Meena Alexander’s poetry is a complex interweaving of the Indian and immigrant experiences. Her poetry emerges out of the consciousness of hanging between two worlds, between memory and present experiences. The issues of identity formation and retention are crucial for her. She skillfully joins contradictory geographies, matrilineal tradition of home and her intimate thoughts and feelings. Her childhood experiences are unusual. Her diasporic sensibility is unceasingly creative. She looks back upon the lost time, places, languages, and past events and weaves them with the present day experiences in her poetry. However, her poetry is not confined to diasporic experience and feminist awareness only. She is the poet with strong political and social awareness and writes about multiple facets of violence including colonial violence, war, state oppression, riots, cultural terrorism, 9/11 attacks, religious violence and partition violence. The present chapter explores the major themes such as diasporic consciousness, feminist consciousness, and violence.

2.1 Diasporic Consciousness

2.1.1 Exile and Loss

Alexander’s poetry mourns on the loss of homeland after self-imposed exile. *The Birds Bright Ring* is interspersed with poet’s reflections on exile, migration, and the human condition in the chaotic world. The diasporic feelings, search of root, the sense of exile within the homeland and abroad, search of identity, and the sense of being rooted out are the part of her growing consciousness. She knows the fact that “Song is being” in migrated life and sings for all those who worked head
bent “labour tooth nail sinew bone” (15) under the colonial burden. They were the proletariat Diaspora or the indentured labourers of the first phase of Indian migration and “They forge that land / Where song has second place / and Being thrives alone” (15).

_**I Root My Name**_ is dominated by a sad, melancholy strain, which comes out of separation from motherland and beloved grandparents in very tender age. She invites “sister of lamentation” to “keep company” with her in “the time for mourning” (‘Invitation’9). Her eyes are polished with the fluent pain. Her head is full of murmurings and the birds of sorrow of exile come out to increase the darkness in her life in the poem ‘Bird Head’ (12). But in the next poem ‘Sleeping Gazelles’, she celebrates exile which measures love based on the assumption that the border crossing only can give the sense of being within the border. The feeling of homelessness can explain the importance of home, “What but exile measures out our love” (12).

In the process of re-rooting, immigrant’s life is divided between the past and present by dislocation. The poet describes the diasporic persona’s dangling position as “dislodged from the pendant sky” (16) in the poem ‘Lost Ayodhya’. The pain and sorrow of the lost world convert past into “Torn Grass”, “Your sap will pass / through me like torn grass / till your blood cross my country’s vein at last” (‘Torn Grass’19). In the poem, ‘Veined Words’ the poet speaks of the “harsh Jerusalem” and evokes the experience of dispersal from land of origin. Her life became, “a night with no stars” full of darkness(14). Alexander’s poetry continuously lingers on her soul cracked by multiple migrations where “to breathe is pain” (14). She deals with the theme of alienation, and expresses the accursed life of the modern man who finds himself disillusioned, exiled and completely alienated.
The sense of exile and loss comes also out of separation from the mother tongue by the dead script of English. The confrontation with the social, personal, cultural, and aesthetic dislocations makes her to juxtapose the constantly changing situation with the dislocated past. The poet could hardly understand the vision of her soul. Her hands grow cold of the pain. Moreover, light is not visible. She experiences sense of being in darkroom and in that darkroom of anonymity; she feels the terror of exile as bitter as crucifixion as she writes in ‘Her Question’ (25). ‘The Text from the Middle Earth for Two Voices’ expresses the feelings of fall and fragmentation which make poet to search herself in her grandmother’s house. Because of the painful experience of exile, the poet becomes “breathless child / Weeping and weeping in a pitiless light” (28). The loss of homeland, the pains of migrated people, feeling of restlessness, the dangling middle state which does not have beginning and end, and weeping of the poet for loss like ‘Lazarus’ are the themes of the poem.

*Without Place* adopts a new approach to the problem of exile. The poet is closely conscious of her exiled status and asks in an essay ‘Exiled by a Dead Script’, “What is it mean to be exiled?” And the answer is “An exile is one who is estranged from the place around him, whose body cannot appropriate its given landscape” (WP viii). The immigrant’s body is unable to appropriate its adopted land. It always dwindles into state of being without place as she depicts in the poem ‘Songs without Place’. The lemming who dreams of the great White Sea is the token of the immigrant who thinks of the left out homeland. The pain of exile becomes coarser and coarser and stains the brain of the immigrant poet in a “gray hour before dawn” (34). The poet compares herself with the white lemmings, the migratory creatures that might be facing the fatal season of exile. After facing fatal migration, the objects have become stern and
bare. The life is divided into the haunting past and confused present because, “They are the final demarcation / of your place” (35). Such final demarcation leaves poet with the gloomy and nihilistic worldview.

Stone Roots illuminates the dark story of lamentation on exile. Having “no common earth” (20), the poet has been haunted by the grief of dislocation. The grief is festering like wounds. It imposes loneliness on the poet as she writes in ‘The Loneliness of Plants’ (22). In ‘Song of the Crooked Seventies’, the poet compares the state of exile to the grey room in crooked hour which leads to no hopeful transformation(37).

In House of a Thousand Doors, Alexander’s poetic persona goes to the ancestral figures, the two grandmothers. They became the imagined force to keep Alexander culturally anchored in the Kerala soil. Therefore, the love for the motherland and grandmothers becomes one and sorrow of separation from them is reflected in the poem ‘Looking through Well Water’ (6). The house of a thousand doors with impassible sills is the house, which is inherited and lost. The poems are all inspired with yearning for true possession, for loss, for impossible returns and reunions. In the poem ‘Narcissus never Knew Her’ the poet speaks “from that other country” (49) which creates the sense of ‘otherness’ being on the periphery of dominant culture. By linking herself to the “ancestral spring” (49), she tries to regain the lost song but there is no hope.

The poem ‘Hillside’ illustrates the basic issue of migration. The poet is dislocated from the familiar landscape; the rivers, the wind and feels that black water is the harsh sentence for crossing the border. The poetic self becomes scattered as, “the wind spread / a few leaves / into a map” (68).The poem ‘A fistful of Thyme’, focuses the feeling of being exiled in America. Thyme is a plant that is used in food to add taste to it, but the ‘fistful of thyme’ of poet’s garden has been struck into smoke, burns to a subtler air, and covers her life. The poet wonders, “Who can
tell that stole though us / Seized and dissolved this climate?” (71). The poet is haunted by the sense of loss and exile throughout the poem. The poem ‘Consider this Leaf’ reflects on the state of exile, alienation, sense of being thrown into the world right from birth. The poet thinks of birth as the first catastrophe. She sees herself, barely eleven that June wandering in sugarcane fields but nextly presents the contrasting picture of self at the age of thirty one when her life is, “leaf shaped like two wings” (72). The growing sense of dividedness and fragmentation has been the striking note throughout this collection. The life of the immigrant is like a leaf “afloat as if by accident” dissuades from the place and scatters as diasporas like seeds in real sense of the term. The poem ‘Searching for Heaven’ depicts it rightly: “I glimpse wings / On ten thousand, falling seeds” (74)

The Storm: Poem in Five Parts describes the storm of exile, migration, displacement, and dislocations. The poet had lived many places from Allahabad to New York during her endless travel and it does not have any timetable. The poem ‘The Travelers’ maps her ceaseless travel, “Is there no almanac / for those who travel ceaselessly?” (7). The gulls swarming on the Red sea, the Gulf of Aqaba, cry in their indecipherable language. Their cry torments the poet as she identifies herself with them and tears stream down the cheeks of the child voyager who is the poet herself. The poet remembers the leaves and flowers, wells and watering places very passionately only to conclude that her journey is nothing but “crawling forward / in thunder and rain” (9). The halts at airports, stoppages in unknown places like Bahrain, Dubai, London, New York during her multiple migrations have cracked her fate. The unfortunate process of dislocation takes the poet to the city, “that hold no common speech for us / no bread, no bowl, no leavening” (10). The migrant workers work in the dirty atmosphere and young women scrub
the floors of high walled building and in such wretched condition “the soul sweats blood” (TS10).

The plight of immigrant women is worse than that of men. They are already marginalized and silenced by the patriarchal domination. They are caught between ‘father’s house’ and ‘husband’s sword’ and remained in the dangling position suspended between heaven and earth like Trishanku in spite of having multiple homes (16). However, the rootedness in the culture, traditions, and the ancestral house could end this exile.

*River and Bridge* also deals with the theme of exile and loss. The poem ‘Relocation’ deals with the strong note of migrancy. The multiple travels and icy border held her mind “in a metallic fork” (3). The poem ‘Estrangement Becomes the Mark of the Eagle’ comments on the estrangement caused due to the exile. The exile has brought cultural alienation which poet feels while living in the room just above the street in New York. That is why poet feels that “exile is hard” just like a “desert around” full of muggers and looters and “Masked faces” (26). While living in such situation estrangement becomes the poet’s mark. The exile warbles in the poet because it makes her the captive of dislocation. But now she wants ‘Room without Walls’ because, “The prose / of my world / unfixed”(34). The landscape of motherland and the balconies of childhood have passed away. They altered poet’s psychology and everything as she says in the poem ‘The Unexceptional Drift of Things’. The migration has desiccated her mind and her voice is lost in the skyscrapers.

The poem ‘San Andreas Fault’ suggests the fault created by exile. The poet has traveled in various countries and has realized that there is nothing like her motherland. “I know the Ganga / is like nothing else on
The migration for the poet is the fatal crossing of border, never to return and gives rise to different questions.

You have crossed a border, never to return
stranger in this soil, who will grant you burial?
Neck of my beloved, who will grant you burial?
Eyes, lips, nose who will shield you from sight? (94)

Her mother country conceived her, nourished her but in the foreign country, the poet just becomes ‘migrated creature’ (97). The grief of exile, incomparable with anything else reaches to the height when poet says; “There is no grief like this / the origin of landscape is mercy” (‘Deer Park at Saranath’ 99).

*Illiterate Heart* delineates the exile and its impact on poet’s imagination. The poem ‘Provenance’ meaning ‘Place of Origin’ suggests poet’s obsession with the places. After migration, the search of self through poetry becomes the only possibility of existence. Creation of poetry, loss, and memory has been deeply related to her migration. So she calls her muse as “O muse of migrancy” in the poem ‘Indigo’ (34). The poem ‘Man in a Red Shirt’ presents the narrative of loss in the process of exile and assimilation. The exile is responsible for making the poet bereft of history and bereft of past, “We are poor people / a people without history” (43). The history has been lost from the poet, which she can imagine only in dreams. Because of this loss, the journey of the poet has been termed by her as, “FROM THURSDAY ON TILL NEVER / THIS JOURNEY IS A NARRATIVE OF LOSS” (44). Thus, her poetry records what has been lost in her journey from the place of her birth, India, to the place of her work: the U.S. In most of her poems, Alexander tries to recapture and preserve what is being irremediably lost to her: family lore, cultural moorings, and a lived past.
The poem ‘Translated Lives’ also depicts the Diaspora people whom the poet calls as ‘Translated Lives’. The misery of loss of history, loss of identity and of living in a multicultural society is not poet’s alone. There are millions of other people who have been facing such sorrow, so the poet asks, “Quick! Are there other lives?” (45). These migrated people, according to the poet, are groping to find the shore in the vast sea of multicultural society, “lovers couple on hard rock / groping for the sea’s edge”(45). The residence in exiled world has transformed them into “nothingness, poverty of flesh”(46) and their lives become stiffened. Therefore, for the poet it is difficult to console them. In spite of their stiffened emotions, the poet wants to kindle the senses again (46). The poet is concerned about these ‘exiled’ or ‘translated’ lives because her life now belongs to those millions of “translated lives” who are facing the agony of living life in exile.

**Raw Silk** depicts the aftermath of 9/11 with reference to immigrant situation. The poem ‘Blue Lotus’ depicts the sorrow caused by the exile and dislocation of mothers. The poet is in search of a stone, a shelter, a hovel of straw, or even a sperm out of which the life of man and woman begins. For that, she climbs the mountains and clears them just to find, “the sign of four-cornered world, gammadion, / which stands for migration, for the scattering / of the people. The dislocation of mothers” (42). The poem ‘Porta Santa’ speaks of the stones of poet’s childhood and her weeping for the loss (54). Thus Alexander’s poetry is embodied with the full particulars of her many senses of exile and loss and struggles for survival from sufferings of dislocation.

