Iltutmish completed work on a victory tower, the Qutb Minar of Delhi. In the poem, there is a reference to the Jardin des Vestiges (the Garden of Ruins), which was part of an ancient Phoenician settlement. *Jardin des Vestiges* is in Marseille now. Second, Marseille, the oldest city in France, was founded by the colonists from ancient Greece. The city was extremely proud of its classical civilisation. *Jardin des Vestiges*, or the Garden of Ruins, bears the last remnants of ancient, classical civilisation in Marseille. Meena Alexander visited both places with scenes of migratory civilisations during a long journey. Her wandering soul asks: “Why such wandering- / What has happened to home? // The ruinous everyday, / How to cope with that? // ...To a clot of blood / Drained into a china bowl” (41). Always accommodating herself in the provisional ‘home’, she is well-conversant with the migratory people living in these ancient places of civilisation. In the second section of the poem named “Metal Mirror”, she brings the image of a ‘mirror’: “To turn, / As if memory were a mirror. (how trite it sounds! // ...Racing past women threshing millet / In the city of Iltutmish, in the year 1230” (41-42). In this way, memory acts like a mirror for the poetess in which she sees the reflections of her fragmented self. She takes recourse to writing because it has the power to reform her fragmented self. “... Writing opens up a space that invites movement, migration, a journey” (Chambers 10). The trauma arising out of the in-between land of hybridity unleashes the multiple layers of a migrant’s memory. The loss of time, the discomfiture in living abroad, and the anxiety of all are reflected in the mirror of her memory. In *Fault Lines*, she says, “What I have to learn to remember is the wound I could not carry in memory. I must write it out if I am to go on living. There is no other way” (237). She is relieved to channelise her feelings when, a decade after her memoir, she turns to “flashes of remembrance, bits and pieces of memory...” (237). Her writing serves the purpose of uniting her fragile ‘self’, “...So I can piece my life together again” (237). In a poem titled “Question Time” from *Birthplace with Buried Stones*, she writes down the purpose of writing poetry. It helps revive her history, both personal and political. The revival of the past through the writing of poetry sustains her in the present while she is set adrift from her roots of ancestral land. Thus, it is the reconstruction of her ‘self’.

“Hybridity is the sign of the productivity of colonial power, its shifting forces and fixities; it is the name for the strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal (that is, the production of discriminatory identities that secure the ‘pure’ and original identity of authority). Hybridity is the revaluation of the assumption of colonial identity through the repetition of discriminatory identity effect.” (Bhabha, 159)

In the process of creating a self, individual and collective histories also play a crucial role. Personal and historical events leave indelible impressions on one’s psyche. By portraying the cruel violence of partition in 1947, the poet depicts the mental state of all the victims in the aftermath of the partition in the poem “For my Father, Karachi

1947". Alexander dedicated this poem to her father, a meteorologist at twenty-six, working in Karachi during the tragic partition between India and Pakistan. He (the poet's father) saw a man whose child was burnt with oil while crossing Chand Bibi Road in Karachi; several trees were burnt with petrol; his blue and black hair was crowned with the smoke of destruction and violence. All these tragic and cruel incidents made him so exhausted that he knelt down on a stone, and he lost the ability to walk, as the poet writes: "When you turned away, / Your blue black hair was crowned with smoke--- // You knelt on a stone. On your bent head / The monsoons poured" (85). The form and structure of this poem present multiple fragmented images as it seems that a person is going through traumatic experiences in his life: "Comes bloodletting at the borders, / Severed tongues, riots in the capital, // The unspeakable hurt of history: / so the river Ganga pours into the sea." (88). In an interview with Ruth Maxey in Kenyon Review, she comments on the importance of poems during riots: "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" (25).

The sense of dislocation, alienation, and fractured self is intensified in the poet's poetry. The sense of place is fundamental to female identities, and this is reflected in Alexander's poetry. The different locations she has travelled to nuance the central theme of diaspora and reflect how place can shape one's sense of self. "In *The Shock of Arrival: Reflections of Postcolonial Experience*, Meena shared her diasporic identities of multiplicity as she writes:

'Who am I?' returns – I am what others see me as, but I am also my longings, my desire, my speech. But how is that speech formed when what they see me as cuts against the grain of what I sense myself to be? Coming to America, I have felt in my own heart what W. E. B. Dubois invoked: 'two souls, two thoughts...in one dark body.' But now, at the tail end of the century, perhaps there are many souls, many voices in one dark body'. (1-2)

Her negotiation with the two, the home and host countries, foregrounds the earlier identity. Pragnya Parimita Chayani quotes in "Revisiting 'Indigeneity': A Study of Meena Alexander's Selected Writings: The Shock of Arrival, Poetics of Dislocation and Birthplace with Buried Stones":

