CHAPTER IV
POETIC DEVICES AND POETIC DICTION

4.1 Poetic Devices

4.1.1 Structural Devices

a. Contrast

In order to accentuate the feelings of exile, alienation, lamentation, loneliness, devastation, pain, agony and loss, the poet uses the device of contrast very effectively in the poem *The Bird’s Bright Ring*. The blind musician and the cactus man representing darkness and disappointment are contrastingly juxtaposed with Durga of many heads, smiling at flower and representative of feminine power (BBR 10). The contrast between frog and sun in the poem represents the conflict between the patriarchal male power and a weak female power with its physical limitations (BBR 16, 17). The poem is engulfed by darkness and blackness. Contrastingly, it is replete with description of light and brightness.

The poem ‘Pictures for the Bhagavatha Purana’ (SR32) has contrast as the main device. The various pictures of the degeneration and degradation of values, oil fishing boat, a wooden stool, police station with broken windows, a mongrel, a boy with an extra thumb erect, women pouring water on the tomb are pictures of modern life. Contrastingly, enough the poet calls them as pictures for the Bhagavata Purana.

Delhi is the capital city of India and has historical importance and grace. However, the poem ‘Threshold City’ (SR 43) presents Delhi in all its degraded and polluted state in spite of its glorious and affluent heritage. Pigeons lurching in football fields, skies shot with acid focus the degenerated situation of Delhi and present the contrast of the situation. India is such a country where we can see the two extreme ends in social
life. There are people who are extremely rich willowing in luxuries and comfort while on the other hand poor people who cannot get enough food to fulfill their hunger. The poem ‘The Travellers’ portrays the pictures of poverty, black money, corruption in order to specify the contrast between the rich and poor very sarcastically(TS 9).

In poem ‘Keeping House’ (HoaTD 9) the description of Sabarmati ashram, ablutions and sung prayers, spinning wheels recounts the simple and peaceful way of life which is juxtaposed against the current situation of country where disorder dogs and people have become butchers to spin out the bloodied flesh in the nightmares. Poet expresses the hardships of exiled life through the device of contrast in ‘Toxic Petals’ (RaB). The exiled space makes poet faceless and selfless sucking up her reflection in a blue hole of sky, so she writes, “From where I sit / summer’s blossoms are headless / tearing uphill” (RaB 71).

In order to actualize the experience in the aftermath of 9/11, violence, war, bloodshed, riots in Gujarat and atrocities on Muslim after Godhra carnage in the home state of Gandhi, the poet uses the images of Gandhi, his Charka, and cooing of doves in the poem ‘Rumours for an Immigrant’ (RS). They heighten the intensity of violence through the contrast. Body assumes contrast with soul. According to Hindu philosophy, soul is immortal and body is just an attire of it and is vulnerable to time. When the attire becomes old, soul shades off the old one and takes birth in the new one. Thus, the human soul rotates in the cycle of life, death, and rebirth and seeks salvation from this vicious cycle of life and death by surrendering himself to the will of God. In the same way, immigrant’s soul is tortured in the pains of exile and body becomes the victim and wants to escape from it. While living in the world of violence, and contemporary havoc of risky life, poet remembers her simple life and happy childhood. The peaceful childhood life is
juxtaposed in contrast with contemporary war and violence in the poem ‘Field in Summer’, “I had a simple childhood / a mother and father to take care of me / no war at doorstep” (RS 63). The poem ‘Lyric with Doves’ (RS) is the significant example of contrast. Dove is the symbol of peace, prosperity, and purity but poem speaks about bloodshed and violence (RS 77).

b. Illustration

As illustration stands for example in the form of vivid picture given by the poet in order to make idea clear, Alexander’s poetry is highly engulfed with the illustrations of different kinds. It is highly loaded with the imagery of diverse kind and presents number of illustrations from nature, landscape, animal world, social life, violence, war, and the exiled life to elucidate the thematic pattern in her poetry. The illustrations from mythological stories, historical events, and childhood life and immigrant experiences heighten her poetry to the level of lucubration.

c. Repetition

Alexander does not exploit the device of repetition for just pleasure or onomatopoeic effect. The repetition of certain words in ‘Text from the Middle Earth’ aggravates the intensity of feelings. The “weeping and weeping” of the breathless child in a pitiless light emphasizes the distress and loss of hope (IRMN 28). Grandmother’s hair which are “Winding and Winding like a Memory” (29) and “each stroke telling, telling my name” (30) highlight the memories of grandmother and poet’s name which is marker of her identity. The repetition of the word “watched” asserts grandmother’s haunting existence in the garden of childhood and agony of misplaced childhood garden. “Into her eyes I creep with memory to the well / she sat at the deep edge of garden / and watched and watched before my grandfather woke” (IRMN 28).
In ‘Songs without Place’ (WP) poet has repeated some stanzas with certain changes
1) The rat is coarse / much coarser / as you know (WP 33)
2) The grain / of the rat is coarse / much coarser as you know (321)
3) The vein
   of the rat
   is hoarse
   much hoarser as you know (WP 34)

The repetitions strike the imagery of rat, an animal causing devastation of grain. The repetition of “coarse” and “hoarse” creates the cacophonous rhythm and underlines poet’s mind in tumult of being without place. The repetition of “as you know” imparts conversational stroke to the poem. The poem ‘Keeping House’ unveils love and possessiveness for husband through the repetition of “my”, “My house, my life, my man” (HoaTD 11). The repetition “child my only child” in the poem ‘Cutting Trees’ (HoaTD 14) demonstrates the intensity of mother’s love for a child. The repetition in the poem, ‘Night Scene’, “And weeping, weeping / in my tumult / I swallowed hard” (HoaTD 26), maximizes the tumult of exile swallowed by the poet from her early childhood. The emphatic repetition of ‘no’ in the poem ‘City Street’ illuminates the gloomy story of wretched, homeless poor people who are deprived of the fundamental needs of bread and water and there is nobody who will fight for them.

   There is no bread on the table
   filled with cold
   no milk, no rice. No water

   No sickle, nor hammer (RaB 8)

Repetition of the line, “I am she” in the poem ‘Passion’ (RaB 64) strikes the feminist cognizance of the poet connecting herself with ‘she’ who is
the any woman who lives in male dominated society and suffers from male domination and gives birth. Reticence is imposed on her still calls herself “tongueless in rhapsody” (RaB 65).

The repetition of tall towers, twin towers is mixed with the device of alliteration. It evokes the strong sense of pride of USA, which has been destroyed to dust on 9/11, and conveys the vanity of American pride in ‘Invisible City’, “Tall towers, twin towers, I used to see / A bloody seam of sense drops free” (RS 10).

4.1.2 Sense Devices

a. Simile

The use of simile is abounding in Alexander’s poetry. In the poem *The Bird's Bright Ring*, she narrates about the endless devastation of two kingdoms after partition by comparing it with the filament of an egg, “Fragile as the filament of an egg / your birth / an endless devastation” (BBR 23). In another example, there is fine blending of simile and metaphor. The image of mother is portrayed as harvest. It is also compared with the soft blood that blooms from the mother and emphasizes the creative and procreative capacity of mother (BBR 24-25).

The poem ‘My Brazen Days’ underscores the new, modern, and ground-breaking attitude of the poet about love and lover. For her, love and marriage is encroachment on the liberty of women and therefore compares the lover with poacher in a simile, “You encroached into my space; / like a poacher, sprang through my face” (IRMN 10). The simile of “sleep” is used to express her profound love for her dearly loved in the poem ‘veined words’, “I want to be held / under your lids like sleep” (IRMN 13). The poem ‘The Cry’ uses simile to express the feeling of lamentation, loneliness and frustration, “I lie as if I were dead / not knowing where / the cry of a child must lead me” (IRMN 14). The rain is a life giving principle but when it pours like anything, it can be disastrous.
calamity. The association of ravaged mother with the rain emphasizes mother both as life giving principle as well as the mother in its all fierceness like Kali and Durga in ‘Stained Words’, “We are weals / in the dare measure of grain / our ravaged mother pours like rain” (IRMN 18). In the poem, ‘Torn Grass’ poet has used the simile of blood flowing in her veins. It is the ancestral blood and connects her to the past and homeland (IRMN 19).

The poet employs simile to bring out the sufferings and miserable condition of poor and wretched people and the poor children who suffer from hunger and have to struggle hard to get food, in the poem ‘Songs from this Dust’

There are children waiting at crossroads
always at the cross roads there are children

Whose small palms fly like savage hornets
Whose mouths are parched and cry

like dry seasons when bread and water
must crawl like swotted flies (IRMN 21)
The simile, “Their veins are dry like pigeons” (IRMN 21) aggravates the predicament of poor due to dearth of grain. The comparison of lame man with a torn worm creates the disgusting picture of social reality of Poor’s life. In the ‘Text from the Middle Earth’, poet’s comparison of herself with the polished stone denominates the place of woman as showpiece in family and society (IRMN 26). The comparison of cut vegetables with bright skulls gives very different type of imagery related to violence and bloodshed in ‘Her Imageless Face’ (WP 20).