### 2.1.2 Migration and Creation

The acute sense of loss and nostalgia is reflected in the creative output of Alexander. Her desperate feeling of being rootless and the search of anchorage, a mooring compel her to belong somewhere and she
finds that anchorage in poetry and calls poetry as place. The creation and migration are closely connected because the migration imposes anonymity, loss of identity on the immigrant. Therefore, the immigrant uses the medium of creation to escape from the situation of oblivion of anonymity to ensure the permanence in a changing world. The agony of migration made poet to write to survive. So while expressing the intention of her writing, she says, “I learn song is being” (BBR 15).

The poem ‘Her Mother’s Words’ (IRMN24) depicts the feeling of anonymity, the darkness of life where her mother’s words can bring the light of hope. The poet transforms these words into the poetry. The loss of identity fuels her writing. Without suffering from loss, her poetry could not have been possible because her impetus to write was the loss of person or of place. She had first begun to write when she was first separated from her grandfather and the motherland. Writing of poetry brings to her special kind of pleasure and enhances the realm of feeling and perception. The poetry crystallizes the chaotic place of language and illuminates the dark horizons of poet’s experience. The poet declares, “The reason why I keep writing is still the same. For me it is the music of survival” (‘Composing Poetry’ 140)

**Without Place** speaks of poetry and place. The migration has brought the demarcation, making the poet sightless, imageless and spaceless. In such condition, “If poetry is the music of survival, place is the instrument on which that music is played, the gourd, the string, the fret” (‘Composing Poetry’ 144). Therefore, the poet writes in the poem, ‘Songs without Place’ that “Poetry is place” (WP 36). The immigrants stand in the borderline, which provides them a double vision and often propels them into the act of writing. Jung’s view of creation as shedding of neurosis can be applied to the Diaspora poetry. The despair and all negative feelings such as loss and lamentation burst into the form of
poetry. Therefore, the poet says that her poetry is “a song of haunted place / where pages break their lines” (WP 38). Her poetry comes out of the grey hour of exile, which marks the final demarcation of her place and makes her dry and imageless.

In the poem ‘Sometimes I’m in a Garden’, the poet remembers the garden of her childhood whose bark is burning due to exile. In her search of the “crudest disciplines of space” (SR8), she turns to the lost garden of childhood. She will find it through the medium of poetry. The poet’s effort is to establish identity from featureless garden through scraping her heart’s blood into poetry. The poem ‘Smoke on Water’ speaks of the fragmentation of poet’s world that is “divided in two” (SR14). The fragmentation is fatal, and poetry becomes the source of courage for the poet, “I am searching in this poem / for courage, for words / to speak to you with” (SR14). The poetry is the articulation of poet’s inner feelings and the dark horizons of her immigrant experiences. Still poet writes, “We write the surface only” (SR14). Meena Alexander’s poetry is born out of a desperate necessity to survive. It always concentrates on use of words to make sense of human lives. Such desperate need to write has been underlined in ‘Song of the Crooked Seventies’, “Poetry comes from a grey room / in a crooked hour when we can / no longer live” (SR37).

Writing for Alexander has been an intensely emotional activity, which is linked to her body, her history, and her present. Alexander describes her creative process as “It is from the consciousness of unselving that I create my work” (The Shock 128). In the poem ‘Writing’, poet describes the water bird, water fowl, the memories and dreams, through which past comes in present. The poet’s mind works through rough weather, through difficult situations of life and then the dropped feather of bird becomes iron pen. The adversities give rise to creation, “The iron pen / turns / a dropped feather” (HoaTD 66). The act of writing
liberates the writer from her marginalized psychosis. However, writing poem was not easy for her. She was born and brought up in traditional Syrian Christian environment with strict instruction of mother to have reticence while contrastingly writing demands expression. Mother’s disapproval of her writing made her to write poems in toilet secretly.

*Night Scene, the Garden* focuses mostly on family and local events associated with Alexander’s maternal home in Kerala, her father, mother, grandmothers, several women, the illegal possession of the house by others by force, and its repossession. However, the most significant issue in the poem is “a childhood experience in a garden, when Alexander felt she could only possess the world through being a poet –” (King, Rev. of HoaTD 444).

In *River and Bridge*, the poems ‘Relocation’, ‘Lost Language’, and ‘Everything Strikes Loose’ deal with the theme of creation. The poet’s imagination has been ordered by travels and border crossings as she writes in ‘Relocation’, “Travel scored by icy borders / the imagination ordering itself” (3). The poem ‘Lost Language’ speaks of the imagination which comes in flight towards the poet. The poem takes birth inside the quiet room of poet’s mind where reckonings of autumn are clear. In ‘Everything Strikes Loose’, poet speaks to her first child when everything strikes loose to her. The sense of loss fuels her imagination as she writes,

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What fuels the mind
I tell myself
is not grief
not waste :
just a bird beak
scuffing up leaves
at the tree’s base (58)
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The poem ‘Muse’ is addressed to the poet’s ‘Muse’ which is the creative imagination and came to her when she was young (23). The muse came like a bird shedding gold feathers, giving words to poet’s desires in English and other languages. The composition of poems in the early age saves the poet from burning and she turns her into the molten thing. In these poems, Meena Alexander builds on her earlier achievements and explores the world of personal loss mediated by memory and exile. “The act of composition itself becomes a cathartic experience. Even as nostalgia mounts, the loss of a beloved becomes more manageable through the poetic act. Poetry becomes means of psychic survival. In a curious way, this poetry of loss becomes a counterpart to the act of composition” (Mohanty42).

For the poet, poetry is choric meditation in the time of difficulty. To survive in raw territory of terror’s shadow, composing poetry becomes essential as she writes in the poem ‘Choric Meditation’, “Shall I stand up and sing / make choric meditation in a time of difficulty? / We live in a raw territory.” (25). The poem presents the picture of fruitless fig tree by the river of her childhood where the muse comes to the poet and says, “I am your soul, she sings, her arms open wide” (26). She asks her to swim in the black river and find her. The poem ‘Fragments’ speaks about the fragments of poet’s existence as well as others, “I start to write fragments / as much to myself to another” (27).
To hold the hope in mind, poet wants to write because trees are bursting into bloom. The poetry comes to her in intense script, particular with rhyme and sharp as wave. The poem ‘House’ summons up ancestors, makes them alive through memory because her muse is, “Muse of memory, maker of sense / barely lit by mirror or lens.” (30). The poet is aware of the fact that her poetry is the ‘supernal architecture’ of muse and is the product of loss.

The role of place, memory and the wounds is very crucial in composing poetry as Alexander writes, “…composition of poetry cannot be cleft from the complex density of place, and the sights and sounds and smells the sensorial of the body makes us heir to. For place bears the mark of history. It is the wound that memory returns us to so that in poetry we can commemorate, we can remember” (Alexander‘Composing Poetry’143).

The poem ‘Indigo’ presents the density of loss caused by the dislocation. The feeling of loss of self and the search of self through poetry becomes the only possibility of existence. Her poetry comes out of vexatious process of migration, so she calls her muse as, “O muse of migrancy” (34). The ‘Mirror of Earth’ depicts the cracked poetic self and poet’s inability to sleep that night. The poetic self feels that return is not possible and so she always keeps on, “Musing on what you had called / the delirium of history” (36). To reclaim her own existence and subjective identity cracked by multiple migrations, the writing provides the shelter and space because “Her writing is a search for a homeland which is sometimes not a physical location rather a psychological state of being” (Sultana 176).

The poem ‘Illiterate Heart’ presents the detail accounts of how poetry came to her. The poet exiled from the place of origin compares herself with Marlowe and Kurtz in Heart of Darkness. It suggests poet’s
groping in the field of poetry, unsure of words. She acquired the script of English instead of Malayalam. The poetry is always beating in her heart and the writing can provide solace to her burnt sense, “What beats in my heart? Who can tell? / I cannot tease my writing hand around / that burnt hole of sense” (65). Her words are influenced by Gandhi, Marx and Gospels but violence involved in using and learning English is expressed very bitterly as, “Black milk of childhood drunk / and drunk again” (66). The poet babbles in her dreams to make herself safe from the splitting of the worlds and sings at midnight a high sweet tune to save herself from the failures. Thus poetry becomes “The movement toward self definition” (68). In spite of the poet’s effort to etch her fantasies through poetry the heart remains illiterate because of burden of language and “the map is torn” (68).

In the poem ‘Red Parapet’ the poet sings of her private place, her mother’s garden. When the wounds of the migration hurt and bruise the lives, poet says, “I need to write as if penitence were / the province of poems” (73). While the poem ‘Giving Names to Stones’ defines poetry as, “Making up lost time” (78). The inspiration of creation is not possible without wandering, border crossing and sense of dislocation, so poets asks, “How should I sit still, how should I write poems?” (81) in the poem ‘Roadside Music’. Thus, the trauma of multiple migrations is transformed into poetry and poetry provides the interior space by making meaning.

2.1.3 Memories of People and Past

Alexander’s poetry involves the transforming power of the memory and imagination in it. Memory emerges as the hidden stream of power and creativity in her poems from the very beginning of her writing career. I Root my Name presents the poet cracked by the memories of her blood, her ancestry. These memories are food to her creativity. She memorizes her grandmother in order to maintain the equilibrium between the past
and present, “Into her eyes I creep with memory of the well / She sat at the deep edge of garden / and watched and watched before my grandfather woke” ('Text from the Middle Earth' 28). In her quest for an imaginative source to withstand the pressures of otherness, she made up a grandmother figure, which gives the poet an easy entry into public space by crossing the domestic.

*House of a Thousand Doors* depicts the world of memory and fiction than of description and action. The poet has recalled two prominent members of her ancestry, who are two grandmothers, one political, and the other domestic. The former she never knew, represents the feminist side of poet’s consciousness. The other presents her longing for roots, desire for home after a life spent as immigrant in several countries. Bruce King comments on these memories, “Among the memories of India these are false memories, made up histories and tales; this is a past created from documents, myths, longings, politics, and fragments” (Rev. of HoaTD 379). The memories make her poetry personal, consistent, and very daring.

She calls the first poem ‘House of a Thousand Doors’ as ‘a dream poem’ and introduces grandmothers as, “She kneels at each / Of the thousand doors in turn / Paying her dues” (HoaTD 7). The two grandmothers dissolve in one in this poem but in other poems, their identities are separately maintained. The two grandmothers appear in poem after poem because they are, “The memory of my blood”. Through the memories of grandmother, the poet rekindles her faith in her female ancestors. The grandmother figure fuses the radically desperate facets of the grandmother known and unknown.

Grandmother Mariamma, who hardly left her Kozencheri house, was the silent strength of the house. She was the power in the Kozencheri house. She is the protagonist in ‘Looking through the Well Water’. She
sits by the garden well gazing for hours into its mysterious depths, as if trying to measure the female anguish. The memories of grandmother take her to the matrilineal bloodline and poet writes, “She didn’t give birth to me / But when I look into the well / It’s her face I see” (HoaTD 6).

In the poem ‘Her Garden’, memory thrives in the secluded realm of a garden creating a new space and time. The poet explains the haunting inexistence of her grandmother through the attic of memory knitted in the shades of gray and black. The garden scene, the imaginary artifact becomes the setting for an effortless and seamless entry into the mysterious sphere of death. The grandmother figure is resurrected in her memory in the poem,

I remember her  
She died so long  
before my birth  
that we are one, entirely  
as a sky.  
dissolved by sun and star (5).

The poem searches option to the intense longing for a strong and vibrant ancestral figure. In the poem, ‘Salt Spray’ the poet imagines the grandmother to make lines hold together. The fragrance of nostalgia wafting in the empty space changes into the “clot of hair” “blocked with sweet, bitten with salt / slowly turning to stone”. The poem expresses the bonding of two generations in the lines, “Her house I inherit” (HoaTD 8). The poem ‘Grandmother’s Mirror’ depicts the grandmother as the ancestor of bloodline. The grandmother who protected poet from the rough weathers of life like the metal frame of mirror is the part of that ‘unlit house’, the vertigo of poet’s childhood, sometimes becomes the shadow, which poet feels, “I swore never to forget” (HoaTD 15). The poet imagines becoming like grandmother and hence writes, “Will I fall /
to the sounding / of your blood” (HoaTD 17). A curious blend of distancing and intimacy pervades the making of the ancestral figure. The ancestral moorings, especially the Kerala childhood are indispensable to an immigrant writer like Meena Alexander. In this context, the grandmother becomes the staying power and strength to the poetic mind, entangled in the net of doubts and tentativeness.

