



Postcolonial Feminism and Violence in Meena Alexander's *Nampally Road* and *Manhattan Music*

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Abstract:

Nampally Road (1991) and *Manhattan Music* (1997) by Meena Alexander provide poignant critiques of contemporary Indian society and the global landscape, particularly focusing on the plight of women amidst social, political, and religious turmoil. Through the journeys of protagonists Mira Kannadical and Sandhya Rosenblum, Alexander navigates themes of community conflict, colonial legacies, women's subjugation, police brutality, political corruption, and religious violence. Both novels offer a searing portrayal of the systemic brutality faced by women, juxtaposing intimate relationships with public atrocities to underscore the harsh realities of societal norms. Alexander's exploration delves deep into the intersectionality of gender, race, religion, and power dynamics, urging readers to confront the pervasive violence and advocate for social transformation towards a more just and compassionate world.

Introduction

This article examines the intersection of postcolonial feminism and representations of violence in Alexander's novels. It investigates how the author addresses issues of gender-based violence, colonial legacies, and women's agency within the context of postcolonial India and diasporic communities.

Nampally Road (1991) is a semi-autobiographical book by Meena Alexander, which critiques current social events in India. The protagonist, Mira Kannadical, returns to India after studying in England and encounters community conflict, colonial schooling, women's servitude, police violence, and political corruption. She becomes embroiled in the ongoing political upheaval and takes to composing poems to support the distressed people around her.

In *Manhattan Music* (1997), the protagonist, Sandhya Rosenblum, immigrates to the US after being married to a Jewish American man. Her unhappy marriage leads her to have an



extramarital affair with an Egyptian immigrant. Both works expose the rising violence in India and worldwide, as well as the subjection of women and a woman's search for self-identity.

Alexander's semi-autobiographical books portray a society full of brutality against women, highlighting systemic brutality through horrific occurrences from public life and intimate relationships. The main event in *Nampally Road* is the vicious rape of Rameeza Be, a Muslim lady, by inebriated police officers. The book also examines the legacy of great epics like the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, which support skewed viewpoints and discriminatory practices that prescribe different standards for men and women.

Mira Kannadikal, the protagonist, develops empathy for the victims due to her profound experience of the cruelty and destitution that permeate the world. The ensuing fury sparks rioting and demands for the criminals to be held accountable. In *Manhattan Music*, the heroine Mira, a radical feminist, becomes a courageous crusader against injustice. She fights to release Rameeza from government jail and national activists who see women as tools. Alexander challenges the validity of deeds committed by those claiming to be in the service of others and highlights the plight of women in a society ruled by men. Gender prejudice is pervasive in Hinduism, where women are seen as inferior and Brahmin Swami Chari is blamed for societal inequality and the promotion of masculinity. Alexander argues that arranged weddings are more effective than love marriages and exposes the hardships and pains faced by married women.

Sandhya and Mira, two of Meena Alexander's characters, are troubled by the terrible tales of their friends and take action against societal ills like dowry deaths. In *Manhattan Music*, Sakhi fights for married women's independence and safety as respected members of society. Meena uses women's camaraderie to empower her characters, and in *Manhattan Music*, Sandhya is paired with Draupadi, who gives her moral bravery and saves her life.

Meena Alexander's works, *Manhattan Music* and *Nampally Road*, are a collection of stories that explore the themes of female camaraderie, racial and ethnic violence, and the struggle for independence and dignity. The protagonists, Sandhya Rosenblum and Mira Kannadikal, are immigrant women who face racial prejudice in America and India, respectively. Alexander's work is praised for its historical authenticity and advice for women facing adversity in these unsettling times. Sandhya Rosenblum, an Indian woman, experiences racial prejudice in America, which she learns from her grandmother about the value of education for women. In *Manhattan*, she encounters racial identity and is called 'Indian?' by young men. Sandhya's cousin Sakhi, on the other hand, struggles with racial stereotypes and a stoning event that



deeply affects her and her family. Draupadi, Sandhya's companion, also faces prejudice and racial epithets in America through her performance art.

