CHAPTER III
MINOR THEMES

3.1 Racial Experiences

Meena Alexander has faced the threats of racial and colour discrimination. Her poetry presents racism as the threat to immigrant’s existence, a sense of self-worthlessness, and social despair leading to prompt meaningless, hopeless, and loveless life. A feeling of deep social and personal despair is a psychological consequence of this dehumanizing projection. Experience of racial discrimination strikes the self of poet severely and makes the dislocation and alienation more painful. First, she experienced the pains of oppressive racial set up of white supremacy at Clergy House School in Khartoum, Sudan due to being the non-white child. She feels “My blackness stuck out as a stiff halo around me” (FL 113). The experience in Britain was not different. During her stay at Nottingham, she was blamed for publishing articles beyond her area of research by the Head of English Department. The poet perceives this as the matter of discrimination against the woman of colour from the third world. The feeling of discrimination makes her to write in Fault Lines, “I always felt that what I really was being left out as an Indian woman, I felt that I had to go back to India” (Alexander 25). Years later in America, the racial hatred came to her through the angered exclamatory abuse, “You black bitch!” (FL 169). It underlines the marginalization and violence. She ponders over it, “Can I make lines supple enough to figure out violence, vent it and pass beyond” (FL169).

Her works deal with the experience of immigrant who carries the burden of being a racial and ethnic minority in the US. She writes in The Shock of Arrival about experiences of racial victimization “walking down
a crowded sidewalk, descending the subway, there is always one’s own body, which is marked as other in this country. Ethnicity can draw violence. And this is part of the postcolonial terrain, part of sorrow and knowledge of our senses” (Alexander7).

The racial differences are manipulated by the dominant group of people to deny the fundamental rights of others. Unfortunately, the ‘othered’ man is irritated, and offended for the prime crime of his skin because skin is constituted as both an index of identity and difference. The final coda of the poem *Bird’s Bright Ring* speaks about the dark body, the indicator of racial inferiority imposing invisibility on the poet.

*Dark body*

*bright*

*for poetry*

*Sheer ring*

*of clarity (BBR 31)*

The dark body is aware of colour discrimination faced in host land. The sorrow is so bitter that the poet compares herself with craving Sita. Her poetry flourishes out of this pain but intends to destruct the invisibility.

The poem ‘Salt Spray’ challenges the white supremacy. The poem narrates the story told by grandmother. The Jehovah’s rage at the white men drowned the colour of their flesh in the sea. Thus on the one hand poet makes white ‘inferior’ by narrating their punishment, on the other hand keeps the desire to be colourless by drowning the blackness into sea (SR 55). Blackness is the colour of inferiority; so poet tries to keep apart from blackness by casting walls outside. The poem ‘Poem by the Well Side’ captures the experience of being a victim of the racist gaze in a strange country through familiar and intimate images. The racial experiences intensify the feeling of being the stranger and marked as ‘other’. The scars are the outcome of racial victimization, which leads to
the marginalization based on race and ethnicity. It marks the ‘no identity’ of the poet and takes her to the jargon of existential chaos.

The consciousness of blackness was with her from her childhood. Her mother used to rub some herbs on her cheeks so that the sun would not burn her skin while her grandmother would not allow her to go in the sun due to fear of becoming black and not finding suitable husband. Grandmother’s insistence on the colour of skin and instructions not to go in the sun are indicative of the control of female body, construction of gender under patriarchal domination. The wild herb plucked from her dreams (nightmares) becomes a “necklace of grief” and in such painful condition, prayer is the only solution, “Will I kneel in this patch of sunlight? / Will I pray?” (‘Poem by the Well Side’ HoaTD 84).

In the poem ‘Brown Skin, What Mask’, the poet speaks her daughter’s experience of colour discrimination in her drama class. The poet is discontented by the identification of ethnicity on the basis of skin and she wants to burn her skin(RaB11). It expresses poet’s agony, restlessness, and racial victimization.

The racial discrimination affects the loss of identity and drives the poet to invisibility. Finally she does not feel her existence as human beings at all, “I am black / featureless / chock full of poems” (‘Toxic Petals’ RaB 72). The poem ‘Art of Pariahs’ illustrates the racial discrimination and violence. The poet identifies herself with Queen of Nubia and Rani of Jhansi, who have entered in North America only to make the art of pariahs and become the victim of racialized gaze (RaB 79). The black people are treated with the vengeance. The two children spray-painted white and their eyes burning due to spray, a white child raped in a car due to her pale skin, the Indian child stoned by a bus shelter are the victims punished for the sin of their colour of skin (RaB 79).
The racialized gaze is a thematic pattern that recurs with stress in Alexander’s poetry. The poet’s creativity is concerned about the cultural marks on the body of immigrant women. The clothes perform as cultural markers and make women easy prey to racist gaze. While living in gendered and racialized space, the poet finds it difficult to define her Indian identity. Because race is “used almost synonymously with ethnicity, signifies a complicated imbrication of culture and nationality” (Banerjee 31). The poet finds her cultural moorings in Indian culture but when she tries to define her cultural Indian identity, she is mistaken as Arawac or Indian the names confine there is something for us in the white man’s burden (‘Ashtamudi Lake’ RaB54).

The poet describes the white man’s burden under which she looses her identity. The poet knows so many other incidents of racial discrimination such as a skinhead threw eggs at her student and other hurled a bottle.

After moving to the United States, the poet feels bereft of history. She is shivered by her friend’s experience of verbal abuse due to mistaken as Iraqi. It leaves her fractured, imperfect, and torn by racism as she writes in ‘San Andreas Fault’ (RaB 91). The poet sees herself as the stranger body specifically a body belonging to the minority in US. She is the racialized object and is marked as ‘other’. Her sensibility works under the burden of racialized identity and creates poetic record of the horror and devastation of violent conflict of existence on physical and psychological level. The poem ‘San Andreas Fault’ ponders on the brutality of violence in the world and goes on to explore poet’s interest in peace and love. She is inspired by the tradition of medieval Bhakti and Sufi poetry. She connects her poetry to the Saint poets like Mira, Kabir,
and Rumi to give the message of love and peace to the world, what Indian culture has been doing from ages.

Alexander’s poetry is a lively response to social and historical realities. While living in USA, immigrants have to face and struggle through the discriminatory biased views. The skin is the marker of ethnicity. The poet carries that marker with her all the time. Along with skin, her sari identifies her as the female from the third world and with this sense of being born in female and coloured body, she writes in ‘She Hears a Gold Flute’ about her dark body.