The poem ‘Childhood’ exploits simile of stone to indicate the coldness, indifference, lifelessness, hardness, unkindness. Stones are
lifeless and tombs are made of stones where children are laid, “perfectly cold like stone” (RS 8). Comparison of the leaf with two wings refers to the bird and indicates migration in the poem, ‘Consider this Leaf’, “This leaf is shaped like two wings” (HoaTD 72). Though living in America poet can never forget her ancestral homeland and rivers flowing through it. The road of tar assumes the form of waves on Indian rivers in the poem ‘Kabir was a Weaver’, “I look back into the yard, / black tar broken like waves / on the Ganga, Yamuna, Pamba” (HoaTD 79). The comparison of love and desire with heat, shimmering sense, and surcharge of love puts forward the mixing of more vehicles for one tenor in the poem ‘Aftermath’

Sometimes I watch in a light
that quivers
as if in heat
a shimmering sense,
a surcharge of love
vivifying desire
through a time ever more about to be (TS 25)

The mixing of metaphor and simile makes Alexander’s poetry more complex as in the poem ‘South of the Nilgiris’ (RaB 61).

Alexander’s poems respond to the experience of racial discrimination. The dark skin makes her victim of discrimination and causes alienation and loss of self. Moreover she watches her skin “as if it were / someone else’s not mine” in the poem ‘Looking Glass’ (RaB 69). In ‘San Andrews Fault’ poet perceives herself as creature of fault created by multiple migrations and appeals reader to become like her, “Become like me a creature of this fault” (RaB 96). The poet gropes about in loneliness and compares herself with reed root-cut to express her frustration of exiled life in the poem ‘Roadside Music’, “I am lonely …,
like a reed root-cut” (IH 82). To specify the fierceness of the Gujarat riots, violence and atrocities against Muslim population, the poet compared the bottom of a boy Yunus, victim of riots with a raw fruit in the poem ‘Amrita’.

I see his bottom
burst like a raw fruit
with the flames
they tossed him in (RS 73)

In this way, the similes in Alexander’s poetry do not come as added decorations. They have been successfully employed as a technique in order to express the different shades of experiences clearly and to give the impression of intensity.

b. Metaphor

Proliferation of metaphors is one of the important features of Alexander’s poetry. Along with some fresh metaphors, the occasional clichés are found in her poetry. The metaphors of nectar and honey are used to express poet’s passionate love for her lover in the poem ‘My Brazen Days’. It is an example of mixed metaphor as it employs two synonymous metaphorical vehicles ‘nectar’ and ‘honey’ for one tenor that is lover, “You are nectar to my gaze / I said once, then, you are honey / to my tongue” (IRMN 10). “Sunlight falling in spears” in the poem ‘Dancers’ is an example of dead metaphor as it is used too many times by other poets also (IRMN 11). The metaphor of ‘breath’ emphasizes the importance of love in poet’s life in the poem ‘Veined Words’.

Breath of My breath
be to me
as a star flashing
and in this dark flesh
trace your lean rare watching;
So keep pace with my bare pulse,
Which time is fast outracing (IRMN 14)

The metaphor hawk in the poem ‘Lost Ayodhya’ stands for the mind of the immigrant in dangling position neither belonging here not there, “Your mind is a hawk / dislodged from the pendant sky / on the iron table top” (IRMN 16). In the poem, ‘Stained Words’ poet exploits the metaphor of the raw entrails which are piled up at the sky to designate the insignificant nature of life in exiled state (IRMN 18).

Alexander uses conceptual metaphor in the poem ‘I Root My Name’ as she uses the basic concept to comment on her grandfather, his land, and memories of ancestral house and temporality of human life. She writes, “Our life is fire but these things remain” (IRMN 20). Poet is alert of the fact that time is flowing and stops for nobody and compares time with sap to imply its flowing, “time is sap” in the poem ‘Epilogue’ (WP 32). She uses the metaphor of place for poetry because while living in the dissemination, she realized that “poetry is place” (WP 36). Once more in the poem ‘Songs without Place’, the metaphor of the song of haunted place used for poetry underlines the importance of place for the poet. While amplifying on mother daughter relationship poet uses the metaphor of sparrow for the daughter, “You cup a sparrow in your palms / raise it to sun, crying” is an example of an implicit metaphor because the tenor that is daughter is implied and not stated directly in the poem ‘Dream Poem’ (SR 13). The metaphor of “peacocks perish” is used to hint at the sorrowful life of immigrants in the poem ‘From a Grey Room’ (SR36). The poem ‘Spring 1981’ written for poet’s son Adam Kuruvilla uses the metaphor of “love is currencies” (HoaTD 43) to depict immeasurable love of mother for son. The metaphor of catastrophe used for birth in the poem ‘Consider this Leaf’ (HoaTD 72) pinpoints poet’s agony and pain.
The poems in the section ‘Blood Line’ in *River and Bridge* are the poems of mother experiencing the birth of her child as the birth of new existence. The metaphor of bloodline in the poem ‘Bloodline’ is very significant as it connects the poet to her line of blood through her daughter.

She is my mother’s
Mother who cries in me,
my line of blood
our perpetuity (RaB 66)

The poem ‘Kabir was a Weaver’ has an implicit metaphor which involves comparison between thousand nameless birds and the immigrant people suffering from loss of identity in the exiled life, “Throats of a thousand birds / forever nameless” (HoaTD 79). The metaphor “Wound of America” emphasizes the psychological wounds caused by exile and experience of racial discrimination in the poem ‘Homeward’ (HoaTD89).

“Syllables on grandmother’s tongue” in ‘After the First House’ (TS 2) is the metaphor for the lost mother tongue. The other metaphors like “Ferocious alphabets of flesh” (HoaTD 29) and “Lost language” (RaB 4) are used for the mother tongue which poet could not acquire thoroughly.

While criticizing the poverty, black money and corruption poet employs the metaphor of “air conditioned nightmare” for movies and its fantasy world, which is different from the unkempt life of struggling poor people (TS 9). Poet has used some clichéd and dead metaphors like “Lap of Sleep” and “realm of dream’ in the poem ‘The Travellers’ (TS 11).

“Axe of displacement” is the example of clichéd metaphor referring to displacement of exiles in the poem ‘Paper Filled with Light’ (RaB 22). The metaphor “Hell’s Kitchen” refers to the plight of immigrants in the poem ‘Asylum’ (RaB 29) while the metaphor of “no man’s land” stands for the fact of unbelonging of Diasporas in the poem “No Man’s Land”
(RaB 31). The metaphor “balconies of childhood” refers to the lost childhood bliss in the poem ‘Sweet Water’ (RaB 38). The mixed metaphors of magnet and the conquest are used for death in the poem ‘Ashtamudi Lake’ (RaB 55). The comparison of earth with sister points out poet’s affinity for motherland, “My sister is this earth / I am water / we will mix together” (‘South of Nilgiris’ RaB 60). The metaphor of “rain on the tamarind tree” (RaB66) used for her child in the poem ‘Bloodline’ suggests that her child is not subservient to any customs and traditions and burden of being woman. The metaphor ‘burnt grass’ stands for the conservative thoughts of past generation. In the poem ‘Skin Song’ (RaB), we come across series of metaphors for time “Time was a drift of wing, claw, vine / petal, stalk, skin of my tongue, wrapping up / stones so sweet to suck” (73). “Time was a lyric did not sing” (75), “Time was the gap in the bars through which she peered / barefoot, square jawed (RaB 76). After experiencing lot of difficulties in migrated life, poet describes life as, “hearts’ catastrophe in an unequal way / no hand could ever script” (RaB 77).

The poet uses the metaphor of “black sun of death” in the poem ‘Port Sudan’ (IH 11) to convey the intensity of her sorrow on father’s death. In ‘Elegy for My Father’, she calls her father as, “a man for all climates”(IH 13). Metaphor of “fragment” is used for poems written for psychic survival, “I start to write fragments / as much to myself as to another” (IH 27). Metaphor of map refers to the nowhereness and rootlessness of the poet in the poem ‘Map’ (IH 28). In the poem ‘Man in a Red Shirt’ poet calls the journey of life as narrative of loss to articulate the feeling of loss, “THIS JOURNEY IS A NARRATIVE OF LOSS” (IH 44). In the poem “Gold Horizon” there is a series of metaphors which gives voice to immigrant’s fury, “Shards of script / struck from a past locked into privacy // this is the immigrant’s fury” (IH 48). The metaphor
of ‘Illiterate Heart’ in the poem of the same title is an implicit metaphor used for the postcolonial mind struggling to get hold of English language at the cost of mother tongue. The poet discusses about difficulty in acquiring the English as second language and hence names it as a cage of script, “I’ll never be locked in a cage of script” (IH 67). The metaphor “black milk of childhood” refers to the migration and its agony faced in early childhood (IH 66). The poem is compared with “sack of words” in the poem ‘Low Hills of Bavaria’ (IH 76).