_Night Scene, the Garden_ recreated the memories of family, Kerala and the ancestral bloodline. In the section, ‘Boating’ Alexander presents a family boating that ends in a mild disaster when the boat almost capsizes with the women, children, and men on board. The poet remembers the grandmother holding the frightened child firmly in the turbulent waters of the lake. The poet describes a disaster and presents an imaginative excursion into the ancestry of bloodline of roots and anchorage. She realizes that

*When they pulled us out we would not come unstuck* (HoaTD 20)

The poet’s memories are not only limited to her grandmother, but she depicts other female characters from her ancestry. In the poem ‘Aunt Chinna’, the poet tries to discuss the female emotions, repressed for ages, in the violent behavior of her mad Aunt Chinna. The poet recalls her exploitation by uncle Paulos and regrets, “Poor Chinna / Snooked like a wild chicken / I hate to think of what happened to her” (HoaTD 21). The poem ‘Keeping House’ also recalls with the most poignant intensity the suffering of Aunt Chinna. The poet remembers of the violence, bloodshed, the possession of her ancestral house by a crook and the torn condition of her house.

The poem ‘Night Birds’ is about a house kinship and childhood assimilated into the memories of Tiruvella house which represents
desecration and loss. The garden has been working as a personal space to find out the confused thoughts and feelings of dislocation and homelessness. The memories of mother approach the poet. The poem ‘Night Scene’ presents the voice of mother, which gains force and power through poet’s memories. The daughter takes up the narrative flow to rewind the childhood of her mother who had followed the path of a common homemaker. The mother represents the feminine values and always believes that woman should always remain in house and look after her children. The poet visualizes her cool, silent mother in the garden, which is the creation of the mind’s space. By touching her mother’s face in the darkness, the poet reaches to her roots as she is propelled by the acute desire for the soil of her homeland. This desire for the place that fuels her creative urge paints her memories in various colours.

The memory of the poet has been fixed on the space to regain the house and then the ancestral house acquires a prominent position in the memory of the poet. In the poems of Alexander, space becomes everything. The cellar, the garret, the very hood, and corridor of the house find place in her memory. The Storm: A Poem in Five Parts opens with describing the paternal grandfather who tore down his ancestral house of teak and bronze centuries old. He tore it down to build a house with running water and electricity. The brutality of the act has been expressed in the poem ‘After the First House’. Fragmentation of the house represents the fragmentation of the self. The poem remembers the fragments of the first house in dreams, “I dreamt of bits and pieces / of the ruined house” (4). The warm space of ancestral house is a fragmented remnant of the past. She remembers of ancestral hillside, swollen paddy fields which are “utterly beyond recall” (2). She speaks of childish fears of child shivered in broad head cliffs of chalk hanging by the river, depths of waterholes where buffaloes crawled, bald and fractured eggshell. They
create the picture of poet’s native land in her memory. Along with the ancestral house, the poet remembers, “the voices of family / all near and dear / crying from the holds” (2).

The poem ‘The Storm’ memorizes her parents and resurrection of the house. The poet speaks of “mother’s tired hands” and “Father’s restless feet” making her familial bonds stronger. The long time exile ends and memory becomes the regenerative force through poetic imagination. The turbulent storm comes to peaceful silence and poet writes, “. . . all exile ended / the faces in lamplight, rejoicing” (23). Thus, memory becomes an invaluable medium in perceiving the meaning of her own personal existence.

The poems in *Illiterate Heart* revolve around memories of father to rediscover the truth of kinship and possibility of shared experience. These poems are the journey to the ancestral roots of existence and search of the self. In the poem, ‘Heat Wave’ the poet remembers her father and expresses sorrow for being ten thousand miles away from him. The poet presents continuous struggle between mind and heart caught in the vortex of memory. In the poem ‘Elegy for My Father’, the memory is linked with faith by saying, “memory believes” (16). The poet calls her father as “a man for all climates” (13). By remembering him she plunges intuitively into the depth of kinship built on faith and trust. The poet recreates certain emotional moments in the relationship with her father. When the poet “Loud mouthed teenager” (12) asks him “Do you love me?” he replies, “some things need not be said.” (13) It confirms the bond of paternal love following the deep understanding of the relationship.

The poem ‘Rites of Sense’ memorizes poet’s mother. The poet has returned home for a few weeks and wishes to dissolve herself into mother’s body. The entire night poet yearns in the memories of mother
who lays her cheeks against her and blesses her bent head. The poet remembers that mother is the source of her femininity and her existence, because she, “Stitch my woman’s breath / into the mute amazement of sentences” (72).

In another poem, ‘Black River, Walled Garden’, the poet shifts herself from the world of reality to the realm of dreams, longing for childhood memories and unfulfilled wishes. The poem opens with the anguish of loss because poet feels that, “The garden of my childhood flees from me” (IH 91). The memory is ‘living’ entity and inspires the silence on one hand and creative expression on the other. The memory of childhood has been directly connected to the Kerala and this poem affects the revisitation and resurrection of Kerala land where childhood memories find shelter. The childhood memories inspire poet’s world vigourously and through them, the poet can revisit the past. The poet is also aware of the limits of memory and forgetfulness. But in spite of these limitations the “no where creature” poet recreates the garden of childhood very affectionately, “Must I Stood / drink from those waters again / reach a walled garden , memories unquiet garden?”(18)

The garden of memory is unquiet and poet wants to delete the contents of memory in a purposeful act of forgetfulness. Her mother’s words of caution always linger in her consciousness, “The first thing a girl should learn is when to keep her silence . . . it made a black space in my ear, a savagery I could not yet decipher” (FL191). Thus in the poem ‘Black River and Walked Garden’, poet is caught in two contradictory forces of severe memory and selective forgetfulness.

In the poem ‘Gold Horizon’, the poetic imagination rests on the bits and pieces of childhood memories scattered to various places. Leaving behind the floods and stones, murmurings in the paddy fields poet has entered a new world, which she had never wished. The theater of
memory has been related to the keen consciousness of the present and the poet’s mind slips into the memory of various places, which form her whole world. Still the poet maintains the wish to return to the world of childhood memories (IH50). Alexander mingles her past experiences with the mother figure to reveal the complexity of her memories. The present and past coexist in a memory of the mother who is the bloodline of the poet (IH51). Her poem reveals the memories of grandmother as powerful ancestral female figure unveiling the hidden layers of poet’s anguish and despair. By bringing together her past and present, her family, community and nation, the poet turns them into piece of writing. Thus, memory becomes the lifeline for the poet, which can pull back the dislocated individual to her real former self. The shards of memory are the hidden treasure to be transformed into creative writing. They reveal the identity of the poet in all its complexity.

2.1.4 Search of Home and Place

In the poetry of Meena Alexander, home is often connected to the self-identity. In her autobiography, Fault Lines, poet defines her idea of home. Though born in Allahabad, it is not her home. Her ancestral homes in Tiruvella; Kuruchiethu house and Kozencheri; Kannadical house together compose her notion of home ‘Nadu’, Malayalam word for home, where she will return to be buried (FL 23). So in Alexander’s poetry ‘home’ becomes a place to which lot of warm sentiments are attached. It fills her with deep longing to return to be buried after death. However, for a woman home is not a fixed place, because “for a woman, marriage makes a gash. It tears you from your original home” (FL 23). The birth of child provides an opportunity to return by ending exile, “While marriage is a parting, an exile from the maternal home, giving birth is time to return, to celebrate, to feast on rich nutty sweets, to imbibe life giving proteins, to have your body, numb after child-birth, rubbed over with hot
oils and unguents steeped in herbs”(FL 26). Thus, home in Alexander’s poetry becomes place of return to close wounds of migrations, healing the brokenness of the body and mind. The home has been a place of nurture and caring and Alexander’s poetry celebrates a number of good memories attached to it. She was always bound to her Kerala home, “I was a Kerala girl-child brought up abroad and one of my feet was bound to the raised wooden threshold of my ancestral home” (FL73). Alexander had learnt to understand the poet’s bond with place through her friendship with Jayanata Mahapatra.

Alexander’s poetry continuously goes on interpreting the diasporic space, because poet wants to make it a habitable home. However after the shock of arrival in alien land, the challenge of the forced assimilation into the mainstream and contestation of values and culture is to be faced for acquiring space. Banerjee Debjani writes, “Home in the diasporic experience is not a comfortable, inherited, and familiar space. Instead it is mere a strategic location where political solidarity is the fabric of bonding” (Banerjee40).

In the prose poem, ‘Hotel Alexandria’, poet portrays the old bag lady who has been evicted from that building called as ‘Hotel Alexandria’, which has to be transformed into a condominium. The sense of dispossession and homelessness of the old woman haunts the poet. She writes, “She kneels on the icy ground, and rocks back and forth. A weird rocking creature . . . whose house is this? I dare not cry. . . . let me speak now, my voice imprecise, my ignorance that of perpetual immigrant, a woman with nowhere to lay her head” (HoaTD 88). The poet identifies her diasporic dispossessed self with the homeless woman because in her poetry “the feeling of homelessness presages the moment of radically reimaging space and claiming it for herself” (Banerjee 40).
Through *I Root My Name*, the poet roots her name in the ancestral land because she knows that her life is fire but her ancestral land is eternal. The poem ‘I Root My Name’ explains poet’s diasporic sensibility rooted in ‘grandfather’s land’. The possession of place is the important issue in the poetry of Meena Alexander. In the poem, ‘Songs from this Dust’ the poet describes various places in her land and miserable condition of poor people living there. After seeing the misery and poverty, she feels sad but still calls these places as her resting places.

However, poet describes these places in all their reality. They give her feeling of home.

This peeped street’s my homing ground
You cannot exile me from here
a people tend it
even though they have no words
to say so (IRMN 23)

The poet firmly declares this land as her homing ground. Still there is insecurity in her mind as the sense of homelessness spills like flagrant humming birds across her hiding places. The poet wants to keep harmony with the homeland because she calls migration as ‘fall’ and herself as ‘fallen sparrow’. Because of this fall she wants to make a place in the very soil were her grandmother has her roots. The poet’s longing for the place is recurring theme which is reflected in the poem, ‘The text from The Middle Earth’, “I must trust to this voice to make a place / With soil enough for the steep brimmed beats to rise” (IRMN 28).

*Without Place* confirms the importance of place in poet’s life. According to Alexander, she came to know about importance of place through Jayanta Mahapatra, her mentor and guide. She has dedicated some of her poems to him. The poem ‘Songs without Place’ focuses the impact of migration on poet’s sensibility. It makes all objects around her
stern and bare. In the grey hour of exile, the poet’s feeling of being without place proves to be fatal and takes poet to sightless space and makes her dry, imageless and spaceless (WP 35).

The place, displacement and the desire for home have been the major concerns in diasporic writing. The displacement from the place of origin causes the loss not only on physical but also on psychological level. However, such loss for women proves to be advantageous in another context. The dislocation from the patriarchal, male dominated culture helps them to gain liberation through displacement. However, Meena Alexander’s poetry focuses only on loss happened in the process of dislocation and not gains. Yearning for the place marks her poetry and poetry becomes that imagined place for her, “Poetry is Place” (WP 36). In her essay ‘Poetics of Dislocation’ Alexander writes, “A harmony that underwrites a poetics of dislocation where multiple places are joined together, the whole lit by desire that recuperates the past, figures forth the future, thread of gold at the rim of a black horizon” (9). Thus, by echoing inwardness of the displaced self, her poetry becomes, “a song of haunted place” (WP38). The gloom dominates the poet in the exiled place, and she sings of the hour of departure.

*Stone Roots* presents different facets of her affiliation to the place, to homeland and to India. The poet becomes lonely and is haunted by the loss of place, loss of the garden of childhood because according to her “It is where I began as a poet and it has taken me all these years to find this place” (Alexander ‘Poetics of Dislocation’ 10). The poet searches for that lost place in the poem ‘Sometimes I’m in a Garden’, “I search the crudest discipline of space / a single room in which I am alone” (SR 8). The poet in search of garden is hopeful of getting that safe, green, and secret place through medium of poetry, which will take her to that featureless garden of childhood. The poet has been living in the unfixed world where her
roots have been swept out by the instability and poet feels that, “this is no common earth” (SR20). The poem ‘No Common Earth’ reflects the feeling of dispossessed poet but on the very next moment, she firmly claims her right on this earth because, “All my fathers live here / night after night I see their hands” (SR 20).

The poet is restless on the loss of her place of origin and so tries to claim it in her poetry. Her affiliations with “red soil” of Kerala, her inseparableness with it, and the busy indescribable place of America make her the creative artist. The love for homeland is one of the important features of Alexander’s poetry. Though living in the heaven called America, poet cannot forget her homeland. The memories of streets full of water, the glistening children and green flouring make poet happy as she writes in the poem ‘June 1977’, “In wet season, you have many green flowerings My India” and declares “I . . . I / entirely yours” (SR 21).