Under her coat
the woman wears a sari
under her boots
her skin is dark (IH 7)

The dark skin makes her victim of racialized gaze and makes her heart disappointed. It has been very difficult for the immigrant poet to live in gendered and racialized space where she is marked as other.

‘Kabir Sings in a City of Burning Towers’ presents the racial intimidation to the immigrants after 9/11. For Alexander, wearing sari is the symbol of ‘Indianness’ which she has to throw away after 9/11. Because the poet noted that women are more vulnerable to the racist gaze because of the clothes they wear. The poem presents the threat of violence in the aftermath of 9/11, which forces her to wear the Western clothes on the street, changing into the sari in the ladies’ room of the Graduate Center, where she teaches. Basu and Leenerts comment, “The racialized otherness experienced earlier intensifies during the racial profiling of South Asian and West Asian in the aftermath of 9/11. Alexander’s work provides a launching pad to reflect and act on these problems in US society” (Basu and Leenerts 12).
The poet speaks of her experiences of racial discrimination coming in different forms. She writes in the poem ‘Child, Stone, Sea’, “I sit on a bench marked WHITES ONLY / A bird with no beak is singing to me” (RS 29). The poet wants to keep herself safe from the harm of such treatment and poetry becomes the medium of survival. In such condition, the poet turns to the past to get courage (RS 30).

The poem ‘Petroglyph’ (RS) speaks of the taxonomy riveted by skin colour. The poet experiences bitter stings of racism because she belongs to social, linguistic, and religious minority and more than to ‘unwhite community’. The white hegemony attaches all superior qualities to the white. The Indians are considered as inferior due to their skin and are devalued as useless. Such experiences irritate and disappoint the poet and she raises the question, “Why this taxonomy riveted by skin colour? / Why strip some persons raw? (RS 46). The racial discrimination has been so rampant in the world that even Gandhiji could not escape from it during his stay in South Africa, “He tried to walk the earth / the British made fun of him / also for the way he dressed” (‘Letters to Gandhi’RS 82). Gandhi challenged this discrimination and tried to walk the earth against it. He is the visionary who gave the world message of peace, equality, non-violence, and truth.

3.2 Resistance

Alexander’s poetry writes back to the dominant culture, both in foreign land and in the homeland. Her effort is to distinguish and redefine the ‘self’, which is considered as ‘other’ in dominant cultures. Her poetry presents explorations in the contemporary history and society in the state of transition. Her poetry expresses resistance against all kinds of exploitations such as political and those in the name of religion, race, or gender, or in academic circle. The depiction of the victimized people of all classes exhibit poet’s awareness of the power relations between the
victims and victimizers. Her poetry encompasses humanism, men, and women, civil and political liberties.

The resistance is the product of dissatisfaction and exists in all societies all the time. The colonial resistance has been depicted by the poet in the poems such as *The Bird’s Bright Ring* and ‘Diary of Dreams’. The first encounter between Indians and Europeans, Vasco de Gama and his crew was marked by the violence and the exploitation of the native by the settler. Vasco de Gama and his crew put the ship with all the lives on deck on fire as a signal not to resist. However, the colonizers had to face the resistance from the natives in the form of various movements. Alexander’s poetry discusses in detail about this resistance in colonial period. The Mutiny of 1857 is the first major resistance encountered by British rulers. The poet memorizes the mutiny as a kind of psychological resistance (BBR 19).

The poem ‘Diary of Dreams’ registers the poet’s awareness against colonial oppression and her resistance to it. She discusses about the national freedom movement that is the peaceful resistance to colonizers. This resistance not only affects decolonization but also interrogates the cultural impositions and political burdens. The national freedom movement through peaceful resistance is contrasted with the violent and brutal ways of colonizers.

Before my birth
a republic was dreamt
fought for with prayers,
burnt indigo, and steel (IH 86)

The burnt indigo reminds of the colonial oppression on peasants to grow indigo and Gandhiji’s Satyagraha against it. This powerful tool of resistance fascinates the poet, “I love you Gandhiji / the child cries out, / I want to be a Satyagrahi” (IH 87). The poet imagines herself as a small
child during Gandhian movement and Gandhiji calls her to join him. The Salt Satyagraha and Dandi March are the important events in the National Freedom Movement and show peaceful resistance. The poet protests the colonial tyranny that made the innocent people victim of violence (IH 87). The colonial tyranny of the Black Water punishment is mentioned in the poem ‘Black River, Walled Garden’. “I dreamt that childhood river: / black waters cutting and clashing” (IH 92)

The non-cooperation movement and bonfire of the foreign goods is the way of resistance to colonizers as discussed in the poem ‘Raw Silk’ (RS). Gandhiji’s use of Charaka and stress on the use of Swadeshi present a kind of resistance to the imposition of colonial capitalism and power structure of imperialism. Gandhiji followed the doctrine of ahimsa and Satyagraha. The civil disobedience and non-cooperation movement is an example of mass resistance against colonizers. The poet refers Dandi March or Salt Satyagraha in the poem ‘Rumours for an Immigrant’. It reflects poet’s resistance to the colonial rule (RS 38).

Gandhiji’s peaceful resistance through truth, non-violence, and non-co-operation is the highest point of the resistance to colonialism. The poem ‘Keeping House’ presents the excellent example of resistance to colonizers. The poet’s mother was inspired by patriotism and spirit of nationality. When she was twelve years old studying in boarding school, she expressed her nationalist spirit by, “refusing to sing ‘Rule Britannia’” and “standing up and mimicking / the words, swearing for India” (HOATD 13). Her courage expresses her love for motherland and resistance to colonizers. The poem ‘Prison Cell’ is an imaginative reconstruction of Nelson Mandela’s experience in prison, where “even an ant, a fly / would be a company” (Naik and Narayan 194). Nelson Mandela, ANC leader and African president who fought against white
hegemony is the perfect example of resistance to colonialism. The poet describes him as, “Lord of Oath and redemption” (RaB 7).