The poet uses very strange and repulsive metaphor in the poem ‘Daffodils’, “My breasts are jugs of blood” (IH 80) to suggest the responsibility of a mother of two children and the violence involved in childbirth. The “transit lounges of my childhood” metaphorically refer to happy childhood in ‘Poem in Late October’ (IH 84) and “a green orchard burning” in the poem ‘Diary of Dreams’ (IH88) implies the disastrous effect of atomic explosions. The metaphor “garden of childhood” is used recurrently to designate the lost world. A number of implicit metaphors are used in the poem ‘Black River, Walled Garden’ (IH) : “Milk white seasons of belonging” (91), “Childhood river” (92), “garden of childhood” (91), “basin of blood” (95), “Burning – Hair – Girl” (96), “Migrant missing selves” (94). The metaphor of “tongue of flame” raised by a fire altar refers to the second language (IH 93).

In the poem ‘Dialogue by a City Wall’, poet calls herself Sita, Iphigenia and Draupadi expressing her modern feminist sensibility, “I am Sita and Iphigenia, Demeter and Draupadi / I am not fit for burning” (RS 6). The metaphors of “a knot of rubble” and “a scrap” are used to expose the devastation of twin towers in the poem ‘Invisible City’ (RS 10). The other metaphors referring to the fierceness of fall of twin towers are “tor of metal” and “strut of death” in the poem ‘Pit fire’ (RS 11). The poet calls herself, “a child of earth” to announce her rootedness in the
motherland in the poem ‘Kabir Sings in a City of Burning Towers’ (Rs 14). In the poem ‘Petroglyph’, Alexander compares earth with green and fragrant home (RS 45). The poem includes the metaphor, “a necklace of sorrow” which unravels the black side of war, which causes destruction of humanity, unwanted waste of human lives, bloodshed, and violence (Rs 49). The dead metaphor like “teeth of war” used for the war like situation in the aftermath of 9/11 in the poem “Gandhi’s Bicycle” (RS 83).

Thus, the metaphor is the prominent figure of speech in Alexander’s poetry. The abundance of metaphors makes her poetry great poetry and allows it many interpretations.

c. Personification

Alexander uses the device of personification to express her feelings she is speaking about. In the poem ‘After the Wedding’ the poet personifies sun as the ‘hard and cold sun” (IRMN 9) which represents the hard customs and traditions imposed on women. The phrases like “hungry music” (‘Prologue’, WP 13) “fertile mirrors” (‘A Mirrors Grace’ WP 14) are the examples of personification. The human qualities of being harsh and dry are attached to sea. The human specialty of dreaming is transposed on the lemming dreaming of a great white sea in the poem ‘Songs without Place’ (WP 33). In the poem ‘Indian Elegy’ (SR), the roses have become bloodthirsty like human beings due to increasing violence, bloodshed end brutality (SR 26). In the poem ‘Eye of the Cyclone’ the cyclone is personified as it “Played the gold flute / of darkness” and “parceled out grief” (SR 31) and is bringer of death and destruction. The night is personified in the poem ‘No Autumn in My Country’ as the playmate of old man, “old men play chess with night” (SR 34).
The personification of house as riding to the grave suggests the ruined state of ancestral house, “Behind us / in dull light / a house riding its own grave” in the poem ‘Night Birds’ (HoaTD 46). The sun is personified through the poet’s imagination as sun eclipses due to its fury. In fact, being furious is human quality which is harmful for the human being. However the fury is harmful for the sun since it is eclipsed due to it, “Against the sun / that eclipsed itself in fury / at the Kerala coast” (‘Boating’ (HoaTD 19). Death is personified by making it to scribble something on the cheek of immigrants in the poem ‘Paper Filled with Light’. The phrases like “the crawling foam”, “a Shadow crawls” personify the inanimate objects by attaching the quality of crawling to it. Death is personified in the poem ‘Aunt Chinna’ as somebody who seizes you in the morning (HoaTD 22). Death is also depicted as hundred armed player in the poem ‘For Safdar Hashmi Beaten to Death Just Outside Delhi’, “death a player hundred armed / clubbed and ringed” (RaB 18).

The poem ‘I Dream of Niagara’ has scores of examples of personification. There are the personifications like “lip of stone”, “maid of the mist”, “ghostly barbed wire” (RaB 85). The light, peace, sunlight are also personified (RaB 86). The poem ‘September Sunlight’ personifies sun and moon, “brother sun and sister moon” (RS 17). The sea, sun and moon are personified in the poem ‘Child, Stone, Sea’,

The sea has many sleeves
One is fire, one is silk, one is torn cotton
The Sun’s throat is torn cotton,
he whispers to me,
the moon’s cheek is burnt silk (Rs 29)
In the poem ‘Fifth Avenue Plaza’, we come across the personification of noon who swallows its own shadow (Rs 37). The stones are recurring images, which have life in Alexander’s poetry; they have tongue and can sing; “Now stones have tongues / sibilant scatterings / stormy grace!” (‘Blue Lotus’RS 44). The personification of silkworms “dancing in the firmament” (Rs 36) in the poem ‘Raw Silk’ refers to the poet’s affinity with silk and search of self in the silk of Kerala.

4.1.3 Sound Devices

a. Alliteration

There is good number of examples of alliteration that is repetition of the same sound at frequent intervals. The alliteration of |s| in “see sudden sparrow” and “a long slow swallow” (IRMN 12) in the poem ‘Bird Head’ makes the line run smoothly giving the impression of migration. The alliteration involved in “blue sky scratched with stray stars” (IRMN 14) creates the emphatic rhythm, which can be realized during the loud reading of poem. In the poem ‘The Loneliness of Plants’ the repetition of sounds “bird call crawls / fireflies fester like wounds” (SR 22) convey the sound of bird to the ears which is cacophonous. In ‘Natural Difficulties’, “Soil gulps smoke” (SR 35) repeats the sound |s| to emphasize the human life scratched by natural difficulties. The alliteration in the line describing unbelongingness “disowned by sun and star: / a bleakness beneath my dreams” (HoaTD 5) in the poem ‘Her Garden’ emphasizes the depth of sorrow of being disowned. The poet shades the burden of, “fur, flesh, faces, / a fickle soul” (HoaTD 68) in the poem ‘My Fall’ affecting the alliteration and gives the sense of the fickleness of human life and mind. The repetition of |f| in the poem ‘Keeping House’, “Forgeries rolled from his pockets: / false passports, feigned signatures” (HoaTD 11) creates the impression of forgery and falseness.
The alliteration in the lines, “Part of earth’s treasure / soft and sore” (HoaTD31) conveys poet’s feeling of warmth towards garden of childhood in the poem ‘Glimpsed in Indigo’. The alliteration in lines “Stony syntax, slow work” (IH 53) in ‘An Honest Sentence’ is packed full with the sense of burden involved in learning the syntax of “part-time English” (IH 53). The repetition of |d| in “Diary of dreams, / drawer of ransacked silk” provides the strong rhythm and emphasizes the disillusionment of “Heart’s hope / grief’s consonant” (IH 88) in the poem ‘Diary of Dreams’. The “black water cutting and clashing” (IH 92) alliterate the cacophonous sounds to convey the harshness of colonial tyranny of black water punishment, in the poem ‘Black River, Walled Garden’ (IH 92). The alliteration of emphatic sounds in the poem ‘Raw Silk’, “guns, grenades, blisters of smoke / on market place and mosque” (IH 34) creates the atmosphere of violence and holocaust. The alliteration in the lines, “What has happened to ahimsa? / is it just for the birds and the bees?” (RS 78) emphatically asserts the negligence of principle of ahimsa by people in the poem ‘Slow Dancing’. The repetition of |t| in “Tall towers, twin towers I used to see / A bloody sense of sense drops free” in the poem ‘Invisible City’” (RS 10) strikes the tallness of towers which stand erect as the pride of US but destroyed to dust on 9/11. It is also example of ending rhyme. The alliteration in the line “I touch your face and feel the flesh burn bone” (IRMN 16) in the poem ‘Lost Ayodhya’ gives indications of violence.

