
Meena Alexander's *Manhattan Music* and *Nampally Road*: A Discourse In Womanly Propinquity

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Abstract

Meena Alexander's creative work lies at the intersection of postcolonial, ethnic American, and women's studies. Like her life, which has included multiple border crossings, her writing crosses traditional disciplinary boundaries and generates interdisciplinary dialogues. Meena Alexander is one of the most important contemporary South Asian American poets. Alexander's biography, intimately connected with her literary output, has spanned four continents and is marked by myriad passages across oceans and borders. In her own recurring description, she crossed many borders, both geographical and national. Wherever she went, she witnessed violence in different forms and degrees of intensity; she also read about violent incidents, both natural and man-made. She writes about personal, domestic, national and international, violent events in her poems, fiction, non-fiction, and memoirs. It is perhaps no exaggeration to say that almost all events of violence in the world, particularly those which are man-made, in the last fifty years find a place in her work; sometimes the same event appears several times. Alexander's work taken as a whole seems to be a record of, and at the same time a commentary on, man's inhumanity to man (or woman).

The paper critically examines the two novels in a feminine plane and explores the engagement with the question of the cultural legacy of colonialism and its continuing effects in the aftermath of decolonization.

Keywords: Disciplinary boundaries, South-Asian American Poets, Feminine plane, Cultural legacy, Decolonization

Meena Alexander's creative work lies at the intersection of postcolonial, ethnic American, and women's studies. Like her life, which has included multiple border crossings, her writing crosses traditional disciplinary boundaries and generates interdisciplinary dialogues. Meena Alexander is one of the most important contemporary South Asian American poets. Alexander's biography, intimately connected with her literary output, has spanned four continents and is marked by myriad passages across oceans and borders. Born in Allahabad, India in 1951, she accompanied her parents at age five to Khartoum, Sudan, later attending the University of Khartoum. She continued her doctoral studies in Nottingham, England and then returned to teach in Delhi and Hyderabad in India. After her marriage, she moved to New York City and has made Manhattan her home since the 1980s. Alexander's literary career has traversed over three decades. While her earliest poems were published in Arabic translation during her university days in Sudan, her first poetry in India was published by the Calcutta Writers Workshop. In the United States, Alexander's first book of poetry to be published was *House of a Thousand Doors* in 1988. Since then, she has published several anthologies of poetry, including *River and Bridge* (1996), *The Shock of Arrival: Reflections on Postcolonial Experience* (which also contains lyrical essays), *Illiterate Heart* (2002), *Raw Silk* (2004), *Quickly Changing River* (2008), and *Poetics of Dislocation* (2009). Of these collections, *Illiterate Heart* won the PEN Open Book Award in 2002. Alexander's writing in other genres has been prolific during the same period. In 1993, she published her memoir *Fault Lines*, which was selected as one of *Publishers Weekly's* Best Books of 1993. Ten years later, she published a revised version of *Fault Lines*, with a coda titled *Book of Childhood* and a preface by the acclaimed Kenyan novelist Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. Alexander's scholarly interest in Romanticism and Phenomenology led to two books: *The Poetic Self: Towards a Phenomenology of Romanticism* (1983) and *Women in Romanticism: Mary Wollstonecraft, Dorothy Wordsworth and Mary Shelley* (1989). Alexander has also written two novels: *Nampally Road* (1991) and *Manhattan Music* (1997).

In her own recurring description, she crossed many borders, both geographical and national. Wherever she went, she witnessed violence in different forms and degrees of intensity; she also read about violent incidents, both natural and man-made. She writes about personal, domestic, national and international, violent events in her poems, fiction, non-fiction, and memoirs. It is perhaps no exaggeration to say that almost all events of violence in the world, particularly those which are man-made, in the last fifty years find a place in her work; sometimes the same event appears several times. Alexander's work taken as a whole seems to be a record of, and at the same time a commentary on, man's inhumanity to man (or woman).