However, the substitution of rulers could not affect the welfare of common people. The ruling class, educated people, and deprived masses remained same after the Independence. The newly formed government could not fulfill the dreams of people and brought disillusionment. Their dreams became fractured. The poet writes in ‘Pictures for the Bhabavatha Purana’ (SR32) that joblessness, corruption, and devaluation of values made the life of common people more miserable and wretched. The politicians under their starched Khadi became dacoits, as poet writes in the poem ‘Theatre’ (HoaTD 55). Satpathy writes in review of HoaTD, “. . . the poet’s own country India – reappears for political comments and also figures in personal reminiscences. As her country now has new oppressors, the poet takes it upon herself to speak out” (Satpathy83). The poem ‘City Street’ records the protest of a group of students against the eviction of a woman Susana Acosta Jaafar. The protesters were arrested by the American police, “They make a flag to the nations / They are crying in the street” (RaB 8). However, there is nobody standing for them, “No sickle there, no hammer” (RaB 8). It suggests the lack of communist voice in the capitalist empire of the US. The poet is so upset that she feels “It is as if I had died / as if we all had died” (8) . The restlessness and notion of protest increase in poet’s mind. She wants to resist but cannot.

Political oppression during the Emergency is an example of internal oppression. The poet raises her voice against “Woman of Delhi” in the poem The Bird’s Bright Ring (15). The poet had experienced the Emergency constituted by Indira Gandhi in 1975 and had participated in the demonstrations against it. Meena Alexander speaks against oppressive rule of the Emergency as the loss of democracy and freedom.
The dissatisfaction and resistance of people against the oppressive rule of the Emergency is expressed through Jai Prakash Narain’s massive protest against it. It is also reflected in Alexander’s poetry. The poet speaks about the massive though peaceful procession of Jai Prakash Narain. He was badly injured by the lathi charge of police. He scolded police, “Come and kill me if you like. Is this / the way those who eat the salt of the people / should behave towards the servants of people” (BBR 28). The rebellion of the people against indigenous ruler is treated as resistance to neo-colonization. It emphasizes poet’s political awareness, her interest in leftist philosophy and demonstrations as a way of registering resistance.

The political unrest and shattered vision of the common people’s aspirations make the poet restless. Her understanding of the life of common people in India is shattered by the elites through their exploitation of the poor and misuse of invested political power. The common people are exploited by corrupt politicians to solidify the power of party politics. The range of Alexander’s resistance and protest encompasses “multiplicity of protests against slavery of all sorts-sexual, racial, class and caste based, religious, or merely cultural- and against human viciousness, war, political murders, child and woman beatings, natural disasters, suicides and other deaths by drowning” (Perry 867). Because even after the forty two years of independence, nothing has changed. The corruption and devaluation of values are rampant and hinder the progress as the poet writes in ‘Ashtamudi Lake’ (RaB 51). Corruption and greediness for wealth lead to materialistic ways of life and make people to forget their duty and devotion for the nation.

The poem ‘For Safdar Hashmi Beaten to Death Just outside Delhi’ is about the oppression of worker’s voice by the capitalist and political forces. The poem presents the resistance to the neo-colonialism inflicted
by the new colonizers in the guise of politicians. Safdar Hashmi was involved in the cause of oppressed, underpaid workers and in women’s causes. He was a young Marxist playwright and was beaten to death when he was performing a play ‘Hulla Bol’ in support of the rights of striking workers. Two days after his death, his wife Moloyshree returned to the very spot and completed the interrupted play. He was supporting the miserable factory workers on strike, who were, “Grown men and women / packed by the factory walls” (RaB 19). The other poem ‘Moloyshree’ focuses on the courage of Moloyshree, the wife of Safdar Hashmi. Through these two poems, the poet raises voice against neo-colonial oppression of workers and writers and registers her protests against it. “. . . Alexander finds her site for neo-colonial resistance by posing question of identity formation, conflict between classes, nationalism and its influence on local politics” (Sultana 174).

The exiled experience for the poet is the experience of living with the individual existence away from family support. She has to live under the burden of discriminatory forces of gender, caste, and class. In such situation by propagandizing feminism and speaking against oppressions, the poet faces the challenges of her life. To meet these challenges and cover the experiences of living in Independent India she always carries the revolutionary stance. The poet resists not only the oppressive rulers of the country but speaks against the neo-colonisation and economic imperialism. It is spreading pollution and destroying environment in the name of globalization. The ‘Great Brown River’ is full of dirt, debris of unnumbered lives, tin cans, chipped glass, worn car tiers, and the body of dead hawk. It creates the picture of the exploitation of natural resources by the capitalists of the day, but poet is sure that it will turn back to them. Therefore, poet warns that,

I realize this river
will round the earth,

a whole globe seething

with words

The waves are swords (‘Great Brown River’ HoaTD 81)

The poet has actively engaged herself in grass root movements working for protection of environment. Thus poet deals with the issue of today’s India like political corruption, colonial education, brutality of police, subjugation of women, pollution and communal strife because “Alexander spoke of poetry as the site of resistance” (Mohanty 17).

3.3 Notions of Lost Language

Alexander shares the burden of writing in English, which is not her first language. The question, whether the dominant language, literature, culture, and philosophy can be turned around and used for subversive purposes, has been central to her poetry. Alexander’s both families; family in Kerala and USA, speak English. Besides, Alexander knows French, Arabic, Hindi, and Malayalam. Malayalam was only oral language. She uses English as the medium of expression. Alexander is conscious of her writing in English. In her prose essay entitled ‘Exiled by a Dead Script’ (WP), the poet speaks of two distinct but interrelated terrors of writing in English. Alexander identifies related terrors as “the terror of babble” and “the terror of non-sense” (Alexander WP viii). These terrors arise from the sheer burden of English which is but, “the dead script, the dying letters of an oppressive bureaucracy and its concomitant educational machine, which through the manifold structures of repetition, seek to control the very pith of utterance”(Alexander viii). For Alexander, “English in India is a nowhere language; spatially, it does not belong anywhere” (Alexander ix). Hence the poet who writes in this ‘nowhere language’ in India, feels herself exiled.
Her poetry reflects the violence involved in adopting the English, “She is trained in English elocution by a Scottish teacher, Mrs. McDermott, and the exercises imposed on her to strip the Indian accent from her tongue produce in her a sense of a physical and psychic violence” (Basu and Leenerts 4). Therefore, it is linked to kind of shame and is not the language of her dreams, “As for myself I am aware that the language I use most fluently, that I can shape and work with best, is rarely a language I dream in” (Alexander *The Shock* 39).