b. **Onomatopoeia**

The device has been used repeatedly by the poet to achieve not only sound effect but also emotional effects. “The thud-thud-thud / of an animal heart” (IH 14) which poet hears under the ribs of father connects the reader with the father in the poem ‘Elegy for My Father’ whereas the “Clatter of bicycles” in ‘Reading Rumi….’ (IH 18) echoes the sound of
bicycles to achieve the cacophonous effect of sound symbolism. Onomatopoeia is not only used for pleasant echoism but also has been put into the creative tension to unravel the violence experienced by the poet. While depicting effect of the massacres and carnages on the sensibility poet reminds of the raucous voice of the “scissor bird cry / cut cut cut cut cut” (RS 81) as it was the bird singing of buried love in the poem ‘Bengali Market’. The unpleasant sounds reflect the destruction and devastation. Because of the natural disasters like plagues, fires, famines and flood the life moves towards extinction and the silence rises and “cicada bristles in the olive trees” which gives the sensation of the mortal silence and freezes all senses (‘Roman Ground’ RS 56). Thus, onomatopoeia is used to create the aesthetic effect of multicoloured experience. The imitation of the voice “tweet-t-woot” of the thousand-eyed owl in the poem ‘Brief Chronicle by Candle Light’ (HoaTD 54) conveys onomatopoeic effect. The echoism is reflected when the kingfisher taps its beak against wood: “Tat-tat-tat! / That-that-that! / Tat tvam asi” (IH 91) in the poem ‘Black River Walled Garden’ and resembles to incantation of mantras.

c. Rhymes

Alexander exploits ending rhymes but not deliberately but on the contrary, they come in the course of expression spontaneously.

1) You encroached into my space;
   like a poacher, sprang through my face (‘My Brazen Days’ IRMN 10)

2) We are weals
   in the dare measure of grain,
   our ravaged mother pours like rain (‘Stained Words’ IRMN 18)

3) Your sap will pass
   through me like torn grass (‘Torn Grass’ IRMN 19)
4) The mildew in her palms balanced the red
strains of a withering summer when she laid
all her brown children into a dank bed
where she had laid and lain and bled
like a lost cur lashed by sight

(‘Text from The Middle Earth’ IRMN 29)

5) Muse of memory, maker of sense
barely lit by mirror or lens (‘House’ IH 30)

6) And how she fell
ring after ring into the well, (‘Black River, Walled Garden’ IH 93)

d. Rhythm

Though Alexander’s poetry is free from the foot and meters, it has
its own rhythm realized strongly by the ear. The repetition of sounds
makes her poems musical and melodious. She employs various devices to
achieve the rhythmical effect and create music and melody. Her poetry
has rhythm of its own and phrases are used for that purpose. The
repetition of words, phrases and lines, parallelism, and frequently asked
rhetorical questions add rhythm to her poetry.

The poet uses such words with the strong rhythm which create the
sensation of war activities,
rough metal
cold cannon
sharp cleft
of bayonet and sword (BBR 21)

The phrases fern fronds, bare black rock, a rare crack, green fern, in the
poem ‘sleeping Gazelles’ (IRMN 12) convey the strong rhythm to
indicate the emphatic sense of growing darkness. The rhythm in the line
“A Stable door bangs shut” in the poem ‘Copper Cows’ (SR 47) creates
an onomatopoeic effect. The rhythmical pairs of words like “black and
bare”, “flat and blue” (HoaTD 5) in the poem ‘Her Garden’ surround poem with the gloomy atmosphere of loss. In the poem ‘Letter to My Mother’, the rhythm of sounds can be realized by ear,

I can hold with ease
I have planted five new trees
by the cowshed
not far from the stream
I hear her heart beat (HoaTD 45)

The names of various places she had lived in come rhythmically to expose coruscating geography of displacement, in the poem ‘Gold Horizon’.

Places names splinter
on my tongue and flee

Allahabad, Tiruvella, Kozencheri
Khartoum, Nottingham, New Delhi,
Hyderabad, New York
the piecework of sanity –
stitching them into a single
coruscating geography (IH 49)

4.1.4 Paradox

The paradox describes an idea, which is composed of the conflicting concepts. The line “her dead husband’s breath” in the poem ‘Rootedness’ (SR 9) brings together the life and death paradoxically to comment on the ancestral figures and their influence on the poet in spite of their death. The poem ‘The Storm’ recounts the storm of possession of ancestral house by others but after lot of struggle and court cases, they got it back. The poet paradoxically shows up the happiness of resurrection of house through bringing together the two conflicting concepts of life and
death, “Our living and dead / returned in lighting / and hail” (TS 22). The title ‘Rooms without Walls’ (RaB 34) is obviously paradoxical but in fact it has deep meaning since the life of the poet is always unfixed and insecure because of migration. Walls symbolize restriction, confinement, and limitations on liberty, but poet seeks such room that will not have walls and restrictions. The poem entitled ‘Toxic Petals’ (RaB 71) has paradoxical implications. A petal of flower can be delicate, fresh, or beautiful but it is toxic which presents hardships of exiled life.

4.1.5 Allusions

The allusions in Alexander’s poetry emphasize her awareness and recognition of literary tradition. The allusions in her poetry are no tacit or indefinable suggestions but are realized obviously as the part of its structure. This recognition is of great importance to understand its functioning in building up the meaning of poetry.

The mythological allusions in The Bird’s Bright Ring are very interesting. The poet alludes to the endless suffering of Ixion, fixed onto an ever-revolving wheel for his having tried to rape Hera, the consort of Zeus. The unhappy end of Icharus who in total disregard of his father’s instructions flew very close to the sun on the wings of feathers of wax, and consequently drowned in the sea, the righteous rule of King Ashoka and the Great Indian War fought on the battlefield of Kurukshetra are examples of allusions. Poet also alludes to Rilke (BBR 15) because of whom she came to know that, “Song might be being” (15).

In the poem ‘Songs without Place’ (WP 33), Alexander quotes the lines of Neurda to highlight the importance of place. The title ‘Brown Skin What Mask?’ (RaB 11) alludes to the Frantz Fanon’s Black Skin White Mask. It correlates the experience of cultural colonization and racial victimization of the third world expatriate woman. In the poem ‘Asylum’ (RaB 29), poet quotes lines from the poem ‘Before the Gate of
God’ by Badr Shakir al Sayab, the Iraqi poet to express the mind filled with darkness in exile and is in search of asylum. Poet also alludes to the Vedic hymns exhibiting her scholarship in Indian religious scriptures in the poem ‘Under the Incense Tree’

O Lord
As the hunter prepares the wild fowl
for feasting

By stripping it
limb from limb.

So you ready us of rage (RaB 47)
In the poem, ‘Skin Song’ (RaB 73) the poet reiterates lines from the poems of Kabir, the medieval Bhakti poet and Walt Whitman. The mixing of Eastern and Western poetics has been culminated into kind of hybrid aesthetics in Alexander’s poetry. Kabir has provided her with courage in the time of difficulty while Whitman has moulded her artistry.

The philosopher and poet Nagarjuna has been cited in the poem ‘Civil Strife’ to assert the devaluation and vandalism in the modern world, “If fire is lit in water / who can extinguish it” (IH 32). The poem ‘Man in a Red Shirt’ (IH 43) restates lines from Rimbaud to underline poet’s association with the symbolist movement. In the poem ‘Indian April’ (IH 56) poet inenginmates some words from the Song of Solomon in the Bible. She alludes to ‘abhangas’ of Mirabai to unravel the intimacy of Mirabai with Krishna. By alluding Conrad’s Heart of Darkness, poet identifies herself with Marlowe and Kurtz to underline her exiled existence and racial experience in the poem ‘Illiterate Heart’ (IH 63). Poet also alludes to “Jana Gana Mana” (IH 65) and words of Gandhi, Marx, and Gospels showing her national consciousness and multicultural
stance. References to T. S. Eliot’s ‘Four Quartets’ and Paul Valery’s ‘Cimeriere Marin’ are present to emphasize the intellectual legacies of the poet (IH 67).

Alexander alludes to Frantz Fanon and Mohandas Gandhi in the poem ‘Hard Rowing’ (RS 13) in the time of violence and seeks refuge in non violent path of Gandhi in the aftermath of 9/11 and other violence dealings like Godhra carnage and Babari Masjid demolition and writes, “What a circus with Frantz / and Mohandas / squabbling on shore” (RS 13). The poem ‘Listening to Lorca’ (RS) alludes to poems of Spanish poet Lorca because for poet it was pleasure to read Lorca’s poems after the pain and shock of 9/11. Through him, she tries to reattach herself to place. The line from Muriel Rukeyser’s poem ‘Waterlily Fire’ is used as the epigraph of the poem ‘Petroglyph’ that runs like this, “Girl grown woman fire mother of fire” (RS 45). The poem ‘Porta Santa’ (RS 53) alludes to Dante’s Divine comedy and uses phrases “Door of Water”, “Door of Earth”, “Mirror of Gold”. In the poem ‘Bengali Market’ that is written to express the agony and turmoil on the death of unfortunates in atrocities in Gujarat, poet alludes to the famous speech of Nehru to express her disappointment in the post-independent India, “will we be cured? I cried / And he – we have no tryst with destiny” (RS 81). In ‘Gandhi’s Bicycle’, poet alludes to speech of Vivekananda in Chicago on Sept. 11, 1893 to comment on the loss of goodwill and humanity in the aftermath of 9/11 event.