The books *Manhattan Music* and *Nampally Road* specifically address religious violence in India and worldwide, highlighting the fragile Indian social fabric that accommodates a multitude of faiths in conflict. They also expose acts of violence committed in the name of religion, such as the goondas' rape of a lady in Hyderabad and the 'sniper' in Sarajevo.

The protagonists, Sandhya Rosenblum and Mira Kannadical, battle against political violence and denounce the brutality of those in power, reflecting the author's own obsessions. Mira Kannadical actively engages in the campaign against the governing party to make meaning of her life.

Ramu and Gautam, two characters in *Nampally Road* and *Manhattan Music*, are motivated by the desire for social equality and struggle against the despotism and oppression of self-centered leaders. Ramu, a coworker and boyfriend of Mira, takes an active role in demonstrations against the harsh laws of the government. Sandhya's boyfriend, Gautam, spends his weekends in the woods north of Hyderabad and is often detained by the government police for his sympathies with the People's War Group, a proscribed socialist organization. The brutality and exploitation of landlords against the impoverished is shown in the story, along with the victims' backlash against them.

The corrupt politicians on *Nampally Road* are portrayed by Limca Gouda, the Chief Minister, and his mercenaries, known as Ever Ready Men. Limca Gouda resorts to violence to put an end to opposition to his regime and demonstrations, using force and violence to torment the poor, ignorant, rural peasants, minorities, women, and disenfranchised. Mira observes the Ever Ready Men's aggression against the orange vendor's nonviolent protest against a new tax imposed upon them.

Meena Alexander's book *Manhattan Music* explores the issue of violence and corruption in India, focusing on the brutal attacks on impoverished and underprivileged women. The author contrasts the actions and lack of empathy of politicians like the Nizam and Limca Gowda, who were driven by power and used public funds to construct a cardboard city in the Public Gardens. This event led to division among classes and resulted in a violent protest against Limca Gowda, which resulted in the burning down of the cardboard city and VIP tent.

The protagonist Durgabai, a character in the book, criticizes dishonest physicians' fraudulent claims and their black money, emphasizing the need for social transformation and a more fair strategy to stop international warfare. The book also discusses the global problem of violence



and corruption, with illegal black money being employed by businesspeople and smugglers, destabilizing the economy and inciting violence against women and the impoverished.

The book also mentions events from the Gulf War, such as the LTTE, dead Apaches, and the death of Rajiv Gandhi. Alexander questions if senseless violence still occurs in even the most developed nations, such as the USA. The health of the whole system is directly impacted by the shortcomings of contemporary civilization. The issue of international terrorism is also highlighted, as shown by the murder threats made by radical Muslims against Rushdie.

The work also examines the horrific violence that has occurred around the globe, including the murders of Indira and Rajiv Gandhi. Photographer Jay shows his sincere sympathy for the victims and focuses on the violence that has transpired afterward. He captures images of young children, a deaf and dumb youngster, and stories he learned about from Surya, a woman from Sri Lanka who was shot dead at a human rights conference.

Meena Alexander's book *Manhattan Music* delves into issues of violence and love in a turbulent society. Sandhya, the main character, imagines guys from Sudan and Egypt plotting to blow up America by creating explosives out of fertiliser, rat poison, and witches' brew. Alexander muses on the prospect of an imagined country bombing Manhattan.

The book also exposes the harsh realities of British control in India, including the transport of Draupadi's forefathers to Trinidad, Fiji, as bonded labourers by the British. Many authors have shown their support for bound labourers' liberation in their writings.

Although Gandhi's goals were love and the reign of love, Alexander aims to show how powerful nonviolence and love can be. She illustrates the profound repercussions of both peaceful love and violent acts on people. The planet is in disarray, split wide open by several San Andreas faults, and on the verge of collapse, as shown by Nageswara Rao's reactions to the message of two books.

In conclusion, Meena Alexander's works serve as a powerful reminder of the struggles faced by women and the importance of education and empowerment in overcoming societal barriers. By examining the experiences of women like Sandhya Rosenblum and Mira Kannadical, Alexander encourages readers to stand up for their rights and dignity, regardless of their background or beliefs.



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