The poet feels very possessive about place and writes in the poem ‘The Loneliness of Plant’, “Place was my flesh / and carried this dread / in both palms, singing. . .” (SR 23). Though poet is frustrated and unhappy by loss of place, still has the desire and hope of homecoming, which she has been eagerly waiting for. She prays Mother of God to light a lamp and glow this homecoming in the poem ‘In Place of Heraldic Device’ (28). The poem ‘Salt Spray’ describes the love of homeland and the inhuman calling of the landscape, the riverbed, and the blue stones, which intensify the gravity of exile. The poems composed on various places entitled ‘On the Malabar Coast’, ‘Threshold City’, ‘At Golkonda’, and ‘At Konark’ (SR) are indicative of the poet’s affiliation to places.

*House of a Thousand Doors* concentrates on the fixity, shelter, and rootedness of houses. The poem after poem refers to houses and doors where houses represent fixity and doors represent multiplicity.
Alexander’s creations are based on yearning for home. They are the provisional creation of poetic self. Bruce King writes, “Underlying her fiction is uprootedness, nostalgia for a past which is itself a fiction. Her mind moves back and forth between India and rooms, hotels, streets in New York, never really at home” (King Rev. of HoaTD 379). The poem ‘House of a Thousand Doors’ unravels the lives of two grandmothers, one house bound, domestic and other ‘was the political grandmother’. The two grandmothers kneel at each of the thousand doors whose bronze sills are three feet high to avoid any creature to enter. The houses and doors are presented as strong forces against all kind of evils. However, poet has lost this shelter and feels insecure. Therefore, her mind tries to repossess the security through dreams of house.

The feeling of caught between twin earths makes her sensitive about home as reflected in the poem ‘Sidi Syed’s Architecture’. The longing for home has been transformed into terrible hunger. The heart of the poet is aching on this dangling position “loosed between twin earths”. Poet calls Sidi Syed as a fit elaboration of unhoused. In spite of being architect, the excess results in nothing, “fit elaboration of a man unhoused / yet architect of himself / his genius still smouldering” (HoaTD 59). Her poems in this collection are associated with a maternal house in Kerala like that of Kamala Das. She yearns for the mother, grandmother and the home left behind. However living in the alien land is her materialistic necessity and hence she grows the love and hate relationship with the adopted land. Though facing many difficulties, oddities in American life, poet has prepared herself to face them in all their colours and poetry becomes shelter for her. The poem ‘By Bear Mountain’ expresses this sense of love and hate relationship, “Yet we wanted it all / the sore stones /the river tilting to a sky” (HoaTD 46). The poem ‘Searching for Heaven’, expresses poet’s desire to be at home. The poet wants to “stop here”,
“watch this field” all the days of her life. Poet’s intention to know from where she comes leads her to search of the roots. She wants to stop there and carry her roots with her but regrets the fact, that “I cannot stop / I cannot take this field / with me” (HoaTD 74).

The Storm: A Poem in Five Parts represents the narrative of how her life goes on. The poem ‘Sita’s story’ describes the homelessness of women though having multiple homes. The poet identifies Sita’s situation with herself and with Diasporas suspended between heaven and earth though having many homes. She has to suffer from the impenitent loss designed by destiny. The daughter of earth found in a ploughed land by her father king Janaka, goes in exile with husband Rama, who finally abandons her making fatally homeless.

A father’s house
a mother’s fragrant bed,
a husband’s sword
that grazed her cheek
quiver and hang
as if in ether
suspended
between heaven and earth (TS 16).

Night Scene, the Garden focuses the illegal possession of the house by others, its repossession, and its subsequent history. The poem ‘Night Birds’ speaks of the house possessed back after long court matters. It indicates the repossession of the shelter, fixity, and rootedness. The poet describes a house in dull light riding its own grave where, ‘Once cobras crested here / drawn in waves” (HoaTD6). The poem ‘Cutting Trees’ presents the tender feeling of the poet towards the inherited house and land. Somebody had suggested her to divide the land in smallish plots to sell. But poet dreams of that land with tiger lilies and orchids and
cannot bear the grief of selling that inheritance because it was the land “My parents left for me” (HoaTD15). This inherited home for the poet is a place of comfort, but now it is cracked and gets revived in dreams.

The poet’s world has become unfixed due to dislocation and then the feeling of insecurity dominates her sensibility. *River and Bridge* concentrates on this sense of transformation occurred due to dislocation affecting the cultural alienation. Lakshmi Kanan comments in this context,

> Whether the poet is in Tiruvella or Meerut or Baghdad or Manhattan or London, she is aware of this one constant . . . her changeable, protean but core self. The indestructible self which goes back to not just a lineage, but a sharp, distinct sense of place, the smell of the earth on which she romped around and played with Ilya, the unforgettable maternal grandfather. (Kanan ‘Weight of Civilization’ 87)

The bridge that connects her to the place of origin is fleeing from the poet. However poet holds the house in mind’s space, “only a house / held by its own weight / in the mind’s space” (‘Ashtamudi Lake’RAB55). The poet’s attitude to cherish the homeland in mind is well interpreted by Rebecca Sultana, “The homeland, remembered in the idyllic haze of childhood, becomes a site to escape the cultural anonymities of postcolonial ethnicity in America” (Sultana 183).

The poet has come to the Hudson’s edge to begin her life but knows that Ganga is like nothing else on earth. The poem ‘San Andreas Fault’ speaks of her experiences of the western world. But while reacting on the western experiences her mind keeps on making transition to the eastern places as if “From central park, New York, to Deer Park, Sarnath, is but a short step for her” (Naik,Narain194). While commenting on themes in *River and Bridge*, Sudha Rai highlights the issue of locations,
“In River and Bridge Alexander’s poems raise thematic and ideological issues about the return to Indian roots in pure forms, the marginal self who interweaves through both Indian and foreign locations, and the crucial issue of assimilation into American culture” (Rai181).

Raw Silk presents the aftermath of 9/11 through immigrant’s view. The poem ‘Petroglyph’ expresses the feeling of worldly home in contrast to the fundamentalist attack on America. The poet concentrates on the concept of global home but that idea has lost its sublimity in contemporary world situation. The idea of home, for the poet is the product of “Physische Geographie” (46) and so rather than lamenting and regretting for loss of home poet has developed the attitude of acceptance. “Now I live on an island by the mid-Atlantic shore / Home is where when I go, they let me in” (RS 47). Poet has accepted global view and wherever she goes that place becomes her home. In spite of that she says in the poem, ‘Red Bird’ “this is my country / I was born by the Ganga / close as by a bird flies” (RS 71).

The notion of home and identity has been fractured by multiple migrations. Therefore, the multiplicity of homes cannot give the sense of home and familiarity, and make the poet alienated and torn by memories and strains of dislocation. And in such condition dislocation and conceiving of the space becomes the birthright and challenge, as Meena Alexander writes in The Shock of Arrival, “birthright both dislocation and the radical challenge of re-conceiving American space, one and the other in a single, imaginative act” (58). Thus for Alexander, making a space is challenge mixed with necessity of assimilation in the mainstream by struggling against the status of being marginal. Therefore, the poet is actively engaged in creating imagined space.
2.1.5 Quest of Identity

Women are always the symbol of purity, chastity, and sanctity and are considered as preserver of culture in the form of religion, language, dress, and food. They are burdened by the patriarchy to carry the culture with them. However, the immigrant woman’s effort to reconstruct her identity by trying to assimilate the mainstream culture, to live according to the alien code, manners, destructs her own self, her own history and leads her to ruptured double consciousness. The imagination of the immigrant struggling to assimilate the two cultures in her life is propelled by a passion to build a new identity. She tries to balance the distinct selves of her existence by exploring the inner trauma and violence faced due to border crossings. The onslaught on the immigrant woman’s identity is not only external but also internal, sexual and racial.

Seen in this context, the ‘self’ that has been projected in the poetry of Meena Alexander is the product of the memories of past juxtaposed against the present experience of the multicultural America. The memories of the past directed towards self-exploration and delineation are constantly providing the poet, the shelter, and identity. While living in New York, the sense of identity was invaded by the gaze of ‘otherness’ and it made her more nostalgic. The childhood and matrilineal memories emerge out in the process of creating identity through her attempt to fuse two grandmothers together. In Alexander’s efforts towards self-definition and expression of immigrant experiences, the poetry works as tool of establishing autonomous selfhood. Through depiction of autobiographical experiences, she tries to establish her new identity in this alien world. Because this world of expatriation demands self-definition in order to survive psychologically.

*I Root My Name* links the identity to the names because the relation between name and identity is very close. Alexander claims that
the pain of no one knowing her name that drives her to write (AlexanderFL 182). By resurrecting the kingdom of memory, the poet wants to establish her ‘unfathered’ and ‘unmothered’ self. In the poem ‘Lost Ayodhya’, she links her inheritance to the kingdom of Ram, which works as healing bark and bone for her migrant fragmented self. She wants to define her identity because in alien country, “The names your fathers gave you / flee from me” (IRMN 15). The poem ‘Her Mother’s Words’ expresses the fear of anonymity. Nobody knows the poet and she feels like sitting in a dark room. She is thrown into the exile and becomes culturally alienated, and faces the identity crisis. However, it is this loss and the awareness of anonymity that becomes the inspiration for the quest for identity.

In the poem ‘Text from the Middle Earth’, the poet describes her being as a polished stone, mirrorless with blind tongue. She can hardly breathe because of the painful experience of exile. It is scar on the poet’s mind which burns the face of the poet and confuses her about her being, “My face is burnt into an earth / I cannot touch or see / Where I am, I cannot be” (IRMN 27). Identity is related to the culture. Therefore, the poet wants to maintain affiliation with her native culture and land of ancestors. The fall and fragmentation due to exile makes her to wish a place in the very soil where her grandmother has her roots. The poet’s longing for the place reflects her quest for identity. Memories, desires, and fiction merge as she examines the construction of her identity and its relationship to family history, actuality, being a woman and writing poetry.

The poet has been writing in the quest of identities because she is aware of double marginalization of her feminine self under the foreign yoke and indigenous patriarchy. In the poem ‘Her Imageless Face’ in
Without Place poet sees, herself marginalized, weaker sex, lesser individual and the exiled space makes her nameless and imageless.

You cannot image her
You shall not name
Sister
dear sister
and darkest spouse
unsalt me
from my doom (WP 29)

The poet has to reconstruct her own identity by contesting the patriarchal society and the sole monopoly of the male.

Alexander’s concern for poetry and literature shows a consciousness, a need for holding to roots in myths and tradition through creative returns to native modes of perception and articulation. Her quest of identity is ingrained in her sense of exile. She suffers from sense of rootlessness and disorientation. The loss of identity is one of the consequences of the exile. The exile causes sense of estrangement from one’s culture and therefore the need for roots has been intensified. In the similar way, the chief motif of Alexander’s poetry is the very sense of exile that reinforced the need for native roots and quest for identity.

Stone Roots focuses the poet’s identity ingrained in the native roots of Kerala soil. The poem ‘From a Blue House’ focuses the cross-cultural experiences of the poet. As an immigrant the change, fusion and expansion become inevitable. Poet is aware of these complexities and recognizes the need to redefine the identity. The poetry serves as a medium through which it is possible to articulate the identity.

The cultural identity has been considered as fluid, produced, and reproduced as it comes out of the cross-cultural encounters. House of a Thousand Doors highlights Alexander’s quest for identity with reference
to matrilineal culture of the Kerala. The many of the poems in the collection celebrate the two grandmothers as the bloodline, which carries the cultural identity for the poet. The presentation of matrilineage in Kerala is the significant aspect of Alexander’s quest for cultural identity. Sudha Rai comments about the matrilineal ties and mother-daughter relationship in the poetry of Sujata Bhatt, Meena Alexander and Chitra Banerjee, “Along with the recall of an older cultural identity through resources of memory, language, story and myth (centred in mothers) their poetry expresses a new birthing of identity from their value domain as diasporic daughters of Mother India” (Rai188).

In the poem ‘Grandmother’s Mirror’, the poet rewrites both her personal and cultural identity by using memory. She tries to understand her identity by tracing her matrilineal roots to overcome her double consciousness. The poet clasped between the two worlds and becomes the “The Koil without skin” (17), and is sure that her bloodline will provide anchorage for the quest of an Indian Identity. In exile where self-assertion is the necessity to face the racist gaze, the mother figure and matrilineal roots provide shelter. So she writes, “Will I fall / to the sounding / of your blood?” (HoaTD 17)

The immigrant poet caught between two or more separate cultures lives on the periphery. She carries her essential strangeness within her. The fact of non-belonging and the sense of dispossession inspire the quest of a new kind of identity. The poem ‘Consider this Leaf’ depicts the poet, who has succeeded in establishing her identity in despite of many obstacles.