Along with above mentioned allusions, allusions in Alexander’s poetry are made through proper nouns. They occur in poems to point to specific frames of reference. Their significance can be understood by the reader familiar with these. The quotations that precede some poems of Alexander taken from Yeats, Eliot, Kabir, Sankaracharya, Rilke, Rimbaud, Lorca are leading and guiding to the poet’s thought. Many of
the poems are academic and show the wide reading of the poet as a researcher and academician. Good number of references from old Greek, Roman, Indian and English literature, and mythologies unravel poet’s intellectual affiliation to literary and mythological characters. She tries to identify them with the characters in real life around her. There are characters like Sita, draupadi, Cleopatra, Renuka, Parashurama, Antony, Agamemnon, Marlowe, Kurtz, Krishna, Lazarus, Icarus, Ixion, Ashoka, Ceres, Demeter, Iphigenia, Durga, Kali who overcrowd the world of Alexander’s poetry. There are also imaginary characters like cactusman, blind musician, stone eating girl, Susikali, and cowherd Bhaskaran.

4.1.6 Transliteration

The words and sentences from Hindi, Urdu, Malayalam, and Sanskrit languages have been used in English transcription. The words like bulbuls, Koels, gulabs, shabda, nada, svara express poet’s affiliations to various languages. In the poem ‘Estrangement Becomes the Mark of the Eagle’ (RaB 27) poet quotes the lines from Hindi poem of Faiz Ahmed Faiz, “Mujh-se-pahli-si muhabbat mat maang” which means that, “Beloved, do not ask me for that love again” (RaB 27). The words “gnanam”, “dhanam”, “kavya” used in the poem ‘Elegy for My Father’ (IH 15) make her poetry philosophical and incantatory. The Hindi sentences used in the poem, ‘Gold Horizon’ (IH 50) emphasize the loss of identity in exiled place. Poet asks, “Kya, kya hum kon hai? Idher hum kon hai?” which means that, “Who are we here?” “What are we here?” The poet pleads God Krishna and intensifies her devotion by using Hindi words in poem ‘Indian April’ to invoke God as “Govinda, aaou, aaou” (IH 57).

Thus, the transliteration from various languages exhibits poet’s scholarship and wide reading in different languages. The Hindi, Malayalam, and Sanskrit words are used for the surprise of English
readers. They add to the complexity in interpretation of poems and multiple sources enrich her poetry.

4.1.7 Exaggeration

Exaggeration or hyperbole is a kind of overstatement used to evoke strong feelings or create an impression. It is not meant to be taken literally. The poem ‘Desert Rose’ sets forth the sorrow of exiled life by using device of exaggeration. The sorrow is so unbearable that poet feels that, “All the seven skies / are broken” (RaB 25). In order to convey the horrible picture of massacre, bloodshed, and cruelty after demolition of Babri Masjid, the exaggerative statements are exploited in the poem ‘San Andreas Fault’,

Hundreds hacked to death in Ayodhya
in Ram’s golden name
the fragile domes of Babri Masjid
beaten down as massacres begin

And rivers of India rise mountainous
While veils of the lost, dhotis, kurtas, saris
Slippery with blood, eased into nothingness (RaB 95)

The exaggerative statement “The Ocean is the hardest thing” in the poem ‘Valley’ (IH 39) maximizes the feeling of hardness involved in crossing the oceans. The metaphor “Sea of Blood” in the poems ‘Raw Silk’ (RS 35) and ‘Slow Dancing’ (RS 79) is the device of exaggeration used to intensify the fierceness, violent bloodshed and savage and excessive killing of people, “the moon soars in a sea of blood” (RS 79). The poem ‘Bengali Market’ also depicts the horrifying predicament in the aftermath of Godhra carnage by using device of exaggeration.

In our country there are two million dead
and more for whom no rites were said
No land on earth can bear this.
Rivers are crisscrossed with blood (RS 81)

In the poem ‘Rootedness’, Alexander expresses her feelings of loneliness hyperbolically by saying that, “Almost literally / I am dying of loneliness” (SR 9).

### 4.1.8 Rhetorical Questions

Meena Alexander uses rhetorical question to achieve greater expressive effect than a direct assertion. The questions in poetry put forward the inner thought of the poet in philosophical manner and reflect the concern about the world. In the poem, ‘Songs without Place’ poet asks the rhetorical question “is this our fatal season?” (WP 35) to express the hopelessness in exiled life. The poet loves her grandmother and finds herself anchored in motherland of Kerala through her and so asks the question to call attention to her rootedness, “Shall I rinse you / to an image the moon / can covet?” (HoaTD 16). The rhetorical questions asked successively in the poem, ‘A Time of Difficulty’ emphasize the despair, disappointment, and the grievous situation of the world, “Are the soldiers still tramping through? / I cannot see / Are the graves drinking us?” (HoaTD 57). Another rhetorical question in the poem, “Will the scorpions hold their sting?” (HoaTD 57) underlines poet’s concern about destruction by violent ways.

The poet is besieged by the feeling of loss of motherland which is expressed through the rhetorical question emphatically, in the poem “Searching for Heaven”, “Where do I came in / to all this?” (HoaTD 74). The poem ‘Keeping House’ takes the advantage of the device in order to express resentment on bloodshed, violence, destruction, terrorist activities and victimization of common people, “Is it a fault in the land / or in ourselves?” (HoaTD 10). The devices of comparison and rhetorical question come together in the poem ‘Cutting Trees’ to put into words the
warmth of mother’s love which is lost after migration to the other side of
the familiar world, “Will it be hot like this / on the other side of paradise?
(HoaTD 16). The rhetorical question in the poem ‘Brown Skin, What
Mask’, “Shall I be a hyphenated being, Macaulay’s Minutes / and melting
pot theories not withstanding?” (RaB 11) emphasizes poet’s hyphenated
existence in multicultural America and contests melting pot theories. Her
another rhetorical question, “Shall I bruise my skin, burn up into / She
Who Is No Colour whose longing is a crush / of larks shivering without
sound?” (RaB 11) intensifies the sense of colour bar discrimination
experienced by the poet. The poet is too much anxious about dissolute
condition of the contemporary world that she asks in the poem
‘Landscape with Door’, “Was Sankara right? Is the world a forest on
fire?” (RaB 35). Although spending ten years in multicultural America,
poet is still considered as stranger. The successive rhetorical questions,
“Will it pitch, pour into bloom of spring time? Can my hand set right
simple things?” in the poem ‘Palpable Elysium’ (RaB 68) express poet’s
eagerness to assimilate in new world. The poet questions herself to
express the feeling of homelessness in the poem ‘Sweet Alyssum’, “He
has no home now, / you know that, don’t you?”(RaB 88). The rhetorical
question in the poem ‘Valley’, “Why am I here?” answered as, “I cannot
tell” (IH 29) emphasizes the meaninglessness and aimlessness of exiled
life.

Because of the bitter experiences, the all life has got stiffened and
the poet expresses her wish to rekindle the senses through rhetorical
question in the poem ‘Translated Lives’, “Will a nervous knowledge / a
millennial sense be kindled? / Must the past we make consume us?”
(IH46). In this way the poet uses rhetorical questions as device of
grammar to state something more emphatically. Being the part of every
day’s discourse, the rhetorical question is used by Alexander to make poem persuasive and impart rhetorical tone to the utterance of feelings.

4.1.9 Synesthesia

Alexander uses device of synesthesia very closely to communicate two or more experiences through one expression. There are number of examples in her poetry in which one mode of sensation is described in terms of another. The poet hears the voices of the cobbler, hawker, beggar man, thief in the “Speaking darkness” (BBR 28). The speaking is the auditory sensation and is mixed with the visual sensation of darkness. In the phrase “Soft Blood” (BBR 25), the tactile sensation of being soft is applied to flowing blood. The phrases “Stained words” and “Veined words” apply the qualities of being stained of clothes and having veins of leaves to the words (IRMN18,13). In the poem ‘Room without Walls’, the poet uses the device of synesthesia, “What drenches us is music so mute” (RaB 34) in which instead of auditory sensations the tactile sensation of drenching is attached to music. Thus, Alexander mixes different sensations to produce multi-dimensional sensations. She tries to establish relationship between different mediums of sensations by finding analogies between visual image and auditory image, auditory image and odour, odour and visual image. The phrases like: “Spiked Music”, “long grass wet with light” (BBR 15), “blind tongue”, “blind heart” (IRMN 26, 27), “hungry music” (WP 13), “perfumed gloom” (WP 24), “Sightless space” (SR 9), “sightless wing” (WP 36), “A bruised fragrance” (SR 9) are best examples.