One of the distinguishing features of Alexander's *oeuvre* is her ongoing engagement with the question of the cultural legacy of colonialism and its continuing effects in the aftermath of decolonization. Alexander's memoir *Fault Lines* provides through the

generational sweep of the Alexander and Kuruvilla families, the relationship of Alexander's ancestors, particularly her maternal grandparents, to the struggle for Indian independence against British colonial rule. Her parents represented the first generation to enjoy the political freedoms and opportunities ushered in by decolonization. However, political decolonization does not efface the psychic and cultural wounds of colonialism which Alexander's generation has to face. Alexander's creative work constantly grapples with the continuing burden of the colonial legacy. This is explored dramatically in her fraught relationship with the various languages she grew up with, particularly English, the language of her creative work. *Fault Lines*, Alexander's memoir, explores her ambiguous relationship with the formal literary script of Malayalam, her mother tongue: her refusal to learn it, while at the same time being deeply drawn to the oral poetic traditions of the language, through her exposure to wandering singers and poets. Her relationship with English, the language of her education and creative expression, is depicted in her memoir as an equally fraught and ambiguous one. *Fault Lines* depicts Alexander's initiation into the colonial languages of English and French while in Khartoum with her parents.

In her childhood, Meena Alexander had heard of young unwed mothers in her native state of Kerala jumping into wells to avoid social scandal and to protect the so-called family honour. She writes in her memoirs, *Fault Lines*: "the image of women jumping into wells was constantly with me during my childhood" (Alexander, 108). This image continues to haunt her. Another fearful image is that of young "married women being burnt in their own homes" (Alexander, 53). These deaths are euphemistically called dowry deaths. In Sudan, where she had her school and college education, a civil war raged for several years. This was another violent image etched on her mind at an impressionable age. In Hyderabad where she taught for a few years, three upsetting incidents occurred. The first was the gang rape of a woman by the police in the police station. This triggered violent demonstrations and position of curfew in the city for a few days to quell riots and restore order. The second incident was the setting on fire, presumably by members of the People's War Group, of a railway coach in a moving train near Kazipet. Many innocent passengers were killed in this gruesome act of arson. This incident finds a place in her second novel, *Manhattan Music*. Gautam, a revolutionary and a suspect, dies in prison. The third incident during her sojourn in Hyderabad was a giant cyclone which devastated the east coast of Andhra Pradesh in 1977. The cyclone destroyed at one fell swoop thousands of people, cattle, homes, crops, etc. Alexander wrote a poem, *In Divi Seema*, on this great natural calamity. Anita Desai writes about Meena Alexander, "From India to the Sudan to England, and finally to the island of Manhattan, poet Meena Alexander traces her growth as a writer and a woman over borders, through decades, and across cultures. In this journey Alexander claims the fragments of a life left scattered by multiple migrations and uprooting. She courageously confronts the meanings of being born female into a period of post colonial turmoil" (Alexander, 68).

Having been exposed to different forms of violence such as suicide, rape, murder, massacre, racial prejudice, religious bigotry, civil war, ethnic conflict and international war, she is sensitized to violence. She says in her essay, *Civil Strife*, “There is a violence that works into my vision. .it comes with the shifting worlds I inhabit, the borders I cross in my dreams. The questions of identity that haunt me—an Indian woman, living and working in New York City—are inseparable from intricate violence that has entered my probing into the bonds that link inner and outer realms, self and world” (Alexander, 204). She says that a writer who is sensitized to the surrounding violence should ‘translate’ such violence. She uses the word, ‘translate’, in an earlier sense, ‘to carry over,’ ‘to transport.’ As a feminist, she is conscious of the ‘marginality of female existence’ and says that “a woman’s voice pits itself, translating violence against patriarchal and colonial power.” (Alexander, 83) She exhorts South and West-Asian women writers to turn “blood into ink, that is, engage in a bitter translation of self required by violent conflict” (Alexander, 84). Meena Alexander is convinced that ‘art grows out of violence’. The effect of violence is that it forces a writer to speak out. She states, “it is only in the teeth of violence that we can speak the unstable truths of our bodies” (Alexander, 78). Her preoccupation, almost obsession, with violence may therefore be explained as the very source, the *raison d’etre*, of her creative endeavour. Violence seems to trigger her creative energies and violence sustains her work. She likens the word coming out of a creative artist to childbirth, “Words that come from the female body are an eruption. For there is no canonical sanction for female writing and speech. As such the word becomes grotesque, just as the body is, after childbirth.... I see the word made flesh. The dance at the end is the woman’s life, the poem,” (Alexander, 28).