I have trespassed the names I was given
my clothes are empty
touched if at all
by the solace of sunlight
bells of laburnum
from a vanished birthplace,
a skirmish with your breath
it breaks : a magnificat of water (HoaTD 73)

The poem ‘Aftermath’ in The Storm depicts the reestablishment of identity and the poet’s self together. The poem ‘Toxic Petals’ (RaB) expresses the bitter experience of racism which leads the poet to lose the sense of her existence as a human being. She considers herself as skinless, four armed goddess, “I share his arms, / I am a goddess now / four armed and skinless (RaB 72). Therefore, the defining of identity becomes the dire necessity for the immigrant in order to face the fragmentation, racial and colour discrimination at every step. In the poem ‘San Andreas Fault’ (RaB), the poet speaks of the doubleness, split identity and fragmentation. ‘The fault’ suggests the crack caused by migration that affects poet’s sensibility. The poet sees herself doubled, split, a stick figure and her two arms bloodied with a bundle. The exile makes her the creature of fault and quest of identity becomes inevitable.

Writing is an effort to find lost world and lost identity as reflected in Illiterate Heart. In the poem ‘Fragments’, Alexander explains her intention of writing as to restructure her fragmented identity (IH 27). Because the search of the self through poetry becomes possibility of existence and she searches herself in the map of indigo, “I search for myself / in the map of indigo” (IH 35). The loss of identity leaves her purposeless, aimless, and even homeless. “Why I am here? I cannot tell” as written in the poem ‘Valley’(IH 39).This sense is so bitter and pungent that she faces the identity crisis, “I have no name / I think you know”(IH 39). So it becomes essential to define identity.

The poet is without place and is in search of meaning of her existence, “Kya, kya hum kon hai? Idher hum kon hai?” which means,
“Who are we here? What are we here?” (‘Gold Horizon’ IH50) These existential questions have been answered by the poet in her autobiographical work, *The Shock of Arrival*, “We are here in this present, the only one we have fractured, pitted, pitched to violence. . . fault lines in our earth fill with remembered fragrances, a lost petal, torn mango leaf, dried blood on a young child’s sleeve” (7). Therefore, the poetry beating in the poet’s heart becomes the medium and effort of self-definition to search the self from the ruin of exile and from the missing selves of migrants.

### 2.2 Feminist Consciousness

The feminist consciousness of Meena Alexander is typical Indian and has its indigenous origin rooted in the oppression of women. The women has two extremely opposite images either as ‘devi’ the incarnation of virtue, devoid of all emotions and deprived of sexual and family relations like Sita and Savitri or the ‘demonic’, the villain, the monster full of all evils, allowing no humanity for herself. The awareness of the repression of the self and oppression of women in patriarchal society makes Alexander to ask “If you want me to live as a woman, why educate me? Why not kill me if you want to dictate my life? God, why teach me to write? (FL102). So in order to subvert the traps of male domination, the poet reclaims the matrilineal tradition of India and celebrates it through her poems.

In *The Bird’s Bright Ring*, the poet figures mother as the source and origin of the feminine voice to be heard. She is always close to the mother as a source of good, the omnipotent and generous dispenser of love, nourishment, and plentitude. Mother has been depicted as the symbol of creativity and production, “The mother is harvest” (24).
Motherhood has been considered as a protective feminine principle. The Goddesses are worshiped as mothers. Shulamith Firestone, an American radical feminist, based women’s oppression on her capacity of reproduction itself and saw no answer to the problem until artificial childbearing was technologically a possibility. However, in Alexander’s poetry, mother is not mere the feminine, loving and nurturing principle. She presents mother as Durga, and Kali, the fierce female goddesses, with their all destructive power. The mother figure in the form of Kali, Durga, and Draupadi represents fierceness, strength, as well as wisdom. In the poem ‘Her Imageless Face’ (WP30), the two female figures of the Mother and the Sister fuse with Goddess Durga who can provide escape from salt of grief. The celebration of matrilineage is the significant aspect of Alexander’s cultural bond with the land of origin as Diaspora poet. Her poetry focuses the new woman centered lineage of thought, writing, and history different from a patriarchal tradition and so she presents the mother as a powerful figure who leads us to golden future.

In the poem ‘Dream Poem’ (SR) poet speaks about the mother-daughter relationship, which is based on the Indian cultural roots and drawn from the stereotyped women restricted by the silence, patience, and acceptance of social and patriarchal realities. The depiction of mother can be seen as the challenge to the power of father constituted by patriarchy. The poet’s self is linked to the voice of mother who is ruled by the laws of father, “Each woman has a daughter / touched in a mirror / there is ash at the edge of disaster” (SR 13)

Sudha Rai sees the celebration of matrilineage through mother-daughter relationship as “rebellious movements working against any monologic ideological moorings” (Rai 178). The mother-daughter relationship has been influenced by new feminist awareness, speech, choice, and direction. The poet projects mother in poetry to exhibit the
consciousness to mother’s oppression of ages and to challenge power of father. The narrator of ‘Blood Line’ (RaB) speaks about continuity and change, the older generation and the new one and how she serves as the bridge in between. The poem is written for poet’s daughter Svati Mariam who is compared with rain on the tamarind. She indicates her carefree and engendered being and belonging to new generation. She belongs to next generation and she stands at the opposite pole from the last generation symbolized by ‘burnt grass’. The daughter is the representative of new female being which is projected onto a future society. She marks the destruction of old, male centred myths and paradigms of social experience.

The new generation woman (child) will be never like woman of past generation and will not be burdened under female body, never be suppressed and burdened by the femininity and suppressed feelings. The poet addresses her daughter to soar high and revolt against old customs in the poem ‘Green Parasol’

Soar over the Bronx River
Set fire to old straw

light up the broken avenues of desire
Then be a girl like any other (RS 32)

Poet longs here for gender free existence of women, however it is the ‘utopian’ desire. Still her poems encourage the concept of new woman aware of her own ‘self’. She tries to negotiate the barrier of gender and the preserves matrilineal connection as a medium of establishing her new feminist identity. Speaking about her matrilineal bloodline, poet writes, “I was born out of my mother and out of her mother before her, and her mother, and her mother, and hers” (AlexanderFL 21).
The poem ‘In Divi Seema’ focuses the women’s capacity of reproduction as the basic reason of their exploitation. From the moment, man discovered his two capacities as farmer and procreator he started to use women for his advantage and exploit them. The sorrow of the woman caused by such male domination has been expressed by the poet.

Composed in darkness
may she lie
like the first ploughmarks
on her native soil. (SR 29)

With female third person ‘she’ and ‘I’, use of birthing metaphors and matrilineal relationships the poet weaves new feminist perspective. As Friedman (1993) points out,

Concurrent with the second wave of feminism from about 1965 to the present, there has been an explosion of women’s writing about pregnancy, childbirth, nursing and motherhood. Birth imagery to describe the self-creation of both women and artist permeates contemporary women’s writing. Nonetheless, women’s birth metaphors still retain an individual stamp encoding each woman’s negotiation of the conflict between creation and procreation”.(qtd in Rai 183)

The pregnancy and childbirth, being the crucial issues for women, have been focused very untraditionally by French feminists. Julia Kristeva, in her Desire in Language (1980) describes a mother-centred realm of expression as the semiotic opposed to the symbolic law of the father. Kristeva rejects the psychoanalytic theorizing of motherhood as the model for psychic health. She observes, “A mother is a continuous separation, a division of the very flesh”. For her experience of giving birth “wounds but increases” resulting in “the calm of another life, the life that other who wends his way while I remain henceforth like
framework” (Kristeva178). Keeping in line with these radical feminists, poet describes the relationship between mother and child ironically, “Before that script was set the child was born / but by that script the woman is torn” (‘Text from the Middle Earth’IRMN29).

The lives of women have been controlled and manipulated by patriarchy in all cultures, all nations and all ages by setting various norms, values, roles of gender perception and idealism to ‘make a woman’. Then the motherhood also becomes kind of imposition as Adrienne Rich writes in Of Woman Born, “Though motherhood is the experience of women, the institution of motherhood is under male control …. This glorious motherhood imposed on women conditions her entire life” (Rich45).

Though childbirth and reproduction has been considered as reason of women’s exploitation, Alexander’s poetry captures the pangs of waiting motherhood, the joy of being pregnant and a perfect female experience of a body cupping a body and introduces the fourth generation in her poetry. In an interview with Ayisha Abraham, Alexander said that giving birth and taking care of young children had allowed her to think back through to her mother. In addition, it had allowed her to see the female condition more richly (Alexander25). She is happy on her motherhood because it is not forced one but she had the privilege of making a choice to have or not to have children. With the birth of children, she entered another world where she could not achieve the silence and space easily. Torn between the responsibilities of motherhood and the earnest desire to write poetry, she experiences, “it emotionally a great struggle to try to put these two things together” (Govindasamy 94) but still she is happy because domesticity has deeply enriched and nourished her writing.
The poems ‘Young Snail’ (Hoard) and ‘Written before Childbirth’ (Hoard) depict the experience of carrying a child in the womb, the proud and happy feeling of being mother. A body cupping a body experiences two lives in one body, heavy, stooped with child, listens another heart panting. The poet is happy as she is going to be a mother.

The desire to be pregnant, to give birth has been the desire for life which cannot be repressed. The unsurpassed pleasures of pregnancy, which have actually been always exaggerated or untrue, strike the fancy of women. Giving birth is to bring other to life. However, when the pregnancy and childbirth comes in excess can never be the thing of joy for a woman. The poem ‘Keeping House’ presents the realistic situation of women and the wives who do not know the contraception and give birth to dozens of children and die of the excess of childbirth. The poet writes about that shameless priest,

Whose wife had passed away
Womb sucked dry by a fifteenth child
Why couldn’t he stop himself that shameless man
forcing himself on her? (HoaTD 7)

The issues of contraception and childbirth are more sensitive for the feminists. Because of the illiteracy, patriarchal male domination, seeing woman as sex toy, ill nourishment, no access to contraception, the women could not carry the burden of excess childbirth and meet death. Poet raises her voice against such oppression of women. The poem ‘Passion’ (RaB) represents woman as the giver of life by expressing poet’s own feeling after childbirth.

I am she
the woman after giving birth

life
Poet is the representative of all those women, their bloodied fluids, weakened flesh, their reticence, and all their agony.

In contrast to the above poem, ‘Skin Song’ reveals the pains of childbirth, the belched grief making to feel the poet as if “vermillion threaded into rice paper” (RaB74). The poem presents the biological description of painful birth of “the wide shouldered bull-headed child”(74) which involves kind of violence against women but is not considered by the sociological studies. The first experience of menstruation of being woman “with the pad between her legs” and learning to “wash out stains in cold water” brings the feeling of shame for being born in female body, “she felt sore and shamed fresh and burnt” (RaB 76).

By portraying the pains of childbirth, experience of menstruating, the poet expresses her consciousness of the presentation of woman as a biologically determined earthbound creature. Poet’s paternal grandmother worried about the dark skin of the poet is representative of patriarchal domination of female body as she says, “You are dark enough as it is. How will you ever find a husband if you race around in the sun?” (FL 50).

The feminist consciousness in Alexander is not the product of inevitable inheritance of her Western education and nor related to her metropolitan location and intellectual framework. She is actively engaged with the issue of Indian women such as child marriage, forced marriage, dowry deaths, and bride burning. She also deals with suffering the mythical figures like Sita and Draupadi who are tormented at the hands of husbands.
The power of the feminism is based on local resistances rather than on broad ideologies or psychological issues. The poet builds up the resistance through the specific situation to raise voice against the plight of women. In the poem ‘Text from the Middle Earth’ the poet resists against the tendency of setting woman as a polished stone by emphasizing on her purity and feminine qualities. They make her faceless, blind tongued and, “Woman’s lungs could barely breathe” (IRMN 26).

The poet is aware of the restrictions on women and harm caused by it. She resists against patriarchal oppression that imposes certain social standards of femininity on all biological women in order to make them believe that the chosen standards for ‘femininity’ are natural. Moreover, a woman who refuses to be traditional can be labeled both unfeminine and unnatural.

The sorrow of Cleopatra, an Egyptian queen reveals the story of such woman who decided to live on her own terms and conditions. The poem ‘A Mirror’s Grace’ expresses the sorrow of Cleopatra forsaken by Antony. For the centuries, women have been attacked of being lascivious corruptors of men. The women who moved outside the parameters of established norms have been steadily degraded and ridiculed. The poet aware of this sort of male domination speaks for the sorrow of Cleopatra who is “forsaken at the summit of desire” (WP 18). Another poem ‘Epilogue’ also speaks about suffering of Cleopatra.