Her *Birthplace with Buried Stones* (2013) explores a travel experience which is not only fragmented but also reflects migrants' in-between identity. In-between identity signifies an identity that dwells in between no more belongs to the homeland and has not yet turned a native of the new place. Birthplace with Buried Stones is a poem in five parts. The style of the unrhymed couplet and frequent dislocations allows us a flow of thoughts that is continuous and varied. Non-fixity of poem's lines signifies a flow of discontinuity, rupture or break. A break that migrant suddenly encounters from previous society, system, culture, language and everything rests in memory but never rests in peace. Poems exhibit a traveler travelled from India to New York where reference to mythology and rituals of India are all pervasive. The poems continuously travel between materiality and mystery. (Chayani, 31)

The narrative of loss and memory is also reflected in one of the poems in which She beautifully celebrates her birthplace at Allahabad Hospital which foreshadows the future of multiple migration in the poem "Birthplace with Buried Stones" as she pens down creatively, "I came into this world in an Allahabad hospital, Close to a smelly cow pasture. // I was brought to a barracks, with white walls / And corrugated tin roof,..." (86). Her poems depict the language, culture, foods, clothes, and structure of her home at Tiruvella in Kerala, which she considers as her motherland, the language of Kerala, i.e.. Malayalam is her mother tongue despite being born in Allahabad, a place where Hindi is the dominant language. But she has chosen English language over Hindi and Malayalam to express her diasporic experience in multiple places. It seems that she carries all the writers and their works, language, culture, and food habits with her from all these places where she lived, leading her to a diasporic conflict where she can connect nothing with nothing. Her poems in this anthology are shaped by the context of postcolonial Indian history and her migrant experience. *Birthplace with Buried Stones*, one of Meena Alexander's anthologies of poems, discloses several features of immigrant writers holding the echoes of otherness in the migrated land and homeland. The title *Birthplace with Buried Stones* symbolically represents the memories of the birthplace. She correlates the history with the simplification of birthstones. Dr. N. Gunasekaran asserts in "A Study of Re-Composition of the Past in Meena Alexander's Poem Birthplace with Buried Stones", "The poem talks about the traveler whose dwelling place is nowhere and everywhere, we see the rippling effects of dislocation, ranging widely from her native India to New York city..." (107).

Language is a dress of thought, and for a diasporic poet, it helps shape her identity and belongingness. For diasporic individuals, the loss of language can signify a deeper cultural loss; Meena writes in the English language, but her mother tongue is Malayalam, and it seems a duality exists in herself on the level of sound of a language as she can connect with Sudan when she hears the sound of Arabic words as she spends thirteen years of her life in Sudan. Her poetry often reflects this linguistic loss as she grapples with the challenges of expressing herself in a language that is not her mother tongue. The act of writing in English, rather than her native language, underscores the distance between the poet and her cultural roots. However, she also uses language as a means of reclaiming her identity. Her poetry is marked by linguistic hybridity, where she blends English with Indian words, rhythms, and imagery. This fusion of

languages serves as a metaphor for the diasporic condition, where multiple cultures coexist within the individual. Stuart Hall writes, “diaspora identities are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference” (401). According to him, diaspora experience “is defined, not by the essence or purity but by recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity, by a conception of ‘identity’ which lives with and through, not despite, differences; by hybridity”(402).

CONCLUSION

The poems of Meena Alexander strongly and sincerely urge the readers to think of themselves as citizens of a vast, borderless world. Being a border woman, she finds her identity in traversing time and space. In some of her poems, an elegiac tone can be heard over the fragmentation of herself. But she meticulously collects the fragments to reassemble them in a new form. Her transcultural identity arises out of the multiplicity of experiences. The poet passed away in 2018, but she has left behind her a rich legacy of diasporic writing for the readers and the researchers. Through a close study of her poems, it is critically examined that they intricately weave together a sense of longing for a lost homeland, cultural and personal displacement, and the continuous struggle to establish a new fluid identity in a foreign land. The fragmentation of memory, place, and identity that characterises the diasporic experience is vividly portrayed. It also highlights how the poet grapples with the dualities of belonging and alienation. Furthermore, the examination of historical and personal traumas, including the lasting effects of colonialism, war, and social injustices, underscores the complexities that shape the migrant's identity. This study also reveals how Alexander's poems reflect the diasporic condition in the postcolonial world, where identity is constantly negotiated and redefined in the face of loss, displacement, and the search for self-existence. Her poems are a deeply personal account of the diasporic experience and a collective reflection on the human condition, making her poetic exploration of displacement, trauma, and identity relevant to all migrant's lives. In this way, her poems depict the conflict of navigating between multiple identities and languages, and despite possessing a rich cultural and linguistic heritage, the diasporic life often finds it difficult to reconcile these fragmented aspects of identity into a coherent whole. In short, the poet's self hangs between the two worlds: past and present, mother tongue and English, home and abroad, tradition and modernity, cultural retention and acculturation, memory and reality, which gave birth to her poetry.

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