The knowledge of English language hinders the free expression of her most intimate feelings. The acquisition of foreign tongue and loss of mother tongue makes it difficult to express her personal self and cultural identity because, “For a diasporic writer, the habitations that language can offer are nothing but imaginary and transient-shelters” (Herrero 29). Therefore, the poet has to pierce through the burden of language to express her truer self. Years later, while talking about the burden of English as expressed in ‘Exiled by Dead Script’ she presents the new approach in an interview with Ayisha Abraham, “I weighed it against the bureaucratic burden of English in India. But now I realize that in so many ways English has been Indianized, it is an Indian language” (Alexander 25).

The poet explains her threat of exile involved in making poetry in English in India. Yet she appropriates it to refuse exile and to subvert the hidden ideology of contemporary Indian English. The poet is aware of the colonial cultural oppression through language. She subverts this burden by rupturing the syntax and reduces the alien tongue to serve her purpose of rebellion and resistance. The poet does not follow any grammatical rules and structures in the poem *The Birds Bright Ring*. The lines of only one or two words seem incongruous but emphasize poet’s subversion of English linguistic patterns.
Loiseau
chante
avec
sa voix
Kala
blind musician
cactus
man gouge
out your eyes
to sing
Durga
purple plum
with
many heads
smile at flowers
Leela
eyes strike
love (BBR 10)

Alexander’s poetry is critical of the consequences of colonial rule. Language is the strongest factor that has contributed towards it. A language is not just a medium for self-expression; it affirms one’s identity, it relates to one’s culture. It is an agency of growth. However, with the appropriation of language, a poet’s self gets distanced from native traditions, culture and thought process. The poet speaks the “speech which is not hers” and tries to articulate her poetic self in a language which “through its syllables / cut her dusty foot soles” (‘prologue’ WP 13).

The anonymities and loss of identity make the poet restless and create darkness in a migrated life. The sorrow is intensified by alienation
caused by loss of language and now she wants to barter the lost joy with the syllables, “Soon she’ll gather all her leaves to her / and barter them for syllables, patiently / counting out the properties of joy” (‘From a Blue House’ SR 12)

The poem ‘Homeward’ focuses on the sense of shame attached to the use of English. The poet finds herself alienated through language, culture, and societal change. It is out of a feeling of alienation and rejection, of disappointment and a sense of loss of one’s identity that she returns to her homeland to close wounds of migration. The sense of loss of mother tongue makes her unable to sustain her selfhood,

My tongue unstops its shame,
my speech halting,
homeward turned in torment
I tell you both my tale (HoaTD 92)

The poem ‘After the First House’ expresses the sorrow of being distanced from the house as well as mother tongue and the culture. The language itself is a medium, which keeps poet connected to her native land and keeps her aware of her Indianness. However, at the second moment poet realizes the sorrow involved in loosing the syllables on grandmother’s tongue. The poet remembers the alphabets of lost mother tongue “I Ai / Ai Ai Ai / not I, not I” (TS 4). In spite of remembering the mother tongue, poet is aware of the fact that “For a writer of the South Asian Diaspora, the habitations that language might provide whatever the language, Hindi, Marathi, Gujarati, English are always conjured up, imaginary shelters that can only be piecemeal”(Alexander The Shock 6)

The poet after spending the shaping years of life abroad feels to be exiled by dead script of English. It results in forced social, cultural alienation making the relationship between the past and present more complicated. The consideration of cultural roots, matrilineal ancient
tradition, and articulation of her Indian sensibility in the colonial language is a challenge, which needs courage and strength, and poet finds it in the ‘ferocious alphabets of her flesh’. The poem ‘No Man’s Land’ speaks of the really difficult and traumatic task of writing in English as it involves psychological violence (HoaTD 29).

The poem ‘Lost Language’ expresses sorrow on the lost language. The poet has lost Malayalam under the influence of English. However, Lakshmi Kannan expresses opposite view in a review ‘Weight of Civilization’, “She (Meena Alexander) writes in a poem strangely titled ‘Lost Language’. Strange because she has not really ‘lost’ it, for how can she? Nor is she lost to Malayalam. It is in her skin, her blood, her eyes, her system. It is all hers” (Kannan88).

English is the language of elites and language of empowerment. However, for the poet, writing in English was a struggle to gain an authority to write because it was not the language of her dreams. Though use of English give her sense of authority and accomplishment by subverting its colonial trappings still “she has felt a definite tension between her writing and linguistic roots” (Rengachari, Manickam 103) as poet writes,

and poems with chill
syllables cluster
like migrant storks
all tender and tense(RaB5)

Though the poet knows many languages, she has realized that English is inevitable and essential for expression. The poet turns to it out of compulsion of expression. Poet is not able to express her sensibility in native tongue that has become mere ‘babbling’, “In Malayalam, Hindi, Arabic, French, / he cried out, turning to English last, / babbling as the continental coast broke free” (‘San Andreas Fault’ RaB 93).
Alexander calls English as “part-time English”, the secondary, other than mother tongue, the language in which she is compelled to express her feelings honestly. She explains in The Shock of Arrival, “I have never learnt to read or write in Malayalam and turned into a truly postcolonial creature, who had to live in English, though a special sort of English, I must say, for the version of the language I am comfortable with bends and sways to the shores of other territories, other tongues” (Alexander11). However, such fluency in other languages does not come without the loss of the sheer intimacy that one has with his own culture, language and homeland as the poet writes in ‘An Honest Sentence’.

A child’s up right hand
stony syntax, slow work

in part-time English
trying to forge an honest sentence

such as
someone has cut her cords

or: someone will swim farther
and farther from what she feels is the shore (IH 53)

The poem ‘Illiterate Heart’ (IH 64) emphasizes the psychic violence involved in learning English language. A harsh introduction to English and pedagogy engenders in her sense of loss of self. The sense of dislocation, alienation, and fracture is intensified further during the course of her education career in England. The poem expresses the poet’s ambiguous relationship with mother tongue Malayalam, refusal to learn its formal script. Still she carries the rhythms of that language which
came to her through oral tradition. The sense of racial and cultural alienation involved in learning the English characters Tom and Bess are introduced at very early childhood, which continues through her life in England and the America. She is able to transform the lived reality of alienation and conflict, the uneasy relationship between the colonial pedagogy and the tradition of formal classical Malayalam into an innovative poetry.

However, Alexander has acquired good English, but the case of Malayalam is different and the Malayalam sounds to her “Slashes of sense, a floating trail” making her to declare firmly amidst of babble of tongues, “I will never enter that house I swear / I will never be locked in cage of script” (IH 67). Though it is easy to teach English, is it possible to educate the barbarians? “Can this make music in your head / can you whistle a hot tunes / to educate the barbarians? (IH61). Moreover, the result of this learning is negative for the poet and so she calls the heart as ‘Illiterate Heart’.