A writer, in Alexander’s view, has several roles to play in a violence-ridden world. He (she) has to describe or depict it, ‘translate’ it, condemn it; a writer necessarily sympathizes with the victims of violence, irrespective of their caste, creed, colour, culture and country. As an activist in her own way, she says in the manner of Karl Marx, that a writer should not stop with describing and interpreting the world, but attempt to change it, change it for the better. For her, art is an instrument, a part of our collective non-violent resistance to violence. In an emotional response to the murder of Safdar Hashmi, ‘a gifted man,’ she says, “Our voices will not be reduced by terror. We are poets and writers. We will persist. We will sing through our words our very right to speak. This is a testament” (Alexander, 132).

Gender studies can be defined as woman gaining importance and significance. In the present state of society woman is in a degraded position. The novel *Nampally Road* gives proper merit and value to women. This is because Meena Alexander has experienced this problem intensely. When she was in Hyderabad where she taught for a few years, a woman was gang raped by the police in the police station. This triggered violent demonstrations and position of curfew in the city for a few days to quell riots and restore order. This event is the

central theme of the novel *Nampally Road* where the woman was gang raped by the police, “Rameeza’s story spread through Hyderabad like smoke from the burning police station. Rameeza was gang raped. Her husband had his brains beaten out...Now the police station was burning, iron bars and all, a quick, sudden revenge” (Alexander, 58). Another example for woman gaining importance and significance can be seen from the angle how Indira Gandhi is projected in this novel as a dictator and a power monger. The intention of Indira Gandhi is bound to be highly selfish. She uses power in order to gain her own ends and purposes. Though this is a bad phenomenon, gender studies give due recognition to woman like Indira Gandhi who is bold enough to come out into the society openly claim power for the sake of power. This passage is a reference to Indira Gandhi:

... iron fisted Prime Minister of the immaculate lineage and Swiss schooling, who on her New York trips made small type in the times ... abruptly withdrew all civil liberties and drafted antiterrorism bills that could throw any citizen in jail without overt reason. (Alexander, 3)

From the point of view of gender studies this is a matter to be viewed seriously. Indira Gandhi might not have done good things but the facts are not so. She uses power in order to stabilize her position in the society. Gender studies are prone to give acceptance to such an event like emergency. The context is very significant. Woman gains more importance. In this part of the novel a woman like Indira Gandhi is welcomed from the point of view of gender studies. First her courage must be appreciated. Her boldness is so prominent that the Chief Minister Limca Gowda takes a woman as a role model for the purpose of self improvement. Limca Gowda enforcing Indira Gandhi’s emergency on a miniature scale in Andhra Pradesh. This passage is a comment on Limca Gowda’s behaviour as a tyrant or dictator. “Limca Gowda was an ambitious man and wished to turn himself into an absolute ruler” (Alexander, 4). In gender studies it is said that man oppresses woman. But here the woman like Indira Gandhi is taken as a role model for Gowda for achieving his personal ends and motives. The novel takes its correct starting point from this end.

The next significant development in the matter of gender studies is love. Usually, man exploits a woman for the purpose of sex. Here no such thing happens but what takes place is the story of the relationship between Mira and Ramu. Ramu loves and respects Mira. There is an affinity born out of sexual interest between Mira and Ramu. Ramu becomes a Ph.D. student in a University. They meet at Sona Nivas College in Hyderabad. There is blossoming of love between Mira and Ramu. Ramu’s love for Mira is genuine but he is not interested in marriage. “He smiled at me then, some what tenderly, and I unable to bear the feelings ... for a long minute before moving on” (Alexander, 4).

They do not show real emotional attachment towards each other for the purpose of ennobling love. This significance of Mira is assessed in terms of her role as a teacher. Here,

gender studies become significant. Mira becomes an impressive teacher. She teaches romantic poetry. Romantic poetry deals with freedom whereas gender studies claims freedom for woman. So there is a connection between romantic poetry and woman's freedom. Mira has no interest in the revolution because her interest is different. She is typically a teacher of Wordsworth and Romantic poets. Mira goes one step further in relating Romantic Movement to the mini emergency declared by Limca Gowda. "The following day in class... I mentioned Limca's public relations film" (Alexander, 50).