‘Dream Poem’ speaks about “Sparrow Burning” which refers to the burning incidents of the women who are “Burnt by Stove” (SR13). The poet not only writes about the incidents of dowry deaths, bride burning, brides catching fire by kerosene stove or gas but also she had participated in the protests against bride burning in Delhi.

Alexander’s feminist consciousness owes much to Kerala’s matrilineal family systems. It gives central and empowered status to the
women line. The poems in *House of a Thousand Doors* are emerged from poet’s struggle to define her feminism in a culture where “a wife is somebody who walks ten steps behind” (Alexander Dispatch 25). Female experience is at the centre of Alexander’s poetry. The two old women, holding prominent position in Alexander’s work, with their keen wisdom and insight silently inspire the poet in her contemplation of life. The poet unravels their lives by weaving them into the fabric of her poetic activity. Her paternal grandmother was ‘housebound’ and ‘domestic’ while her maternal grandmother was ‘the political grandmother’ who had fought against colonialism and political and social injustices. The later one represents the feminist consciousness of the poet.

In the poem ‘House of a Thousand Doors’, the women trying to enter different doors, kept away by the social barriers and rigid gods of society are the indicative of the oppression of centuries they have been facing. Men think woman as vain, stupid and barbarian, enjoys her oppression and deserves it. However, Alexander’s poetry challenges such misconceptions by focusing matrilineage. It celebrates female creativity and pays tribute to women writers, artists and other influential and strong women ‘ancestors’ who have struggled successfully to strengthen this lineage.

The countless women burnt in their homes are depicted in ‘Brief Chronicle by Candle Light’.

Children torn by the winds
Married women burnt in their own homes
I thought I had seen it all that night
as I lit a candle at my door. (*HoaTD* 53)

Roshni Rustomji-Kerns sees the burning of women with reference to Sita’s fire ordeal, who finally “chooses to disappear from the bonds of marital and social rules and demands” (Rustomji-Kerns Rev.ofHoaTD
The poet also represents the picture of unbeatable Indian women in spite of miseries and obstacles “Like a raw creature the owl cried out / ‘tweet – t – twoot’ and all its thousand eyes / could not drink up the moving woman” (*HoaTD* 54).

The poem ‘A Time of Difficulty’ represents the more socialist aspect of poet’s feminist consciousness as she speaks about the prostitute’s cry. The prostitutes are victims of women’s economic position and the double standard of morality that enabled men to sin with impunity. As Kate Millet writes in her *Sexual Politics*, prostitution is based on the socio-cultural constructions of gender as an extension of biological sex differences. It is characterized by male domination and female subjugation under which the practices and social institutions like the family and prostitution deny women’s desire and existence at all. In such situation, woman’s effort to keep herself away from evil leads her to grave and she accepts death. Thus, the poem ‘A Time of Difficulty’ is a clearly flowing meditation on so many feminist issues like the prostitute’s cry among broken stairwells, the grandmother lost in chaos, the women nearing their graves to keep the darkness apart.

The poem ‘My Fall’ is feminist in theme and expresses poet’s desire to make her free from all burdens of socially constructed femininity. The clothes are the first indicators of this burden so she leaves them behind, “I have broken free of them all / and come running / my skirts fly behind” (*HoaTD* 68). With the shedding of this burden, she removes the burden of fur, flesh, faces and fickle soul. Her poetry expresses the deepest and sincere concerns of her being in lively manner to articulate her selfhood. It explains her concerns of the social, political, and cultural issues and defines her distinguished self moulded by pressures of femaleness.
The poem ‘Lines for Dorothy Wordsworth’ contrasts the Romanticism with the real life by presenting the grief of women whose sufferings are connected to cultural as well as to socio-economic conditions. The depiction of a poor woman who is refused lodging and delivers a dead child in the night on straw without covering emphasizes the discriminatory socio-economic conditions. The women struggling against such diverse conditions, against hunger, poverty and inequalities, become the symbol of struggle for existence, “We are poor / she whispers / woman from a poor country” (HoaTD 84).

In the poem ‘Sita’s Story’, she speaks of Sita, the heroine of the epic Ramayana who is the role model of womanhood for the Indian people and it is expected that women should follow her. Sita was found in a furrow by her father King Janaka, married Rama and accompanied him in his exile where she is, “suspended / between heaven and earth” (TS 16). The misfortune is knotted with her. However, what she gets in return is the insult, suspicion, and hatred, which compels her to go through the fire ordeal to prove her chastity. Sita represents the exploitation of women as poet writes in ‘Cutting Trees’ “lovely Sita would have burnt / had mother earth not opened?” (HoaTD 14)

The woman is always seen in relation with man, as daughter, wife, and mother. In marriage, the Indian women are never free to choose their life partners. She had no choice, no life of her own. Thus the marriage according to J. S. Mill “is the worst form of slavery for women” (207). Moreover, in the poverty-stricken families, money is the only criteria for the choice of bridegroom as the daughter of priest is, “married to a sight unseen widower / he had a green card for America” in the poem ‘Keeping House’ (HoaTD 7). In traditional society, only those women can be ideal who blindly and unthinkingly accept the role assigned to them, as done by Sita.
The poem ‘Aunt Chinna’ describes the suffering of Indian women for whom husband is the God. They have to live on his mercy. After his death, nothing is left for her. She has been brought up strictly according to the traditional codes. She is constantly reminded by her mother that girl is destined for man and one who gets the masculine attention is the luckiest one. She is brought up with the ideal mottos like, “Honour thy mother and thy father / Home is best” (HoaTD 20). Poor aunt Chinna, beaten by her husband, snooked like a wild chicken became mentally disturbed.

The poem ‘Sweet Alyssum’ expresses sorrows of Draupadi, Demeter, and Sita all of whom are oppressed by male dominated society.

Draupadi born of fire
Surely your are she
or Demeter even, poised at the bramble pit
where love drove her
or Sita clinging to stone (RaB 89)

Draupadi, the heroic character from Mahabharata, princess in palace, the woman bartered in the dice-throw between men, lived in wilderness with her five husbands. She crawled through tunnels to save her life. She is brought to rage and shame by vulgar behavior of Kauravas. She is betrayed by her husbands. However, she takes revenge of her insult. While Sita is the silent sufferer, accepts whatever comes to her and finally disappears in the mother earth from where she had come. Poet identifies herself with Sita and Draupadi in the poem ‘San Andreas Fault’ (RaB 94). Poet’s modern feminist sensibility is conscious of her femininity and she writes in ‘Dialogue by a City Wall’, “I am Sita and Iphigenia, Demeter and Draupadi / I am not fit for burning” (RS 6)

As an elite feminist, poet has very untraditional approach towards marriage and love. In the poem ‘After the Wedding’ Alexander compares
marriage with death as it is cause of separation from mother and motherland. “Marriage is the destiny traditionally offered to women by societies” (Beauvoir *The Second Sex* 445). In marriage women are subjected to various forms of oppression and inferiorization. In the patriarchal order, marriage privileges men and disadvantages women. It reduces women to a total surrender of her body and self. The modern woman, conscious of such suppression in marriage writes,

I did not think I could try to die

When yesterday they hennaed my hands
in in the pattern of stars and moons
and flowers of joy (‘After the Wedding’ IRMN 9)

Though poet has such feminist feelings for marriage, love in her poetry comes as the strong affection and personal attachment to her husband. In all its kindness, compassion and affection, the love acquires her life. She writes about her marriage to David Lelyveld, “We were lonely, each of us, deep inside and our meeting made for a sheltering space. There was great innocence to our falling in love, a sheer sense of possibility. We felt we had each lived our separate lives and now could come together” (FL 157). At the age of twenty eight, she married David Lelyveld, a Jewish American historian. Poet expresses her warm feelings and tender love for her husband in the poem, ‘My Brazen Days’, “You are nectar to my gaze / I said once, them, you are honey / to my tongue” (IRMN10). Though in love, poet is aware of the encroachment of her lover into her space. Therefore, she writes, “One hearing that / you encroached into my space / like a poacher, sprang through my face” (IRMN10).

Alexander also speaks about female sexuality by focusing many taboos attached to it and constraints imposed on women’s articulation of
it. Patriarchy attributes passivity to female and activity to male. In the dominant discourses of patriarchy, sexuality is not seen as reciprocal or co-operative, but simply phallic. As Meena Alexander comments in *The Shock of Arrival*, “In India, the elaboration of female sexuality is complex, woven into the fabric of hierarchal society, a colonial sense of maintaining power of keeping order” (82). The expression of female desire and sexuality in women’s writing signals the dissolution of the old bondage and radial possibility of female independence. By expressing her passionate love and sexual desire, she defies the culturally imposed conventions of sex. She writes of passion with the intensity in the poem ‘Veined Words’,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Breath of my breath</th>
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<tr>
<td>be to me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>as a far star flashing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and in this dark flesh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>trace your lean rare watching;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>so keep pace with my bare pulse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>which time is fast outracing (IRMN 14)</td>
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The poem ‘A Mirror’s Grace’ depicts the fatal love of Cleopatra, her shattered dreams of love with Antony and her sorrow in, “the hour when he forsook her” (WP 15). Simone de Beauvoir writes in *The Second Sex* about love as “the curse that lies heavily upon women” (669) which is true about Cleopatra and many other women. The man is ‘centre’, the ‘self’ while woman is considered as the ‘other’ at the ‘periphery’ defined in relation to the centre. Cleopatra is also “seen in the usual exploitative male terms as the ultimate temptress, especially emphasizes as problematical are her driving fires of what patriarchal Christianity would call lust” (Perry78). By depicting Cleopatra’s tragic love Alexander struggles against the existence of women identified in a male dominated
society by her sexuality and mere flesh and the passions. Though happy and vibrant days of Cleopatra’s life are passed and death is approaching, she is living in the memories of Antony. Though forsaken by Antony, she identifies herself with him and indicates her selfless love for him,

I am I
Yet I am he
O silver mirror
Pace with me (WP 16)

Antony crossed the twisting paths of her desire but poet writes, to Antony “She dreams your rare folie” (WP 16). However, her destiny is fixed. “She must weep for Antony” and love is “Shroud of shame for Cleopatra” as she was “forsaken at the summit of desire” (WP 17). For Alexander the expression of desire is quite opposite to father’s teaching who thinks of sexuality as fall of man and who tried to inculcate the religious sentiments to repress budding sexual desire. Therefore, though Alexander writes about passionate love, desire, and sexuality, she exhibits the sober sublimity in its expression. However, she relates her writing creativity to the sexual desire budding in her.

Alexander’s poetry explores the complex issues stemming from the embodied nature of female sexuality. “Alexander’s writing is peopled by female bodies that bear the shame and punishment of sanctioned and illicit sexuality” (Basu, Leenerts 10-11). The unwed pregnant girls jump into the well due to the fear of public shame and the stone eating girl subjected to the public shame represses her sexual abuse, trauma, and buried shame. Poet also prefers shy and controlled expression of the experiences of love, marriage, and sex. All these are examples of the burden of being born in Indian female body and taboo attached to female sexuality.
Alexander deals with the issue of repressed female sexuality with reference to Indian women. Even in the mythological stories women had to bear the burden of female sexuality. Parasurama’s mother Renuka was killed due to suspicion of being involved in the sexual imagination by the son on the order of his own father (‘The Storm’TS21). Sita had to go through the ordeal fire to prove her sexual chastity (Sita’s Story’TS15). These are the examples of women’s bodies punished because of the burden of female sexuality and their power to incite desires. Thus for the complete identification of women and femininity, there is need to talk about the women’s bodies and women’s sexualities as it is done by Alexander’s poetry in some extent. Some passages in ‘Night Scene, the Garden’ express poet’s sublimated sexual passion, which comprises her creative energy.

In the section entitled ‘No Man’s Land’, poet considered two sexes equal, neither sex has ultimate power. The description of cowherd who stoned Cobra death reminds of the snake, a creature of Lord Siva accompanying Siva – the Sivalingam which is the omnipotent symbol of creation.

Alexander speaks about sex and love very briefly, obscurely and mystically less romanticizing it. In ‘Narcissus Never Knew Her’, she unhesitatingly and somewhat obscurely expresses her intense inner passion (HoaTD48).

