

Echoes of otherness in the selected poems of Meena Alexander

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Abstract

Human life revolves around hopes. Hopes keep us going. But some unexpected flops or fiasco break us sometimes. Reading Anita Desai's touching novel 'In Custody' will bring us to this reality. Hope is a key concept in many classics and contemporary fictional works. It is used as a motivating force to show the changes in main characters. The protagonist of the novel discusses here is a college lecturer, named Deven Sharma. He fails to face the flops in his life as he has many hopes to have. But the self-realization only gives solution to his soul by the end of the novel.

Keywords: echoes, otherness, selected poems

1. Introduction

The writers of Diaspora are branded for using many of the autobiographical elements in their works. The factors of Diaspora are shown by portraying some real life incidents through their literary texts. Meena Alexander, one of the prolific writers of Indian origin shows this fact through her creative art. The striking memories of motherland are overshadowed in almost all her poems.

Birth place with Buried Stones, one of Meena Alexander's collections of poems discloses several features of immigrant writers holding the echoes of otherness in the migrated land and homeland. With a nice lyricism, her poems convey the fragmented experience of the traveler, for whom home is both nowhere and everywhere. Wherever and whenever she goes, she feels the strangeness.

Like all other poets, Meena Alexander's poems also deal with the themes of love, war, effects of violence and dislocation. In this Collection of poems she widely talks the feelings of time and space. She was shifted from India to Newyork. How this change of space influences her literary career and affects her real life. What kind of memories she has to share with us from her nostalgic past being in sweet homeland. The answers for these questions may find good values. But now the dream of being a first citizen cannot find life in the poet's life. A kind of otherness is felt by her. Through this study let us see how these poems express such feelings.

1.1 Echoes of Otherness in the Selected Poems of Meena Alexander

Ideas of home and away, location and dislocation, have come to play a vital role in contemporary literary and cultural criticism, especially in immigrant literature. Meena Alexander's collection of poems published in the year 2013 is titled as *Birth place with Buried Stones*. The poem in the same title among other fine poems in the collection itself expresses her feelings on homeland and her attempt to show her national identity. The poem begins with her memories on the river Ganga and cultivations in fields like Silk and Jute in her homeland, India. Throughout this poem she is trying to say that once she was a pure Indian and still the memories are alive in her.

We can find her words of consolation and her quest to say that she has her own homeland through this poem. She even feels very much proud of being born in India. This fact is brought out through her lines: "I came into this world in an Allahabad hospital, Close to a smelly cow pasture" (*Birth place With Buried Stones*, Chapter II). She was born in Allahabad, India, raised in Allahabad, Khartoum, and Kerala, educated in Sudan and Britain, married and settled in New York City. Since then, Alexander has become a prolific author producing a variety of collections of poetry, works of fiction, literary memoirs, essays and literary criticisms. In keeping with a past quick between changes and restless moves, her deep lyrics revolve around countless experiences coloured with agonies of displacement and hopes of relocation.

Considering the fact of being a migrant writer caught into various spaces, Alexander introduces herself in different facets; Asian American, postcolonial, immigrant, women of colour, feminist, and Indian. These multiple facets, in turn, are capable with clear voices introducing what Alexander herself asserts: "all this is part of our task, part of the violent, fractured worlds that we must make into beauty". These words can be considered as her words of consolation to every diasporic writer who feels the otherness in both the homeland and in the migrated land.

At the same time as rooting these expressions in the body of her migrant texts, she not only talks the fractures of her selfhood, but also engages into endless scenarios of identity formation. Alexander never isolates herself within the margins of her Indian identity, but rather employs other locales, cultures, and in sharp narratives of a 'third space' where self examination is at the forefront. Doing so, she put together together the fragments associated with migrant lives, searches for a more definite integrated identity, and sets out through distinct poetic voices to signify an authentic Asian American identity focusing India Identity. The act of writing 'the third space' hence is remarkably caught in Alexander's portrayal of her migrant self when she tells; "A migrant life lived through continents, across waterways and islands, creates the space where I write"

Though she feels a kind of otherness in her real life she gets life to her life only through her poem now. This can be stated in the shadow of these lines from her poem in this collection '*Question Time*'

In the shadow of a shrub once you and I
 Brushed lips and thighs,
 Dreamt of a past that frees its prisoners.
 Standing apart I looked at her and said-
 we have poetry
 So we do not die of history

(*Question Time* 12-17)

The sweetness of the homeland is expressed and her words of consolation also be seen in the above lines. Like almost all the Diaspora authors Meena Alexander also doesn't find any unsatisfactory factors from her history. That has been portrayed through this poem.

The hardest of all to her is the feeling of 'otherness' experienced. The same thought can be seen through her recollection of the past. But some verses prove that she has been trying to adjust these kinds of situations brilliantly. She was fallen into the current of curious experience of 'otherness.' Crossing the borders, she founded not only a family but also a new self in another country. Her Syrian Christian past was buried and entombed, for she wanted to breathe the clear air of America in order to free herself from the weight of hierarchy, authority and tradition. The incompleteness haunting her poetic feeling sharpens her attraction to Nature and the human world, and enhances her feeling to the original difference and weakness of life.

Meena Alexander's fond memories of her traditional family root can be seen by the last part of the poem "*Birthplace with Buried Stones*". The sweeter times with her grandmother always got places in her heart and her hearty lines of poems.

All this flows into me as mottled memory,
 Mixed with syllables of sweat, gashed syntax,
 Strands of burst bone in river sand,
 Beside the buried stones of Sarasvati Koop —
 Well of mystic sky-water where swans
 Dip their throats and come out dreaming.

(*"Birthplace with Buried Stones"* Chapter V, 7-12)

Let's find the fact that only through dreams and her literary texts Meena Alexander finds her better and comfortable world of her own. The reality of this world seems so bitter and this taste is reflecting through her poems. Now her birthplace is only visible in between some buried stones. Going through these kinds of poems we will make up our mind to accept a great fact that Meena Alexander cannot forget her birthplace even though there have been dominating the buried stones.

2. Conclusion

Bringing to mind the softening of home as a stable location from which the traveler departs and to which the traveler, somehow still the same, returns. Home, is a matter of space one inhabits in the shifting landscape of postcolonial life, and no longer a stable thing in the mad run of life. It marks a definite shift from the physical place to the emotional space, and locating one's original space becomes a process of self-awareness, which is necessary for building up one's identity. It is also a return to a past that is part arises to fit into the existing present. This imaginative journey into the past imagines the necessary poetic homecoming of words that help to plan new spaces, till now undiscovered. As an outsider in the patriarchal

space, she is compelled to locate herself in a space of her own, produced out of words and silence.

Creating a country of her won through literary texts, Meena Alexander really replaces everything which she lost. But the fact is that all that which she creates are just imaginations and which will be echoing the feel of otherness forever in mind even though she is trying to create an in imaginary homeland too.

3. References

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