As Raja Rao says in Foreword to Kanthapura, English being a foreign language “was not language of our emotional make up”(Rao ii), so it is necessary for the colonized writer to make the English language able to carry the weight of native sensibility. This happens very successfully in the poems of Meena Alexander. It is the success of colonized writer to use coloniser’s language to express colonized sensibility. However, Alexander considers her writing in English, as kind of shame imposed on her. English is the symbol of colonial burden. Therefore, though she has acquired fluency in English, she was more interested in subverting its colonial trappings because “Sometimes I think of the English language as a pale skin that has covered up my flesh, the broken parts of my world. In order to free my face, in order to appear, I
have had to use my teeth and nails, I have had to tear that fine skin, to speak out my discrepant otherness” (Alexander FL73).

3.4 Subaltern Voice

Alexander projects the voice of the subalterns and represents the history of the masses. Though living abroad, Alexander has not abandoned a revolutionary stance. She speaks of the class struggle and the class conflict through her poetry. She is a Keralite and spent some formative years at JNU. Therefore, she is influenced by leftist thought and sings for the working class in her poetry, “I sing for all those who work head bent / close against the great red sun” (BBR 15).

The poet is more elaborate in describing her identification with the working class and have-nots. The sun is the symbol of feudal power and colonizers. She aligns with the Marxist idea and sings for the proletariat, “For song being labour”. The poem The Bird’s Bright Ring has been full of sad and gloomy tone reflecting death, devaluation of values and suffering of masses as the major concerns for the poet. She hears the voices of suffering people from the depth of darkness and sorrow(BBR 23).The poem compares the birth of these people as ‘endless devastation’ and ‘devastation of mortality’, “Fragile as filament of an egg / Your birth / An endless devastation” (BBR 23).

When the poet was in Hyderabad, her office was just across the wall from a police station. During the Emergency, she could hear sounds and cries of prisoners who were being beaten. She wrote poems on it. The poet expresses sorrow on the sufferings of the prisoners in ‘Within the Walls’ (IRMN 17).The use of brutal force against disenfranchised victims of political oppression during the Emergency and its depiction in the poetry of Meena Alexander shows her understanding of the exploitation of masses by indigenous rulers. The nation brought up on the teaching of
Mahatma Gandhi of non-violence and truth, has been tainted with violence and oppression of depressed classes and women. The common suffering people whom poet calls, “My People” are just “genitals of litter bearers” (IRMN 19). They carry sorrow from centuries and never know pleasure. The poem ‘Stained Words’ (IRMN) depicts those sufferers who are kept on the periphery of pleasure from ages.

The poet is the voice of marginalized subalterns and sings of them in the poem ‘Songs from this Dust’. The miserable condition of the poor children, their parched mouths and cry, the wooden hovels, the gutter and butcher’s daughter are the faces of many subalterns in India. The poor people suffering from hunger and struggling to get food are described by the poet (IRMN 22). The description of a lame man crouched like a torn worm, a deaf man crazed by the traffic, a blind man retching gutter water, a mute woman, two sight worn children are indicative of misery and poverty.

The poem ‘Text from the Middle Earth, for Two Voices’ speaks for the marginalized women who are kept aside and can never breathe the bright element of life. They are the most silenced subalterns. The silence imposed on woman, firstly by patriarchy and then by imperialism, make her just a piece of decoration. In spite of the restrictions and silence imposed on women, they accept and compromise through imagining of their women predecessors and hope that “What kept her from harm shall keep me” (IRMN 26). The poem ‘A Mirror’s Grace’ describes the multilayered and multifaceted sorrows of women. In the form of Cleopatra, the poet reveals the agony of unfulfilled love. Cleopatra who is forsaken at the summit of desire weeps for Antony. After facing such fatal love, she has become mute and poet worries, “Now who should speak for Cleopatra?” (WP18). Being a woman, the poet answers the
question positively and accepts the responsibility of speaking for her. “Though she is mute / I hear her moan” (WP18).

The poem ‘Her Imageless Face’ goes on unraveling the difference between the rich and poor and shows the influence of leftist thought on the poet.

Their feet tap out the tocking of the moon
their sickles whistle through an emptied room
pitched in a darkest corner with a mess
of smokes pots and pan, their crooked rims
grimed with debris
of a million wasted scraps
from meals served straight to swell the bloom
of sleekest fat beneath the softest skin
gartered in silk
in the downy gloom of evening dinner parties (WP 23)

The hungry countless voices of poor, deprived and downtrodden laden with black gloom, marching towards their doom have been bursting like ripe plums in the poetry of Alexander. The gloom is perfumed with smoke and their voices are nothing but wailing of hunger, “a stench of sullen voice / wailing out their hunger / each cry in tune” (WP 24). In the poem ‘Songs without Place’, the poet speaks of tiny girls, knock kneed boys and loss of flesh. The “loss of flesh” here suggests the poverty, hunger and weakness. The people depicted in the poem could not tolerate the vast extravagance of cloth sewn in a better season (WP 38). Poet calls her poetry as ‘song of bread’ (WP 38).

The poem ‘Brief Chronicle by Candle Light’ commemorates the married women burnt in their own homes. The burnt women refer to the burning of brides for demand of dowry and to the tradition of ‘Sati. The poet hears the hundreds of whispering feet and countless women who are...
exploited by the family. The poem expresses sympathy to those women who have to lend their hours in hard work (HoaTD 53).

Gender and race are two basic premises of oppression. Woman’s oppression has been taking place not only in family. They are oppressed and exploited in all occupations. The poem ‘A Time of Difficulty’ (HoaTD) is a flowing meditation on the gendered subalterns. The prostitute’s cry among broken stairwells, the grandmother dealing almost neatly with impending chaos, the half mist that covers the city are indicative of poet’s concern for suppressed classes. The poet presents and resists the thoroughgoing sense of oppression throughout contemporary existence. Whether in America or third world she speaks of the marginalized psyche, which encompasses the women in its hold.

In the poem ‘By the Mahanadi’, the poet describes the washer man who washes clothes in Mahanadi. Fresh clean clothes are piled high in his basket but “his head trembling, a burden / brilliant white / setting right the darkness” (HoaTD 69). Poet’s interest in poor people is expressed through image of Sri Krishna who never discriminated between rich and poor.