4.1.10 Apostrophe and Invocation

Apostrophe is addressed to beloved, birds, mother, goddesses, muse, rivers, and seas in Alexander’s poetry. Many apostrophes in her poetry imply a personification of non-human object that is addressed and has used for various purposes. The poet addresses to “woman of Delhi!”
(BBR 15) referring to Indira Gandhi and her oppressive emergency rule in order to give voice to resistance and anger against the tyrannical behaviour of new rulers. In the poem ‘June 1977’, poet addresses her motherland India to announce the intensity of her love, “your centuries are brackish, India / A black vessel, I / entirely yours” (SR 21). In the poem ‘Black Water’ (SR) poet addresses to Sanjaya, a character from Mahabharata and explains that all human beings finally dissolve into fire, earth, water, and air out of which they are made.

The atrocities and horrible holocaust in Gujarat compels the poet to think that only Gandhi can provide solution but on the contrary, we come across the fact of shutting the gates of Sabarmati Ashram on that February night and violence outside in the poem ‘Slow Dancing’. Therefore, poet addresses Gandhi out of frustration and disappointment, “Dear Mr. Gandhi / Please say something / about the carnage in your home state” (RS 78). The feeling of homelessness is the major ingredient of poet’s sensibility and is demonstrated in the invocation of mother of God to seek her blessings for homecoming, “Mother of God / I pray O restive Maria” (SR 28). Migration, loss, and memories are the vital sources of inspiration of her poetry. So Alexander addresses muse as “O muse of migrancy” (IH 34) in the poem ‘Indigo’. Poet invokes the Lamb of God to have mercy upon human beings so that it would be possible to overcome the hard times of exile, violence, and bloodshed, “O Lamb of God have mercy upon us! / Whose mercy will fall, as the rain falls?” (‘Low Hills of Bavaria’ IH 77)

4.1.11 Parallelism and Antithesis

Parallelism is a similar word order and structure in syntax. The parallelism in the poem ‘No Man’s Land’ connotes the unbelongingness of the Diaspora people,
No Man’s land
no woman’s either

I stand in the middle
Of my life (HoaTD 26)

The parallel structure emphatically underlines the inbetweenness. The parallelism “nothing makes blank, nothing kills” refers to the nihility of life realized after having experienced several exiles, gunshot wounds and piercing of barbed wires of partition and subsequent violence (‘Estrangement Becomes the Mark of the Eagle’ RaB 27). The parallel structure used in the poem ‘Passion’ manifests the feelings of woman, who has given birth and has experienced bloodied fluids, weakened flesh, and pain of childbirth.

I am her sight
her hearing
and her tongue
I am she
smeared with ash
from the black god’s alter (RaB 65)

While parallelism in the poem ‘Slow Dancing’, “I cannot help myself / I cannot shut my mouth” (RS 78) manifests poet’s feminist stance and rebellious nature.

There are examples of antithesis also. In the poem ‘Veined Words’ the poet expresses her love which is related to bent body and home of longing. The love of beloved has crazed her and she is feeling that rose is prickly still thorns are sweet bringing forward the antithesis, “The rose is prickly / the thorn tree sweet, / your green is growing into my vermilion” (IRMN 13).
4.1.12 Anecdotes

Though poetry is different from prose, it can tell a story, describe an object or situation, and narrate an event by using device of anecdote. Alexander narrates the most personal and intimate stories of herself, her grandparents, village, family and Kerala women in order to articulate her connections with the matrilineal family tradition. The poems in *House of a Thousand Doors* and *Night Scene, the Garden* narrates the stories which are of grandmothers, her mother, her own life, mythological women; Sita, Draupadi; Renuka, cowherd Bhaskaran, Parsurama, boating accident, her cow, encroachment of house, and its resurrection and number of other women in family and village. The various narrative voices and number of characters arouse the complexity and power of the images, ideas, and emotions in the reader. The stories of stone eating girl, girl Susikali are constructed by the poet in order to reconstruct her poetic self imaginatively. The men and women from legends, history, and her own imagination unravel poet’s inner self through the anecdotes and poet is at her best in dealing with them in a private, semiautobiographical mode.

4.1.13 Voice and Persona

Along with themes of arrival and departure, belonging and exile the poem *Night Scene, the Garden* speaks of the suffering of women and their despair. To express nostalgia and despair the poet uses three voices, which provide the richness of tone and the range of subject matter to the poem. In fact, *Night Scene, the Garden* is a ten part poetic sequence in several voices and has been performed on the stage. The voices in Alexander’s poetry are not restricted to selected group of immigrants and expatriates. They are varied voices reflecting unified and diverse views. Bruce King writes in the review of *Night Scene, the Garden*, “the various voices and characters, the use of the past, the meditational mode (if more
intense and dramatic here), and the way places become a starting point for various experiences” shape the poem into a comprehensive vision (King444).

Though the various voices are present in Alexander’s poetry, her persona recurrently meets us in all the poems. The poems in House of a Thousand Doors include a richly imaged, sensuously imagined voice. The voice speaks about houses, doors, family, and grandmothers. The poem ‘Text from the Middle Earth’ (IRMN) is presented through two voices who speak one after another of the memory; the life and blood for the poet and the restrictions on women and harm caused due to it.

4.1.14 Dramatic Monologue

The Bird’s Bright Ring is a reflective or narrative poem. It appears as a whole to be dramatic monologue, full of female speaker’s reminiscences of her relationship with the male listener called as “cactus man”. The monologue reflects on the human condition in the chaotic world where “blindness blooms” and “dark hollows” are visible everywhere. In order to uncover the pre-independence period which poet has not experienced, she uses the technique of dramatic monologue. The spirit of the past unravels the mystery of time to her alone and the poet provides the version of the spirit’s account. The poems in Without Place have the semblance of a dramatic structure as the words ‘Prologue’ and ‘Epilogue’ clearly indicate but the poems do not represent any connected development of events. Instead, these poems are a strange mixture of the narrative and the lyrical to express the confused life of the modern man who finds himself disillusioned, exiled and completely alienated.

4.1.15 Stream of Consciousness

The important technique used in the poems of Meena Alexander is that of stream of consciousness, the speaker’s mind moving forward and backward at will as if she were in dream. She deals with the memory to
express her mind’s working and the technique proves very effective in unraveling her implications with the past. In the section XXII of BBR, poet casts her glance at a calendar of 1975. Her mind suddenly recalls the news items of The Times of India (Tuesday November 5, 1974) reporting the lathicharge on the massive, though peaceful procession of Jai Prakash Narain. Similarly, in section XV the speaker reviews all the major events of the history of the world—the sorrow of Sita, the endless suffering of Ixion, Icharus, Ashoka, and battlefield of Kurukshetra. The stream of consciousness is suggested by lack of syntax and total defiance of the rules of English grammar.

Apart from these devices, Alexander uses devices like metonymy, synecdoche, inversions, and deletions. While rebelling against the burden of colonial language Alexander throws all rules of syntax to wind. The absence of formal syntax structure and complete disregard to the rules of English grammar are the chief features of her poetry. By inserting the variety of techniques and devices in the poem, she affirms her commitment to rupture the established norms of poetry. In order to go for unconventional versification, Alexander uses free verse with short length lines sometimes only of one or two words. Her poetry reveals the use of the poetic devices as assonance, alliteration, repetition, inverse word order, parallelism and many others. However, her poetry is free from foot and meters. It has its own rhythm realized strongly by the ear. The repetitions of sounds make her poems musical and melodious. Though she employs free verse, many of the traditional poetic devices are utilized to achieve elevated effect, music, and melody.

4.2 Poetic Diction

Language in literature is language of communication, which exploits the language of real life in particular context. It is laden with figures of various kind and verbal artistry and varies according to the poet
within a social context, placed within a particular socio-cultural and histological setting. The diction is the conscious power of choosing terms with an effect of precision from the wide range of available words. Therefore, it is individual characteristic. Alexander’s poetry has remarkable variety in applications and implications of language. In order to explore the diction in Alexander’s poetry the researcher is intended to focus on the diction peculiar to her poetry, which comes out of her multiple migrations, study of different languages, wide reading of world literature, her Ph.D study and her career as an academician in various universities in India and abroad.