The sexual constraints in Alexander’s poetry are typical Indian man-woman constraints which we cannot find in Kamala Das who created a more rebellious, confessional poetry depicting her unfulfilled sexuality under the burden of traditionally arranged, sexually strained marriage. In ‘Night Scene, the Garden’, a matrilineal poem, the poet depicts a mother wanting to kill her daughter. This attempt of mother to kill daughter by pushing her into well refers to the unwed girls becoming mothers by pre-marital sexual relations. They committ suicides jumping
into well to avoid public shame. The love and sex, with reference to these unwed and pregnant women is equal to death. Thus, Alexander’s poetry tackles feminist consciousness with reference to variety of women oriented issues. The poetry of Meena Alexander shows reaction to these issues of women in India, and oppression of women which is based on gender discrimination. Her poetry, being the expression of womanhood, goes beyond individual borders mirroring the details of emotions and experiences of the tortured and oppressed femininity.

2.3 Violence and Terrorism

Alexander’s poetry deals with the various facets of violence including war, state oppression, riots, cultural terrorism, separatist nationalism, political violence, terrorism, and particularly 9/11, religious violence, partition, colonial violence. In the poem Bird’s Bright Ring poet speaks of the armed Mutiny of 1857, the first Indian Freedom War fought against British. The feeling of being one time colonized is still dominant in her mind. The poet refers to the British tyranny to express the terror of the British rule experienced by the Indian people.

It was here the shadow fell
the shadow of the British soldiers
here
here
they dragged their guns
over the slope to the cleft of the Ridge
1857 a cold bad winter and they broke our backs (BBR 19)

In the poem ‘Diary of Dreams’ the poet writes about the tyranny of colonial soldiers in pre-independence period.

On getting the order
the house must be burnt,
the soldiers wipe boots
gather fuel (IH 87)

Since its independence at the stroke of midnight, India has endured wars imposed by neighbouring countries like Pakistan and China. The poet speaks of the China war imposed on India. The use of weapons against the national solidarity of India under the slogan “Hindi – Chinese Bhai Bhai” is the worst example of treachery in the name of friendship.

rough metal
cold canon
sharp cleft
of bayonet and sword

they dragged the artillery
down her breathing cheek
lined it
at the point of Flagstaff Height
The dark you see
is where one jugged vein
burst
as the soldiers
dragged their guns (BBR 21)

The great Indian war fought at Kurukshetra, between the good and evil results into lot of bloodshed and brutal loss of human lives and the sense of devastation of mortality strikes the mind of the poet.

Sing

O singing tree
into the devastation of mortality

for those who born of the bruised mother (BBR 24)
Increasing violence and bloodshed and brutality of war makes poet restless and she feels that flowers have also become blood thirsty, “no lilies in Lidice now / its roses grown blood thirsty” (‘Indian Elegy’ SR 26) The war sometimes involve treachery and won with its help. In the poem ‘At Golconda’, the poet describes the battle fought by emperor for “Seven Whole Months” shedding the blood of soldiers but finally won the fort by treachery.

Night after night  
under Decanni stars  
the emperor hobbling  
sword thick with blood  
from a traitor he took  
through the teeth behind FatehDarwaza (SR 49)

The poet is aware of the political situation in the world. “A Strong political awareness is another striking feature of Alexander’s poetry, and this is a trait which few of the contemporary women poets share” (Naik, Narayan 194). Therefore, the guns coughing and stuttering in an ancient square and the violence in the name of border become the themes of her poetry, “A mile or two away / in an ancient square / guns cough and stutter” (‘The Travellers’TS7).

The wars are generally fought for the possession of land, resources or out of the excessive hunger for power. It is a state of prolonged violent large-scale conflict involving two or more groups of people, usually under the support of government. The poem ‘No Man’s Land’ depicts the violence in the time of war when women wash their thighs in bloodied river water and wipe their own flesh. The realistic description of violence expresses the bloodlines and ceaseless brutality of the war. Such ceaseless war only stops after compelling the soldier to rest finally by the
river. The poet tries to give a sense of the tragic waste involved in warfare. The poem ‘For a Friend Whose Father was Killed on the Lahore Border in the 1965 War between India and Pakistan’ expresses the inability of compensating the loss caused by war. The enmity between India and Pakistan since their respective births is the cause of violent crisis in both the countries. It leads them to loss of lives and property, which can never be compensated. The father died on the Lahore border cannot be got back, “could covering what the pity of war / could not render up – the bones of a father” (RS 26).

The poem ‘Petroglyph’ answers the question “What war is this?”(RS49) asked by the poet herself. The destruction caused by war makes her to feel that war is nothing but the scent of flesh, charred wires, falling of towers, burning pit. It is a burial ground for thousands. Like many other poets, Alexander has focused on black side of war, which causes destruction of humanity, unwanted waste of human lives, bloodshed, and violence. The places like Istalif, Kabul, and Kandahar are full of bloodshed and mothers are weeping on the death of their children during war. Kabul, Kandhar and Istalif refer to the ‘War on Terror’ declared by American president Bush against Afghanistan in the aftermath of 9/11, in order to crush and uproot the evil of terrorism. USA used carpet-bombing technique against Afghanistan to cause the maximum devastation in a specified area. Thus ‘War on Terror’ declared against Al Queda and its leaders was actually a war on hapless nation and its people. It resulted in, “a necklace of sorrow / mothers bear, throats parched with blood” (‘Petroglyph’ RS 49). In spite of destruction and devastation, the change in the women of Istalif, Kabul, and Kandahar reflects the changing image of traditional women, “I see woman shrug of their veils, let sunlight / strike their cheeks. Women casting burkas / into flames no war can check” (RS 49).
Contrasted with today’s vehemence and bloodshed, the poem ‘Field in Summer’ presents poet’s safe, and violence free childhood, “I had a simple childhood / a mother and father to take care of me / no war at my doorstep” (RS 63). However, the contemporary situation is described in the poem ‘Fragile Places’ as “The World is a forest on fire”. The devaluation of values, everyday war situation, brutality, bloodshed, and threat of terrorism have made the life miserable. The modern life and cities are dwelling on the edge of river of death and hence poet feels, “We make out our lives / as if the wreckage of war” (RS 86). The war has been the brutal waste of human life, “One cries, I lost my leg / Another, my arm is blown” (RS 87).

The violence poet speaks is multifaceted, worldwide and has been existing on different levels. The wars, terrorism, internal conflicts, civil wars, revolutionary violence, the violence committed by the state on its own population find expression in the poetry of Meena Alexander. Her strong political consciousness helps her to comment on the incidents of political violence worldwide. The Emergency Rule in India is one of them. The violence is not only restricted to causing destruction or physical harm but also the violation of rights of people is also one aspect of it.

The ‘Emergency Rule’ imposed by then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi has been considered as black period of the Indian democracy. The poet had experienced Emergency and had participated in the demonstrations against it. The poet speaks about the massive and peaceful procession of Jaiprakash 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 servants of the people” (BBR 28).
When Jaiprakash Narain was conducting a legitimate campaign against a repressive administration, he was attacked by the police. He fainted for some time. Police officers were bursting teargas shells on the masses. His aim was to overthrow a tyrannical government through peaceful agitation but the government perpetuated violence against its own population through its coercive machinery of police for reproducing its own power. Such violence perpetuated by state against its own population is called as “State Terrorism” according to Ahmed (17).

Alexander’s writing is full with an inner violence. The note of violence can be found in the verbs in her poetry. Her poem ‘Within the Walls’ (IRMN 17) speaks about the treatment given to prisoners during the emergency. Her office was just across the wall of police station and she could hear the sounds and cries of prisoners who were being beaten. She wrote the poems on those issues expressing the truth of heart. She describes the use of brutal force by police against the prisoners.

When it comes to the use of violence by the state through its agencies like police officers, the states violence falls on the subaltern forces. The poverty-ridden and marginalized population becomes easy targets of such activities. The violence during emergency depicted by Meena Alexander comes scrabbling like lice in the dung heap and covers the life of common people when poet feels, “Everything is moving in my street / the death of everything is moving” in the poem ‘A Picture from My Street’ (IRMN 24).

The poet speaks of state violence worldwide. The poem ‘The Young of Tiananmen’ is a tribute to the martyrs of the notorious Tiananmen Square massacre. The students protesting against Chinese government were killed mercilessly.

Tanks rolled, guns coughed

tear gas choked them in pitiful
sobs : the young of Tiananmen
from a far country I sing (RaB 14)
The violence and bloodshed swallowed them whole but they became “children of the sun” to inspire the people to revolt against oppression. The poet glorifies their martyrdom that is beyond description, “What ink can inscribe them now / the young of Tiananmen” (RaB 14). The violence is inflicted to root out resistance and quash all kinds of domestic dissent. The incidents of Emergency and Tiananmen Square are the examples of this type of repressive violence by state.

The widespread civil disorder in India caused by the division of Indians among themselves – above all the Hindu Muslim split, in the absence of third party took the shape of civil war. Much Indian blood spilled by Indian hands during communal riots, a great human catastrophe. The barbed wire of partition and violence during the period pricks the sensitive mind of the poet, which she expresses in the poem ‘The Travelers’.

Through acres of barbed wire
Shutting off shops
and broken parlours
they bear the bodies of the dead

Pile them in lorries
and let the mothers
in their blackened veils approach (TS 7)
The pathetic condition of mothers collapsing on the slope of grief, crawling on hands and knees, tearing the bloodstained clothes reveals the fierceness of violence and bloodshed. The trauma of partition associated with the birth of two free nations has been expressed in the lines, “Your birth / an endless devastation” (BBR). The poet offers a innate explanation
to the cause of “the devastation of mortality” and it is riot, terrorism and war. She attributes it to its birth, as it was born of a bruised mother.

Along with the violence in 47, the massacre of Sikhs in 1984 after the assassinaion of Indira Gandhi makes the poet restless. Sikh demanded creation of an independent ‘Khalistan’ by remaking part of northern India. It encouraged National separatism. When opposed by Indira Gandhi through ‘Operation Bluestar’, they killed her. Because of this, the riots started and consumed the lives and properties of many Sikh families. Therefore, poet writes in the poem ‘Paper Filled with Light’

The massacres of 47, the killing field of partition,
Gandhi, his eyes burnt into prayers – he fasted,
We all did in those days, fasting for peace –
In 84 in Trilokpuri a girl child raped, stabbed in the riots

(RaB 23)

This horrible and inhuman massacre is unbearable but Alexander’s poetry becomes its witness, “Poetry as witness” (23) Poet is disappointed and horrified by the violence and death and asks, “What is death scribbling on their cheeks / as they stumble to a water truck long run dry?”(RaB23)

In the poem ‘For a Friend Whose Father was Killed on the Lahore Border in the 1965 War between India and Pakistan’ poet speaks of the partition and riots. The pity of war and brutality of violence are mixed in her poem expressing the inhuman aspect of violence which can only destroy and cannot generate. So poet asks, “Where are the burnt pains of the Punjab? / The Killing fields of partition?” (RS 26).The literature of the partition shows us a nation divided. It reflects the agony of split consciousness converted into a narrow nationalism. Hindus and Muslims who had lived together in reasonable harmony and nurtured dreams of freedom, were suddenly enemies.
In the poem ‘Bengali Market’ the poet complains to Gandhiji about demolition of Babari Masjid,

Dear Mr. Gandhi
It was cold the day the masjid
Was torn down stone by stone,
Colder still at the heart of Delhi (RS 80)

And in another poem ‘Searching for a Tomb over Which They Paved a Road’ Alexander describes destruction of Tomb of Wali Gujarati by Hindu extremists during the Gujarat carnage of 2002. She calls herself the poet of ruins as her poetry comes out of ruin and destruction, which is inner, as well as, outer. The act of violence can be political and criminal at the same time. Nevertheless, in the post 1980s under the influence of rising fundamentalism, violence has been done in the name of religion. Alexander writes about religious violence in the aftermath of demolition of Babri Masjid in her poem ‘San Andreas Fault’,

Hundred 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
White veils of the lost, dhotis, kurtas, saris
Slipping with blood, eased into nothingness (RaB 95)

Such inhuman and brutal acts are beyond forgiveness but the real disaster is that the damage will not cease and the people are standing just as witness to all destruction.

The poem ‘Fire Fly’ in Raw Silk laments on the carnage in Naroda Patia, Godhra. The Hindu-Muslim violence that has followed the February’s massacre by local Muslims of Hindu pilgrims passing through
Godhra has been commemorated by the poet, “In Naroda Patia, in Godhra, / children sing in the ground” (RS28). The poet focuses on the bitter aftermath of the Gujarat (Godhra carnage) violence through the series of poems in *Raw Silk*. The poem ‘Naroda Patia’ expresses the harshness of the inhuman carnage of targeted violence against Muslim reflecting colossal horror of the violence faced by Gujarat’s Muslim population.