Sri Krishna
resting on a poor man’s
thigh,
the bone flute
rejoicing (‘Winter on Broadway’HoaTD 82)

‘The Poem by a Wellside’ depicts the wretched condition of “Women from poor Country” who are beaten by their destiny, people and situation and go to well to end their lives.

By the well side
our dreams
drop their clothes
and flee (HoaTD 85)
In the next lines poet speaks of the burning of women.

The poem ‘Homeward’ written to Jayanta and Runu Mahapatra is the outrageous expression of the oppression and deprivation of the low caste and out caste female. Her sense of feminist consciousness is constantly developing because of being born in female body. The poet presents the picture of her landlord grandfather which intensifies in her mind the guilt of being on the other side of the people whom she is speaking for.

I dreamt of his ivory cane
three feet long
fit to crack a bullock’s back,
stiff gold turban,
a wooden chair with six – foot arms
the servant pulled to the verandah’s edge
as women squatted in the yard (HoaTD 91)

The landlord presents the feudal system which was on the verge of dying in communist Kerala. His activities show the colonialisat attitude to the common people, overseers, and woman who now come to ask for money of their work.

On a whim he turned and spat
past the overseer’s shirt
a woman’s left knee
scarred with dirt (HoaTD 91)

By presenting the picture of her grandfather as a magnificent, typically oppressive landlord, poet chooses to stand by the side of oppressed.

The poem ‘The Travelers’ presents the restlessness of the poet on the misery and poverty of people because those who fight for the poor and downtrodden are nowhere. Children scrabbling in the dirt by the hovel of the poor are contrasted with corrupted world overflowing with
money, “I see movie theatres built with black / money from the Gulf” (TS 9). The sweaty faces of the rich have been mocking the unkempt faces of struggling middle-class and the poor who cannot get food to eat but, “Next door in restaurant / food is served on white cloth / and the remnant flung to the crows” (TS 9).

The poem ‘Aunt Chinna’ speaks about the suffering of women after the death of husband and even under his dominance when he was alive, “After he died / what was left for her” (HoaTD 20). The women are compared with poor cow. They follow the little mottos ‘honour thy mother and thy father’ ‘Home is best’ and such other sayings and suffer at the hands of husband. Sufferings of Aunt Chinna by the hands of her husband Paulos is representative of many Indian women tortured by their husbands (HoaTD 21),“Poor Chinna / snooked like a wild chicken / I hate to think of what happened to her” (HoaTD 21). Chinna was so much shocked that she became mentally disturbed.

The whole world is the subject of poet’s writing. The poverty and hunger are the concerns of the poor people everywhere.

A Muslim woman in Sarajevo shot to death as she stood pleading for a pot of milk a scrap of bread, her red scrap swollen with lead hung in a cherry tree” (‘San Andreas Fault’ RaB 95)

Alexander goes on depicting the hunger, starvation, sorrow and denied justice, which makes the sensitive reader restless.

A man in Somalia locked to his starving child the bone’s right to have and hold never to be denied, parched lips cut and bruised, hunger stamping the light so that fig trees withered
3.5 Death

For Meena Alexander death is the end of life, causing loss of the people near and dear. Although her poetry is not philosophical meditation about death, neither it is about her death nor death wish and attraction of death. Rather death comes as the repulsive element, which annihilates everybody irrespective of his class, gender, and caste. The theme of death comes in her poetry as the cause of loss and lamentation. She has written elegies on the death of her father, grandfather, Allen Ginsberg and an artist Safdar Hashmi who was killed while performing a street play. For her, death means the separation from the beloveds. Even she equals border crossing with death.

The poet commemorates the death of his beloved ones and also the death of the humanity in the 9/11 attack, bomblast, Afghanistan war, Godhra carnage and thousands who were killed in Ayodhya in the name of Ram, Young of Tiananmen Square who became the victim of Chinese government’s repressive violence and many others. Thus, theme of death is not only dealing with the personal loss but the young and innocent massacred worldwide are commemorated by the poet.

In the poem, ‘Her Imageless Face’, poet explains the concept of death as,

the whistling of shrill dreath
laying a hundred singing mouths
to bed
laying a hundred cooking hands
to earth (WP27).

Death is the permanent cessation of life. There are various reasons of death. The people die of aging, suicide, accidents, disasters – natural as
well as manmade, violence, riots, and terrorism. All such deaths find expression in the poetry of Alexander. The poem ‘Eye of the Cyclone’ (SR 31) speaks of the deaths caused by natural disaster. Cyclone plays the gold flute of darkness and parcels out the grief by bringing the death of thousands.

Cold with coastal mud
river to corpses
these implacable souls
glittering through roses (SR 31)

The poem ‘Ashtamudi Lake’ is about the rail disaster in Kerala in which over hundred people were killed, but simultaneously poet has been speaking of the disaster involved in exile. The exile is responsible for disappearing connections, and cultural alienation. So she writes, “Approaching you / I skirmish with disaster // Bridges flee from me” (RAB 49). The girls tossing flowers in water at the death anniversary of passengers correlate death with the certain customs, as death is the centre of many traditions and customs in every culture around the world. Though poet commemorates deaths of people killed in railway disaster, she is having opposite approach towards elegy, “If someone sings / an elegy / I do not hear it” (RaB 49). She concludes poem by calling death as a “conquest”, “The magnets death makes of us all / (the bonus of truth, call it that / if you will), a conquest” (RaB 55).

The death is the final stop of life. It takes all desires to an end. In mind’s eye poet goes on thinking of death. The death, which fractures the light of life, is seen as “a conquest” may be because of the fear of destruction. In Hinduism, death is not an end of life but it is a passage to heaven, the sacred afterlife. It is won by those who live meritorious life. The poet also is aware of this concept and writes about the death of her
grandmother Kunju who died so long before her birth, “she died in the
day / her face set heavenward”(‘Her Garden’ HoaTD4)

In the poem, ‘Narcissus Never Knew Her’ poet considers death as
the hope of new beginning. The birth and death are fundamental patterns
of all life. The cycle of the birth-death and then new birth has been going
on since the creation of the universe. The cycle of birth, growth, death,
and decay is the archetypal cycle of whole universe. Though grandmother
died, she has been revived in the form of granddaughter Meena who
strictly clings to her matrilineal roots.