4.2.1 Concrete and Abstract Diction

Alexander prefers concrete, vivid, and unpretentious diction although her poetry is full of strange collocations, bizarre images, and complex symbols. Her poetry has both kind of diction: concrete and abstract. Concrete word or sentence asserts about particular subject; particular person or physical object while abstract tells about abstract things or qualities, which exist only as attributes of particular persons or things. The concrete description of locale is the chief feature of Alexander’s diction. It involves the qualities that are perceived by four different senses: hearing, touch, sight, and smell. The description of landscapes and various lived places from Kerala, Allahabad, Delhi to England and New York involves the pictorial representation of rivers, streets, earth, coasts, lakes, trees and flowers, grass, the house of red tiled roof, paddy fields, mountains, valleys, the church, courtyard, black Broadway, moving trains and metros, boats, spices, San Andreas Fault, singing stones, bristling cicadas, the garden, swing in the tree and so on.

The concrete diction of her poetry exposes itself in the imagery, the capacity of the poet to visualize the pictures through description. John Crowe Ransom in his The Worlds’ Body (1938) emphasizes on the
concreteness of poetry and its materiality of things, “Most poetry is certainly more concrete than other modes of language, especially in its use of imagery” (qtd. in Abrams, Harpham 55). Alexander expresses every state of thought and feeling with the help of concrete imagery provided through the concrete descriptions of objects, humans, nature, landscape, body, stones, ruin, devastation, bloodshed and violence. The concrete images of eyes, heads, legs, throat, mouth, tongue, palms, veins, hand, belly, cheeks, plums, birds like swallow, lemming, koil, cuckoo, cicada, peacock, animals like rat, lice, goats, cow, fish, pigeons, lion, gazelles, elephants, toads, rats, stones like sandstone, ripple stone, slate, polished stone, stone eating girl, landscape and nature, coasts, trees, gardens, ruin, marshes, paddy fields, Pamba and other rivers like Ganga, Mississippi, Hudson, Himalaya, San Andreas Fault and various other places come together to create concrete, vivid and apt imagery from piling up of simple details and by use of metaphors.

Thus, use of vivid and concrete imagery is the strong element of Alexander’s poetic diction. The juxtaposition of unexpected or impossible images that occurs in surrealistic poetry forms the major part in Alexander’s poetry. Along with vivid images, her diction is endowed with symbolism and metaphor. However, it is abstract diction, which elevates Alexander’s poetry from ordinary level to philosophical and proves the well-known fact that the most moving and memorable in poetry is abstract. Bruce King comments in Review of *House of a Thousand Doors* that her poem are full of “cosmos of abstract symbols such as sky, star, sun, used without qualifying words” (King379).

The recurring use of abstract words makes her poetry indecipherable for the readers. She uses synesthetic imagery with strange collocations, which gives touch of abstractness to her poetry. The images like crystal of mundo (12), river of crystal (13), speaking darkness (23),
blind tongue, soft blood (25), spiked music (30), breathing lamentation (25), a black hole of music (31) (BBR), fluent pain (9), crescent dark (12), brilliant sun (14), barbarous sight (15), pitiless light, rambling house (27), rippling wave of speech, memory of blood (26) (IRMN), hungry music (9), waxen bones (15), green spice of shame (15), raw sun (15), ceaseless salt (29) (WP), dark water, seven heavens (RaB97), silent grief, meaningless thunder (TS4) broken shadows, a thousand suns, sunlit wings, riding memory (RaB83) are some of the abstract concepts from the long list which make her poetry ambiguous and provide it with mystical and symbolical significance.

4.2.2 Words from Other Languages

Along with unraveling poet’s interests and fashions, the diction assists in understanding contemporary setting and influences on the poet. From the close reading of her poetry, it is found that, Alexander borrows freely from ancient world, classical French, Urdu, Malayalam, and Hindi, multiculturalism of USA, Western intellectual traditions, and feminist movements. Alexander exhibits her Indian consciousness and revolutionary spirit not only through the subject matters but also through her style, diction, and versification. Her language derives life and vitality as it springs from her own experiences. The American English affects her language as she has been living there for long period and England has molded it because of Ph.D. study in British University during formative years. The diction of Alexander is academic and gives the sense of wordiness. Being very academic, deep, and slightly boring her poetry is alleged of verbosity and wordiness in the poems that narrate about the family, childhood and places. Paranjape comments on the wordiness of her poetry in his review of House of a Thousand Doors’, “one gets the feeling that she doesn’t have much to say” (Paranjape 44).
Widely read and travelled academician Alexander imports words from many languages like French, Sanskrit, Urdu, Hindi, and Malayalam. She hardly coins new words but borrows words from her reading, daily usage in American life and Kerala countryside exhibiting the interesting blend of words taken from different lived experiences, contexts, and people she met.

*The Birds Bright Ring* opens with lines in French language,

L’oiseau chante avec ses doigts
Deux fois

Repete

L’oiseau chante avec mes doigts
Deux fois (BBR 9)

The Hindi word “Kala”(10) meaning black is used in BBR to indicate the sense of gloom, despair and kingdom of darkness. The Sanskrit words Shabda, nada, svara, sruti (13) in the final coda connect her poetry to the ancient Indian tradition of poetry.

The words like “Kharif season” (SR 22), “khadi” (HoaTD55) reveal the Indianness of poet’s language. The repetition of Malayalam sounds Ai, Ai in “After the First House” (TS 4) refer to the lost mother tongue which has now turned just “meaningless thunder”(TS4). There are Hindi words such as goondas (HoaTD10), aaou (IH57), rakshasis (HoaTD12), aag (RaB50), Amma (IH72), shabash (RaB72), Sanskrit words like dukham (RS121), mahakavi, bhang (IH57), Yogic asana, paniphal (RS71), pushtakam (IH23). They provide Alexander’s poetry with the sense of Indianness. There are words like Yadnya, putra, dharama prajnaparamita borrowed from Indian mythology. The Sanskrit words in ‘Elegy for My Father’ (IH 15) gnyanam, dhanam, kavya are
used to indicate the temporality and meaninglessness of life as all life ends in death. The lines from Hindi or other languages are written in English transcription in some poems. They are ‘Estrangement Becomes the Mark of the Eagle’ (RaB27) and ‘Gold Horizon’ (IH50). There are also typical Indian words like kurta (IH63), dhoti (IH63), mahakavi (IH63), satyagrahi (IH86), charka (IH86), durgah (RS74), ashram (RS78), ahimsa (RS78).

Some Malayalam words are given with their English meaning in the poem ‘Illiterate Heart’ (IH 67) to emphasize the burden of English learning.

njana (my sole self), njanam (knowledge),
nunni (gratitude), ammeci, appechan,
veliappechan (grandfather)

Uproar of sense, harshe tutelage:
aana (elephant), amma (tortoise),
ambujan (lotus) (IH 67)

The words from other languages are also used without giving meaning in order to add to the confusion of readers and complexity of the poem. In spite of this, her poetry is the movement towards self-definition and has turned out to be an unembellished diction where there is no sleight of words. The feeling which diction emphasizes is pure, direct, and intimate. The diction in Alexander's poetry with its latent associations and meanings is used successfully. Her diction is modernist and is influenced by contemporary egalitarian and conversational style. She avoids decorative poetic diction.

4.2.3 Phrasing Power and Recurring Phrases

Alexander is an instant artist and can compose poems in train, in traffic or in her room. Her poems are spontaneous overflow of her
thoughtful mind replete with a fresh and original power of phrasing. The use of adjectives and adjectival and adverbial phrases to delineate a distinctive quality of a person or a thing is abounding. Some randomly selected examples underscore her phrasing power: purple plums, bones of light (10), burnt diamond (12), terrible babble (24), countless tongues (24), city without sorrow (29), glittering obsidian (24), breathing lamentation (25). There are abstract phrases like eyes of nothing, tunnels of black (31), a black hole of music (31), open wound of heaven (25) (BBR), new burning eye (9), brimming festival (9), flesh fine as tissue (11), crescent dark (12), copper hair (13), deep grass (13), stray stars (14), splintered thread (15), incandescent image (15), stained words (18), veined words (13), torn grass (19), a dark pit of pavement (IRMN), sightless doom, imageless face, boneless face (19), brilliant blankness (WP), terrible kindness (98), seven heavens (97), lips of stone, weave of silk, black kindness, shards of sense, twice born verbs, unseasonable weather (35)(RaB), sweet and bitter smoke (9), pale petals (9), a house without wheels, hungriest heart (25), a knot of rubble (10), strut of death (11)(RS) which reveal the phrasing power of the poet. Sometimes more than two adjectives are used in phrases great black sun, long grass wet with light, countless voices rising in the dark; dark and wretched spaces (BBR), a long slow swallow, flagrant humming birds, straight white sails (IRMN).