No cries
Were heard
in the city
Even the sparrows
by the temple gate
swallowed their song (RS 75)

Meena Alexander comments on the rising violence in India with reference to the rise of a fascist Hindu movement, terrible ethnic violence in Gujarat and escalation of tension on the border with Pakistan and the fear of war as the part of her personal history. Thus by using the frame of the real, the script of the violence, a code of traumatic recovery, she transforms violent version of the real memory of the history into art. For example, in the poem ‘Amrita’, the poet imagines that Amrita Shergil speaking after Gujarat atrocities. The poem is written after poet’s visits to relief camp in Ahmadabad. The half-naked Yunus wearing green shirt is victim of atrocities.

I see his bottom
burst like a raw fruit
with the flames
they tossed him in(RS 73)
The brutal massacre makes poet restless and the behavior of media is even irritating. The enthusiasm of the media people fostered the positive atmosphere for the extremists.

Behind me an old man with camera
picture perfect
cast a shadow
(RS 72)

In ‘Letters of Gandhi’, the poet speaks to Gandhi about the violence in his home state Gujarat. Horror, savage brutality, brutal violence, and bloodshed contradicts the tolerance and secularism of India and its multicultural history. The atrocities against minorities in India in the name of religion lead her to write ‘Letters to Gandhi’. The poem goes beyond the recording of events and focuses transformation of culturally pluralistic and secular past into the shameful religious extremism and violence and the erosion of ideals of Gandhism. The violence resulted into death of so many people in carnage. Their organs, thighs, lips, throat scattered in deep pain, “Torn bodies / clattering / in an ox-drawn cart” (RS 77). In ‘Slow Dancing’ the poet speaks about the traumatic violence and the brutality in Gandhi’s state, and going a step ahead, she is more insistent on getting response from Gandhi, “Dear Mr. Gandhi / Please say something / about the carnage in your home state” (RS 78).

The poet is hopeful that Gandhiji can bring out the solution on this situation through his non-violent ways but gets disappointed by knowing about the shutting of gates of Sabermati Ashram on that February night and violence outside. Her mind is disappointed and frustrated and the question comes, “What has happened to ahimsa? / Is it just for the birds and the bees?” (RS 78). Though Alexander reflects and meditates on the changing reality of Indian nationalism and its secularism by dealing with issues of Ayodhya and Gujarat, she either deliberately or unconsciously
forgets the terrorism of bomb explosions in Mumbai in 1993. Poet knew that this is burning issue on which she is talking, still she has daring to do it, “I cannot help myself / I cannot shut my mouth”(RS78). She goes on describing the violent situation hyperbolically as, “the moon soars in a sea of blood” in the poem ‘Slow Dancing’ (RS 79). And in the poem ‘Bengali Market’, poet speaks of the darkness which filled her mind, “after the carriage was set on fire / after the Gujarat killings / I disappear into darkness?” (81). The lives of million dead are valueless and get no rites. The violence could not be bearable to any land on earth. The rivers crisscrossed with blood create horrific image of the life and convey the message of “buried love” which suggests loss of humanity and love. The more bitter frustration and irritation is expressed when poet refers Nehru’s speech and laments on the failure of democracy in the poem ‘Bengali Market’ “Will we be cured? I cried / And he - we have no tryst with destiny” (RS 81).

In the poem ‘Gandhi’s Bicycle’, the 9/11 incident reminds the poet of September 11, in 1893 in Chicago when Swami Vivekanand conquered the people of America by saying “Brothers and Sisters” (83). However, in the next line she asks, “How many would dare say that now?” (83). By writing this, she emphasizes the need of unity, which can bring peace and prosperity in the world to eradicate the evil of bloody violence,

But we need to say that you and I

even in the teeth of war. Come closer now
Do you hear the still sad music
of children killed in Godhra and Naroda Patiya (RS 83)

Though poet writes letters to Gandhi, she knows that he is the past and can be revisited in dreams. She hopes that he will come out one day and
teach ahimsa to Indians and whole world. However, in reality the Gandhi’s ideal of non-violence has yielded place to nuclear explosion for defense preparedness now. She regrets the fact in the poem, ‘Diary of Dreams’

In Pokhran’s desert  
a bright bomb  
carves soil  
into feverish rains  
The wind is slow  
Torn leaves visible  
Truth has a deeper hold  
than perishing (IH 87)

The complex issues of partition, riots, assassination are the products of such circumstances and the Indian expatriate poet Alexander looks back towards this, and expresses about it in her works. She has chosen to focus on some of the violent issues like demolition of Babri Masjid, aftermath riots, Godhra carnage, 9/11, partition like her mentor Jayant Mahapatra who has focused on the issues like the Punjab terrorist crisis, the assassination of Indira Gandhi and Bhopal Gas tragedy in Dispossessed Nests, the 1984 Poems.

The violence, Alexander speaks is not of a particular place but the entire red earth has turned into countless graves. Mother earth is the place for dwelling of human beings but has become mourning place in the poem ‘The Travelers’ (TS8). In another poem, ‘Keeping House’ poet regrets for the Indian soldiers sent to Srilanka and perished in the fire of war.

I think of our soldiers  
sent to Lanka,  
their hands and throats still warm
massed in piles where the palace stood,
straw, kindling and
blood pressed into bricks
so the fire might eat it all (HoaTD 9)

The violence in the contemporary world has filled the world with
the blood and values are trodden under the feet of brutality. The poem
‘San Andreas Fault’ describes the violence worldwide. A Muslim woman
in Sarajevo shot to death as she pleaded for a pot of milk, Turks burnt
alive in Germany, a grandmother and two girls’ cheeks puffed with
smoke are the signs of cruel violence inflicted against oppressed and
subaltern classes. And when the violence becomes rampant, words like
“Progress”, “Peace”, “Brotherly Love”, “One Nation under God”,
become just “All that stuff” (RaB 93). The poet also writes about Safdar
Hashmi, the Marxist playwright, who was killed by a mob while
performing a street play in support of striking workers. Her keen
awareness of the contemporary political world, takes notice of a woman
from Cambodia during the political trouble

In Cambodia I carried
My mother’s head in a sack
ran three days and nights
through a rice field (‘News of the world’ RaB6)

Such violence reveals the fierceness and brutality of human existence.

Raw Silk is written in the aftermath of 9/11 after the fall of towers
as the matter of psychic survival. Alexander writes, “I had written my
poems quickly, in order to survive. But after writing there came a time to
fragmentation, being torn apart in so many directions: the fear on this
island, the condition of our lives not knowing what could strike next, fire,
pestilence, white powder filled with anthrax spores” (‘I Witness’59).
The poem ‘Aftermath’ explains the torn mentality of the poet who wants to write about linden tree but its leaves are full of insects with wings of the colour of dry blood. The whole atmosphere is polluted by explosion, debris, and then rain. Poet describes it as, “An eye, a lip, a cut hand blooms / sweet and bitter smoke stains the sky” (RS 9). In the poem ‘Invisible City’ poet describes the shell of towers, the pigeons, the rescue workers working in the debris. To reflect all these things realistically she feels, “The poem needs to be sharp, as clear, and faceted as broken glass. It must pick up the multitudinous cries of the world that we are” (‘I Witness’ 58). The invisible city is surrounded by the sweet and bitter smoke that stains the air after the fall of skyscrapers (RS 10). These skyscrapers have now become only “a knot of rubble” (10). The poem ‘Pit Fire’ presents the city in the altered light of terrorism and cry, the pit of fire where death struts and flesh in fiery pieces indicates the devastation of human lives.

The other poems like ‘Hard Rowing’ and ‘Ghalib’s Ghost’ express the horror caused by 9/11. The poem ‘School Yard’ written for her son Adam Kuruvilla in which poet describes the place, city, where Adam grew up, river and playground of Battery Park where he played. But now the scene is changed. The walls are on fire and fields by the river are sprinkled with ash and children have fled the new school yard because there, “they carry the wounded in, / men and women half alive / skin smoldering” (RS 16). Thus school yard has changed into war cantonment.

In the poem ‘September Sunlight’, the 9/11 incident reminds poet of the atom bomb explosion of Hiroshima. The poet’s mind compares between the two attacks targeted against innocent people mainly civilians and non-combatant. In fact, both attacks targeted against civilians are the acts of terrorism. The nuclear attack on Hiroshima and Nagasaki
announced the US as supreme power in the world but the 9/11 attack announced the vulnerability of this power on its home ground. Keeping in line with this Alexander writes, “Not so long in Hiroshima / woman in Kimono, bird, and cloud / turned to shadows staining the ground” (RS 17).

In the poem ‘Listening to Lorca’, she contemplates about 9/11 and concludes that such events are the consequence of the dangerous competition between different countries for power. The terrorist attacks like 9/11 involve the use of force or threats to intimidate people or opponents to achieve political aims and to keep people in fearful condition by using terrifying weapons or actions. Hence Alexander compares the contemporary power competition to bullfight, “How the world goes on and on / Have you ever seen a bullfight” (RS 18).

The smoke feels poet’s eyes and she sings song of sorrow. Though it is written after nine months of fall of towers, grief is still fresh. The incident of 9/11 has created another anxiety for the immigrants as they were being seen with suspicion “There was pall of suspicion extending over South Asian brown people who looked like they could be Arabs” (Alexander ‘I Witness’58). “Immigrants were being swept up and put in imprisonment with no charges lodged against them”(58). In such conditions, living in US was difficult for them so poet writes, “Why stay on this island?” (29) and asks “Why call it home?” (RS29).The poem ‘Fire Fly’ describes the fire plane, which exploded twin towers. The incident has affected poet’s mind so deeply that at night she dreamt of flash of fire: a plane with fire from its wings, bursting apart the bricks, then vanishing in puff of smoke. She dreamt of it repeatedly and writes, “A fire fly threads my eye / who am I?” (28).

The poem ‘Raw Silk’ speaks about the increasing terrorism with reference to 9/11 attacks. The proliferation of weapons of mass
destruction has intensified the threat of terrorism that has religious implications. Therefore, poet writes, “guns, grenades, blister of smoke / on market place and mosque” (RS 34). The sorrow is unbearable for the poet, “I wept in sorrow I could scarcely bear / for a mother killed on the street” (RS 35). The chaos, fear and horror created by weapons make the poet to comment, “O the bomb is fear’s flower / there is no love in the bomb / only chaos the sea must swallow” (“Triptych in a Time of War” RS65). The violence of 9/11 fills the courtyard with the blood making it sea of blood. The bloodshed is contrasted with Gandhi’s non-cooperation movement including the bonfire of foreign goods.

The poem ‘Rumours for an immigrant’ reveals the insecurities in the minds of immigrant people after 9/11, “There is no homeland anymore / all nations are abolished, a young man cries” (RS 38). The poet is confused and does not know what will happen to immigrant’s lives in such violent conditions. However, poet suggests that Gandhi’s non-violent ways can provide way, “On his charka Gandhi strums a tune: / I stop somewhere waiting for you” (38). After 9/11, poet’s mind was filled with anxiety, but the poetic mind tries to find solace in writing and “she opens up her notebook” (RS 39). The stock of blood gets gathered on the plain and poet compares the ‘Invisible City’ which burns in her, with the lost culture of Mohenjo Daro.

The poem ‘Kabir Sings in a City of Burning Towers’ deals with the ever present 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. Thus, the experience of racialized otherness is intensified in the aftermath of 9/11. Alexander’s work provides a launching pad to reflect and act on these problems in US society.
In such time Alexander writes, “I heard Kabir the medieval poet saint, whom I love, singing to me in secret. He was giving me courage to live my life” (Alexander ‘I Witness’ 58). The poet writes about Kabir who taught that all people are the children of earth and all are equal without any discrimination, “You are just a child of earth / Kabir the weaver sings” (RS 14). Thus, Alexander’s poems in *Raw Silk* can be seen as reaction to the terrorist attack of 9/11 when she and other people had a primary need to eliminate or reduce existential terror in response to such horrific events as 9/11. It was an event in which the threat to one’s existence was more authentic than those of previous events. Therefore, Alexander chooses the medium of poetry to survive of the existential trauma.

The Indian life has been influenced by Vedic philosophy and Sufi tradition. The Sufi and the Bhakti saints like Amir Khusru and Kabir had taught that Ram and Rahim, Ishwar and Allah are the names of the same God. Thus in the wake of recent religious conflict between Hindu and Muslim and worldwide violence, the teachings of Kabir are very important for the peaceful cohabitation of the people. Though poetry cannot stop violence, it can provide relief and becomes music of survival in the time of catastrophe.