You have come far enough
Soon it will be dawn
Compose yourself and learn
her death
love
love the form
fatigued beyond the measure (HoaTD 8)

During her journey to Balasore, the poet witnesses the suicide case
on the railway track and describes it as “A bloody death” (HoaTD 65). In
modern life, man has to cope with many forces around him and the forces
within him. His inability to deal with the unfavourable forces of life leads
him to failure causing the sense of frustration. As overwhelmed by the
feeling of nothingness, he finally commits suicide. In the poem, ‘To
Balasore’, the poet describes the suicidal death of man who has leapt out
purposefully and his flesh is scattered on the track (HoaTD 65). The sight
of such suicidal death creates kind of unease and unrest among
passengers making them feel, “Our mortal selves clung close” (HoaTD
65).

The poem ‘My Valley’ and ‘Skin Song’ commemorate the death of
Ilya, poet’s maternal grandfather. The old man left that house with red-
tiled roof without leaving footprints on the sand of time. Death proves the futility of human life.

Sand where an old man
Old as the tree...  
What happened to him?
The wound, the death
the frightened bite of song (‘My Valley’ HoaTD 67)

In her effort to cope with the sorrow of death of grandfather, the poet goes through all kinds of emotions. She becomes sad, worried, and scared. She seems to be shocked, unprepared, and confused. She feels angry, cheated, relieved, guilty, exhausted or just plain empty inside when reminds the death of Ilya in the poem ‘Skin Song’ (RaB 75). For Alexander life is heart’s catastrophe and death is the final script that no one can avoid. The death is not just cessation of life but it brings with it decay, sorrow, violence and destruction making the ash of everything which comes in its fierce claw. Poet feels that there is no grief like death. Therefore, poet feels it difficult to speak about those who are dead, “It seems impossible to begin / to speak of those gone ahead / intact, fired by breath” (‘Deer Park of Sarnath’ RaB 98).

The death is the counterpart of life, stays like a shadow with man rightly from his birth. Therefore, if death is the finale of life, the birth is the first catastrophe from which the beginning of cessation starts. Death is the inevitable and universal fate of humanity but the human beings’ struggle to live makes his existence meaningful. The principle of life and a will to live struggles against the destructive impulses of death as depicted by Alexander in the poem ‘Night Birds’. Due to the court cases of house and frequent visits to Delhi High Court, her father’s health declined, became so weak that he became unconscious one day. Poet’s mother scared of the idea of separating from him, who was for her “My
life, my man” (HoaTD 11). However, her love for her man won in the struggle of life and death,

    He recovered though
    it was his will know
    the will to live
    He held tight and fast
    he held my hand and God did not desert us (HoaTD 11).

Thus, death is related to the fear of separation from beloved ones.

    The poem ‘Elegy for My Father’ describes the intense and very beautiful relation between father and daughter. She had completed this poem after the one year of her father’s death. She describes him as “man for all climates” (IH13). The poet’s grief on father’s death is the emotional, physical, and spiritual reaction in response to death or loss. The mind is filled with the emotions like sadness, anger, or nausea. The poet questions her belief. Her disappointed mind feels strongly interested in religion, and faith, which is the evidence of her spiritual grief (IH 14). Poet’s experience of covering father’s eyes at his grave touches the reader’s heart. The father with white hair is always in her memories and while lamenting on his death she meditates about life.

    If this is the end of life,
    the three priests sang,
    what use are gnanam,
    dhanum, kavya?
    Princes and poetentates
    have come to this
    crawling on all ‘Fours’ (IH 15)

    According to Hindu mythology, Yama is the messenger of death. Everybody tries to avoid or at least postpone death. Yet denial of death is a foolish idea. Being central idea of life, death has been fascinating
human beings from the beginning of universe. The death instinct is so deeply rooted in human mind that nobody can escape from it. Out of such relation with death, everybody tends to know about death, of prophecy of death, which is told by beggar in the marketplace in the exchange of three paise.

Three paise for your fate
before it’s too late, comrades
Before the stars
Set on the iron gates
Yama waits (‘Homeward’HoaTD 90)

A mature understanding of death is related to the conceptual development about how things in world work. It is the fact that death is universal and inevitable. All living things die. Death is irreversible and the dead do not come back, but poet makes the dead people alive through memories in poetry. The causes of death, ranging from the deterioration of old age, illness, accidents, disasters, homicides, violence, and terrorism are well known. The fear of death in Alexander’s mind has been expressed through portraying death of paternal grandfather. Her paternal grandfather was a stern feudal landlord but was very afraid of death and used to pray God in the evening to save him and all. The poem ‘Homeward’ commemorates the death of paternal grandfather. The death is always hard to bear, “So hard to bear, mother whispered / Yesu’s name was on his lips” (HoaTD 92). She provides the picture of grandfather’s death,

That ghostly night
my father’s father died
and all his fathers back of him
arms locked, crying into stars (HoaTD 93)
The poet, who has lost her father, grandfather on both sides, grandmothers, feels cheated out of time she wanted to have with them. The poet grieves on the death of all ancestors in the poem ‘After the First House’ and tries to cope with the loss by expressing grief through poetry. In fact, it is not possible to recover after losing someone you love. However, time is the best remedy and the grief becomes less intense as time passes on.

Through sugarcane stalks
thick and bawdy red
the graves are visible:

grand parents end to end
great uncles and great aunts
cousins dead of brain fever
bald sisters sunk into rage
their brother-in-law
without issue

ancestors all,
savage, sinless now,
their stones stung white with rain (TS 5)

Birth and death are the two sides of coin. The cycle of birth and death is as recurring as the cycle of day and cycle of seasons. Poet also believes in the resurrection of life after death and wishes to see her ancestors born again,

Come catch me now
he sings
Look at me
I am born again! (TS 5)

Along with the ancestors, Alexander has written elegies on the death of some eminent people. The poem ‘Paper Filled with Light’ is
written in memory of Uma Shankar Joshi in which she speaks of the immortality, “But there is no distance between us now; you who lived / by the word are wholly immortal, your lines burnt into history” (RaB22).

‘Indian April’ is an elegy composed in the memory of Allen Ginsberg, one of the staunchest devotees of Krishna. Mira is yet another figure who belongs to this category of “translated lives”. As Ginsberg’s journey to India was a quest for the spiritual uplift and Alexander brings in the passionate devotee of Lord Krishna, Mira as the best model and co-traveller for Ginsberg and for herself too. All of them are the characters in a “narrative of loss”. The poem ends with Ginsberg plunging headlong into deeper waters. (IH 57). ‘Poem in Late October’ written in the memory of Walter Kendrick expresses the helplessness of human beings before death, “There is nothing in my hands / and you must walk through water” (IH 85).