Due to the exposure to the Western literary tradition, the poet employs the techniques of phrasing and construction following the poets like T. S. Eliot as Bruce King comments in ‘Review of Night Scene, the Garden’, “T. S. Eliot’s Four Quartets is present in some phrasing, rhyming and construction” of Alexander’s poetry(King444). There are very amazing and complex phrases in The Bird’s Bright Ring, which reveal the phrasing power of the poet. They are dark spaces (19),
brooding voice (20), rough metal (21), cold canon (21), sharp cleft (21),
eyes of nothing (21), slits of canon (21), breathing cheek (21), delicate
lips (22), splinter of wood (22), shards of glittering gum (22), tangle of
thorn (22), crystal of root (22). The juxtaposition of unrelated images
makes her poetry undecipherable for common reader and needs efforts to
understand.

The suffix ‘less’ is used in number of phrases such as; countless
voices (BBR23), ceaseless summer (22), breathless child, pitiless light
(28), restless trail, blameless body, ceaseless time(30)(IRMN), clawless
rats (18), imageless face, boneless face (19), fearless bone (21), slit so
sightless (22), sightless doom (23), sightless cave (29), ceaseless salt (29),
ceaseless thorn (30), sightless space (35), endless light (38) (WP),
featureless garden (SR8), fireless room (6), countless women (53)
(HoaTD), meaningless thunder (4), sinless ancestors (5), countless graves
(8), father’s restless feet (19), senseless limbs (19), ceaseless thirst (20),
endless gravity (25) (TS), shameless man (HoaTD7), speechless, skinless
goddess (72), wordless part (76), senseless mutilations (96) (RaB),
restless waters (11), harmless bats (74) (IH), priceless ash (RS48). These
phrases emphasize sense of loss.

4.2.4 General Diction

Poet exploits number of allusions to the mythology, literature, and
literary characters to exhibit her academic and traditional legacy. The
prosaic words which have harsh connotation such as breathing
lamentation, endless devastation, terrible kindness, a blindness magnified,
sea of blood, freight of dreams, alkaline soil, impenitent river, narrative
of loss are used to convey the harshness of reality. Sometimes her diction
is affected by verbosity and superfluity at the cost of vigour and intensity
as commented by Paranjape. The hyperbolic words and phrases are used
to intensify the particular situation, thoughts and feelings. The hyperbolic
words like sea of blood, bloodied rose, millions dead, rivers crisscrossed with blood, strut of death (RS), ocean as the hardest thing (IH), exaggeration of loneliness as “I am dying of loneliness” (SR9), “All the seven skies are broken” (RaB25) add to the intensity of happenings.

4.2.5 Geographical and Scientific Words

The diction from all occupations has been used by the poet, although the technical, ecological, astronomical words are abounded, which make her vocabulary subtler, dramatically balanced and greatly enriched with learnt terms. The metaphors are fresh and taken from the vastly wide range of reference. While dealing with geography of psyche and displacement, poet uses geographical words plenteously: fault, ravines, lake, reservoirs, mountains, hills, valleys, seasons; autumn, rain, summer, spring, cyclone, storm, territories, ice, almanac, meteorology, weather, sun, moon, sky, horizon, earth, climate, clouds, runnels, milk white seasons, river in spate, hail, islands, volcanoes, ocean. The scientific terms like massive body, gravitating sulphur, metallic wings, phosphorescent, gravity of exile, words related to human anatomy; eyes, head, veins, entrails, pancreas, liver, veins, tongue, womb, heart, rib, elbow, wrist, nostrils, ears, cheeks, lips, skin, spine, bone, blood, sperm, thigh, fingers form the precise picture of human life surrounded by science. The various trees, plants, bushes, vines, spices, flowers, trees laden with fruit, paddy fields, and sugarcane fields form the vegetable world in her poetry. Thus through mixture of ordinary and unfamiliar words and ecological images and phrases, poet exhibits her ecological concern.

4.2.6 Inversion and Deletions

Aristotle advocated the mixture of ordinary and unfamiliar words in the language of poetry in order to maintain clarity through ordinary words and avoid meanness through unfamiliar words making the
language elevated. Alexander tries to achieve different effects by her technique of placing words in a line in such a way, which allows considerable variety to language. The standard word order in English is subject, verb, object which is not followed in her poetry. Such variation of order is called as hyperbation or inversion. The hyperbation or inversion of noun and adjective is the commonest variation. Poet says, “Her house I inherit” instead of “I inherit her house” in the poem ‘Salt Spray’ (SR 56). Thus, arrangement or juxtaposition of words creates its own kind of poetic diction.

*The Bird’s Bright Ring* and some other poems exhibit the lack of syntax and total defiance of the rules of English grammar. Full stops and other punctuation marks are very rare and we find all kinds of deletions and inversions. The lines of one or two words are abounding. The absence of formal sentence structure and complete disregard to the rules of English grammar are the chief features of the poem BBR that come out of her rebellion against the imposition of burden of colonial language and not out of ignorance. Majority of lines in BBR are of one or two words.

Strangely

I pick up
burnt eyes
my two
hands
birds
to her
mouth
my feet
a song
of light (BBR 18)
The words are just juxtaposed without using any connections. As compared to BBR, the poems in other collections follow grammatical rules to certain extent. There are verbs, and auxiliaries in the poem, sentences are congruous, and complete which is helpful in interpreting the poem. In the early stages of writing, her poetry is proliferated with curious and multilayered symbolism but later on, she turned towards the use of concrete imagery. Her diction is infused with imagery.

Repetition of words and phrases is the significant feature of Alexander’s diction. We come across the word plum not merely as image but as the inseparable part of her diction: plums, purple plums, flesh of plums, sharp plums, plum pudding, burnt plums, red plums, bright plums in BBR. The word plum is repeated for eleven times in the poem *The Bird’s Bright Ring* and is used recurrently in all the collections of Alexander. The Word soul is repeated for eight times in the poem ‘Singing to My Soul’ (HoaTD 63). ‘Lamentation’ is also recurrently found word. The recurring words in *Illiterate Heart* are father, indigo (a rat of indigo, the map of indigo, a horizon scrawled in indigo, a leaping indigo wave, the indigo sea) and heart. The phrases ‘grey room’ and ‘crooked hour’ are repeated in *Stone Roots*. The words related to darkness, blindness and blackness are used repeatedly in all collections.

4.2.7 Words of Violence and Sorrow

The poems exhibit the depressing tone by the use of words such as breathing lamentation, dark bruise, devastation, open wound of heaven, narrative of loss, cracked sky, weeping and weeping, sightless doom, difficulties, bruised fragrance, dying of loneliness, grey room hour, wound of America. There is proliferation of words of bloodshed, violence, war, and weapons. There are weapons like guns, grenades, rifles, bombs, shrapnel, knife, sword missiles, bayonet, artillery, sticks, whips, ropes, scythes, sickles, tanks, teargas, and instruments of war. The
diction is replete with violent words like soft blood (BBR), blood, rhythms of blood, slaughter, rusting blood (WP), heart’s blood, blood stained cloth, hammers draw blood, seethe of war, the bloodshot eye (TS), bloodied flesh (HoaTD), massacres, killing field of partition, bloodied stuff, bloodied feather, blood gags, bloodied river water, bleeding head, slaughter, blood of the lamb, (RaB), colour of dry blood, the sash of blood, pouch of blood, burnt pains of Punjab, courtyard was a sea of blood, carnage, moon soars into sea of blood, gunfire (RS).

Symbolism of Alexander’s poetry adds to the expressiveness of the language. The symbolism suggests something more and beyond the expressed meaning. The ordinary language cannot express the mysterious and expansive and hence cannot give the touch of richness and complexity to the poetry. On the other hand, symbolism conveys the inexpressible concepts by increasing the richness and expressiveness of language. It expresses the suppressed experiences, which are impossible to express directly. Symbolism has been the inseparable part of Alexander’s poetic diction. Alexander’s diction and versification has achieved noble, serious, and elevated effect really transforming it into the diction of twentieth century modern poetry. Her diction grows richer and richer as she progresses towards maturity.

These explorations into her poetry prove that Alexander’s diction is governed by social usage. It is loaded with the words related to migration, exile, contemporary world situation, war and violence, political changes, fanaticism, terrorism, and bloodshed. Her diction is the product of experiences of living as black woman from third world in multicultural America where no melting pot theory is applicable. She uses the words that are available to all speakers of English as well as some unfamiliar words but with distinction. The diction is also full of ambiguity and is permeated with historical incidents, memories, and bizarre associations. It
exploits the resources much more deliberately and systematically. Her diction exploits paradox, ambiguity, the contextual change of meaning and irrational inversions. It is laden with symbols, metaphors, similes, and epithets.