Society and romantic poetry are viewed as mutually convertible. Society must be free but romantic poetry says according to Mira that society and woman must move freely. In society woman must walk freely. Gender studies give importance to women's spiritual pursuits. In this context, two more characters can be measured in terms of significance. They are Durgabai and Rameeza Be. Durgabai is a noble doctor. She runs the clinic without any monetary motive: "Durgabai charged practically nothing and still used the rundown clinic with a tin roof in one of the poorest parts of town" (Alexander, 17).

During the time of mini emergency there is no law and order but it is highly oppressive. Otherwise Rameeza Be would not have been raped. The rape of Rameeza Be must be viewed in the context of gender studies. Rameeza Be is a humble woman. She is innocent. But she becomes helpless in the hands of a big police gang. Sexual exploitation is very crucial in the context of gender studies. Usually man has a predominant tendency to exploit a woman for the purpose of sexual fulfilment. What happens in *Nampally Road* is that a woman is raped mercilessly. A description of how Rameeza is raped is given in a pitiable condition. "Her sari was stiff with blood. I could tell by looking. She lay curled up on the mud floor of the cell just behind the wooden desk" (Alexander, 57).

One must examine the psychology of policemen. They behave like brutes and monsters. They have no mercy for a woman. For a momentary sexual fulfilment Rameeza is subjected to be raped in a dishonourable way. Gender studies always condemn such incidents. Rape is the highest crime in the social law but in gender studies it shows the height of cruelty to which a man can behave mercilessly towards a woman. Therefore, Rameeza is a telling example but there are good men who protest against this gender exploitation. The mode of protest is shown in this passage, "There was a commotion just behind. A group of young men struggled with a police man. They had caught him by surprise. Where is she? Where have you taken her?" (Alexander, 57) But they are helpless with the presence of organised police group. Ramu tries to gather a group of revolutionaries both men and women to protest against such atrocities. Initially they are not successful but later on the revolution gains a significant turn. They try to put sense in Limca Gowda so that he will correct his ways. But such a thing is impossible. Limca Gowda's primary motive is to put down the revolt at any cost with the help of police. This he achieves to some extent.

Another significant turning point in the novel is the orange seller's protest. They stage a demonstration to show a lesson that tax increase is not beneficial to them. In fact, it is nagging them like anything. In this incident a woman is seen pushing the cart with a child in her hands. A passage is given to show the woman carrying the child:

I could make out a child, probably a year old, its belly swollen. Its right hand was opening and closing, clutching at the air. It is struggled to sit up. Its mouth and eyes were visible now. It must have been wailing, for suddenly the woman slipped her hand out of the ditch and rocked the orange cart. (Alexander, 18)

What further develops is not a happy moment. The mother is disregarded. She is pushed away. Policemen are so inhuman that they do not show any consideration towards the woman who carries the child. In fact she is put to lot of trouble and inconvenience. The police people have no respect for the woman carrying the child. The child is innocent. But the policemen resort to lathi charge. Everyone is beaten up brutally. In this incident the woman pushing the cart carrying the child is very important from the point of view of gender studies. Her feelings are not at all respected. On the other hand she is fortune by being beaten up. No gender studies will fail to make a mention of such an incident.

Next is the relationship between Durgabai and Mira. Durgabai is a magnanimous doctor. She has sympathy for suffering people. She is a gift to the society. Her interest is to cure sick people. She does it frankly and innocently. Mira is so attached to Durgabai that she calls her 'Little Mother'. She is 'Little Mother' because of her extraordinary kindness. "As befit her age, I addressed Durgabai as Little Mother" (Alexander, 16).

This is again gaining merit in the light of gender studies. Such gender studies emphasize the relationship between women. Laura Ribaldo is another lady who is a neighbour of Durgabai. She gives curd to Mira and Durgabai. In gender studies woman's kindness comes out in an unnoticed way. Simply the act of curd giving lifts Laura Ribaldo on to a heroic dimension.

Another significant factor is the individual's sexual exploitation. Durgabai's servant maid is Rani. Laura Ribaldo is beaten up by her husband but she is sexually exploited. She wants freedom from her cruel husband. In gender studies woman's freedom is the life breath. These incidents reveal the attitude of man towards woman. Man by nature is not noble. He looks for an opportunity to sexually exploit a woman. This dominating tendency is condemned by gender studies.