Being the traveler of the world, the diasporic poet of India, has been marked by her strong political consciousness as well as awareness of the worldly affairs. In the theme of death also, her awareness of the incidents all over the world finds expression. The Young of Tiananmen square shot dead by their own government, the civilians killed in Afghanistan and not so long in Hiroshima, the Indian riots of 1947, massacres of 1984, Godhra carnage of 2002, trauma of 9/11, and so many events are seen as the messengers of death compiling the heaps of dead corpses. The poet believes in the elegiac function of poetry. Therefore, she uses it as a medium of mourning for the dead and consolation of self.
3.6 Reclaiming Past through History and Myth

Alexander as an immigrant poet actively engages herself in making and unmaking of history. The two pulls, one of the ancestral tradition and culture leads her to identify herself with the mythical figures like Sita, Draupadi and on the other hand an elite Westernization makes her alien to the indigenous past. It results in dreaming and recovering the history through verses, which is essential in the process of being.

Therefore, the poet’s effort to relate herself to Sita and Draupadi, Kali and Renuka is her effort to adhere to the traditional values through mythological figures. Reclaiming the rich past to claim the superiority is habit of the poet. In the world full of ‘devastation of mortality”, bloodshed and violence, India showed the path of non-violence to the world. Therefore, in the poem *The Bird’s Bright Ring*, poet evokes the ‘righteous rule of king Ashoka’ and calls his capital as “City without sorrows”, “Pataliputra / City of Ashoka / City without sorrow” (BBR 29).

The celebration of the ancient culture and myth gives the sense of superiority to the poet’s othered self. Durga, goddess of power represents the incarnation of the fierce female powers and can provide escape from salt of grief. The goddess has been worshiped as the ‘mother principle’ and the power of creation who can lead to golden future.

Durga
mother
of our ceaseless salt
he kneels
at your feet ( ‘Her Imageless Face’WP 30)

Poem remembers the great women from history and mythology, Draupadi, Queen of Nubia, Rani of Jhansi, “They have entered with me / into North America” ‘Art of Pariahs’ (RaB 79).
House of a Thousand Doors speaks about the two grandmothers and the inherited house as a symbol of rootedness and thousand doors suggesting the multiple migrations, incomings, and outgoings of the poet. The memories and voices of grandmothers are the mediums of reclaiming the past and memories of her childhood in India rather than her present life. The celebration of the political grandmother, who participated in national freedom struggle connects poet with the national identity. It refers to the subverting of the colonial rule under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. The other domestic grandmother, who was the ultimate power in her house, connects the poet with the myth of female power. Such wishful reclaiming of the past, symbolized by ancestral figures of grandmothers is the product of pains of exile and homelessness. It assumes the moral and cultural superiority over the host country. Faced with the rejection the poet clings to her ethnic identity because, “Revival of ethnicity makes bearable to some extent the marginal shadowy existence of these migrants in the new land” (Kirpal 165).

Through the Bhakti poets, Kabir, Meera, Surdas Alexander wants to reclaim the ancient Bhakti tradition of India, the saint poets yearning for the god and their philosophy based on the humanitarian approach of equality for all human beings. She presents the secularist tradition of India. In contrast with the racial experiences in USA, the poet presents these aspects of Indian culture to prove its supremacy. In the poem ‘Kabir was a Weaver’, she speaks of the Indian culture,

I look into the yard,
black tar broken like waves
on the Ganga, Yamuna, Pamba
three rivers I know
flowing through pink silk (HoaTD 79)
Alexander’s poem ‘San Andreas Fault’ in *River and Bridge* ponders on the brutality of violence in the world and goes on to explore poet’s interest in peace and love. She is inspired by the tradition of medieval Bhakti and Sufi poetry and the saint poets like Rumi, Kabir and Mirabai. These saint poets always give the message of love and peace to the world. According to Basu and Leenerts, the poetry of Meena Alexander is “connected to the medieval Bhakti poet, Kabir, who strove to create a more just and peaceful society through his verses” (Basu and Leenerts 15).

The epic *Ramayana* has been celebrated as the text of exile by Diasporas, while they identify the exile of Rama and Sita with their own exile. The song of Rama and Sita sung by fishermen reminds poet of the impenitent loss but at the same time, it reclaims the relation with exile of Rama in ‘Sita’s Story’. As Robin Cohen states, “the Indian (Hindu) Diaspora adopts the *Ramayana* as the key religious text. Because the book’s central theme was exile, suffering, struggle and eventual return – a clear parallel with the use of Bible by religious and Zionist Jews” (Cohen 66). Meena Alexander is not religious Hindu, but still cherishes the shares myth of Indian (Hindu) culture and as a Diaspora when she looks back, she thinks of exile of Rama through immigrant’s perspective and Rama’s subsequent rejection of Sita, through feminist perspective. She writes about the song of fishermen which is about exile of Rama and Sita (TS14-15).

Alexander as a diasporic poet reclaims the history and constructs her own version of history and nation. The depiction of history and political situation with reference to the colonial past and contemporary neo-colonialism is the chief feature of her poetry. The national history and politics in the context of neo-colonialist oppression play very important role.
The poet promotes the sense of nationhood and superior cultural legacy. By claiming past history Meena Alexander writes to empower local traditions, culture and institutions depreciated by colonial past. Her nationalistic writing has enabled her to rise up against domination experienced in exiled life. In the poem ‘Diary of Dreams’ poet imagines herself as a small child during Gandhian movement and Gandhiji calls her to join him, “he calls to the girl / Here, come / make salt with me!” (IH87). By recalling the Salt Satyagraha and Dandi March an important events in the National Freedom Movement, she asserts the significance of peaceful Indian resistance in contrast to other bloody revolutions in the world.

Meena Alexander shares the Indian culture in her poetry continuously. She reflects on the philosophy of Sankaracharya, interrogating “Is the world a forest on fire?” as Sankara Said. The world is just a forest on fire, which makes the poet like those trees “that have no provenance”. Poet has lost her provenance “Being neither here nor there” as written in “Landscape with Door’ (RAB 35). Suffering from the pain and violence of dislocation poet roots herself repeatedly in early life of Kerala. She revises the bygone childhood as the source of reclaiming the past and “History, myth and memory interact as she recreates strongly felt images of her childhood in Kerala” (Chand 143).