Gender studies can be therefore defined as woman gaining recognition in the society, her freedom to live and move about anywhere. Laura Ribaldo wishes to leave her husband

Henry and choose to live with her three sisters who live in Canada. She wishes to live with her three sisters because of the atrocity of her husband:

Laura was gripped by a desire to flee Hyderabad. Henry might have had something to do with it. Sometimes he beat her about the ears so violently she was forced shivering and half naked onto the balcony that jutted out from their flat (Alexander, 43).

This shows that man is unbearable in many moments. If a chance is given the tendency of man is always going in the direction of exploiting a woman sexually. This cannot be tolerated. Therefore, the voice of protest comes from the gender studies. Such cruelty and evil must be removed at any cost. Laura Ribaldo expresses her emotions freely and also she looks to Durgabai for consolation.

Under the dazzling glamour of westernization and modernization - man, marriage, sex or the family mattered nothing to her. The dilemma of men at the surprising transformation of the feminine attitude was really pitiful. Woman in her struggle to gain her identity and man, in his attempt to retain his authority always confronted with horrible ego clash. Both men and women competed against each other to prove the superiority of their ego. This mentality complimented with extreme freedom has done a lot of harm to the family which can survive only on the harmony between man and woman. The biggest impact of this situation is on the families in the Indian Diaspora. Meena Alexander's *Manhattan Music* which deals with the life of the Indians in the diaspora is one of the best examples to study the effect of westernization on Indian family.

Alexander's fourth novel *Manhattan Music* gives a deeper insight into the impact of westernization on the upcoming generation and its consequences on Indian families both in the homeland and the diaspora. The protagonist of *Manhattan Music* Sandhya is an assertive and educated woman from an orthodox Christian family from Kerala. As in the traditional way Sandhya's parents prepare for their daughter's marriage when she finished her studies, but she baffles her parents defying the culturally imposed traditions and conventions. Her colonial education enables her to protest firmly saying, "If you want me to live as a woman, why educate me? Why not kill me, if you want to dictate my life?" (Alexander, 26) She was not ready to listen to her mother's words, "Arranged marriages are the best, Sandhya. How could you doubt it? Look at all these messy divorces in our cities!" (Alexander, 23) The modern girls are not ready to accept marriage as the destination of a girl's life and she is not ready to get trained as a 'good girl' for the matrimonial market. Marriage is of secondary importance to them. Being economically independent is the prime aim of the present-day girls.

The modern women of India believe marriage as a trap and for them divorce is the only salvation from it. Women approach divorce as though they successfully amputate the unwanted from their life so that they survive. This attitude leads to the decline of the family values in India. This new attitude of women is the basic cause for the change in the family set-up of Indian society. Once the education is over, whether it is a boy or a girl, the preference is to go abroad especially to the West. West becomes so luring to the modern younger generation because it is the dreamland of freedom and opportunities.

Sandhya marries Stephen, an American Jew and migrates to the west to make a family. It was a marriage of her choice. This audacious nature of Sandhya in defying her parents and the conventions is a blow to the traditional concept of Indian womanhood. Sandhya's migration to the West on a voluntary exile accompanying her husband to his homeland is a turning point of transitions in her life. It was with full excitement she immigrated to the dream-land. She thinks, "Stephen had married her and brought her to America. She would live here, she would learn to forget" (Alexander, 11), but once when she settled in New York, she started experiencing the pains and violence of dislocation. Though she was confident of a good start in the new land, all her expectations went upside down when she became a victim of culture clash. The end-result was the alienation of Sandhya from everything.

In the Indian set-up, the girl who is brought in marriage becomes the woman of the house. It is her responsibility to safeguard the welfare of her home. But here Sandhya moves around like a stranger in her own house where she had only her husband and mother-in-law. The house appears to her as a suffocating place. In the homeland usually the newly married girls will not be sent out without male escort, but in this dreamland of freedom Stephen gave her a Green card and told her to take America headlong. A symbol of extreme freedom! Of course it is a situation of extreme freedom which no girl can expect in India; but Sandhya the wife expected her husband to be with her. For Sandhya, Stephen was not available whenever she wished for support in the world where he had brought his lady-love to live her life. In the safe status of a first class citizen in white USA, Stephen couldn't understand the anxieties and neurosis of Sandhya, the Indian immigrant. He was busy with his work and other personal matters, and had no time to spend for pleasure-trips with his wife. The extreme freedom and loneliness in the marital life brings Sandhya closer to Rashid, an Egyptian. In the Indian set-up, the close interaction of the family members and the strict supervision of the husband won't permit a wife to indulge in an extramarital relationship so easily. But in the land of freedom people look at such affairs as the individual freedom and right. This renewed outlook and freedom are stronger enough to shake the foundation of the tradition-bound family structure of India.

There is something remarkable in Indian women; that is their ability to cope. Even though there are a large number of disappointments in marital life, the ability to cope makes a woman tolerate and adjust with all the ills in the family life. This special quality of woman is the main strength behind the successful survival of Indian families. Though Sandhya is from India, the influence of colonial education and the life style of the West have taken away many of her feminine virtues. She becomes indifferent even to take care of Dora, her only child's needs. A mother ignoring her maternal role is an unimaginable situation in the Indian society. It is the mother who has to instill values of the culture to the children. Since Dora is an Indo-American child, the mother has greater responsibility in bringing up the child imparting the values of both the cultures. But Dora was unlucky. Most often the child was lonely because her mother was preoccupied with her personal affairs. The difference becomes very obvious when Sosa, Sandhya's mother visited them in their New York house. Sosa was startled to see her grandchild sleeping in a temporary make-shift, away from its parents. She poured out her anger at this western practice telling, "Put them in by themselves now, and they leave you at eighteen. Is that what you really want?" (Alexander, 144) Keeping away the child even from the very young age onwards is a western practice to make it grow up independently. But no mother from Indian set up can think of such a situation because they are mothers who hold their children closer to their bosoms so that the child will grow up taking the warmth and love of mother. It is this love that makes the child obliged and responsible and loving towards its parents as a bond till the end of their lives. Once during a conversation Sandhya was surprised to hear that Rashid has his own bedroom. She felt really embarrassed to tell him that she never had a bedroom of her own. She feels, "How could she tell him how odd that would have seemed, cruel even, a young girl put in a room by herself in the large house in India. The parents would have been severely blamed". (Alexander, 144) Though this habit sounds quite absurd to an outsider, it shows how cautious and caring are Indian parents about the well-being of their children. Keeping children along with them in the same room involves a lot of sacrifice on the part of the parents. And they are always ready to bear it for their children.

As Sosa warns, in the west, children when they grow up to stand on their own feet, they fly away to make their own lives. Parents are no more botherations for them. It is a special feature of the western culture that parents when they become old and helpless, resort to some old-age homes. They have no right to expect love and care from their children because they haven't given it. Youngsters are happy with their nuclear families. The human relationships are so thin and brittle there. They have no reason to regret about it because, the elderly helpless parents living in the loveless atmosphere of some shelter homes and the youngsters enjoying life in their nuclear families is a part of their culture. But under the influence of such a shallow tradition, the highly value-based people of India forgetting the worth of their sublime culture is absolutely foolish. Now the Indian people also look at their

old and helpless parents as a burden to take care; and so they too find some shelter homes to throw away their parents. Thus, the precious presence of parents and grandparents are slowly disappearing from the Indian families. A bane of westernization! This new trend has shattered the foundation of Indian family.

Parties and gatherings are common in western life and are very exciting occasions for the Indians. Here also too much freedom degrades the morality of people. Sandhya's cousin Chandu's outlook about women is given as follows: "After all, my dear, what are women for but to fill us – by which I mean the male species – with their exquisite fragrances?" (Alexander, 116) The attitude of men towards woman as a sexual being complimented with the extreme freedom is more than enough to destroy the moral fiber of the social life. Even if the husband or the wife mingles closely with the opposite sex, it is taken as a token of modern civilization labeled as 'forwardness'. The Indian husband who won't allow his wife even to look at any other man than him in the homeland appreciates the wife for her company of men. The Indian wife who is so possessive about her husband in the homeland watches blankly her husband flirting with other women. In the guise of a modern husband and a modern wife they discard their inner feelings and values to merge into the new culture; but they recognize very late that all these gestures of modernity have changed their 'home' into a 'house'.

Sakhi and Ravi, the Indian couple in America experience this transformation in their life and family. From the warmth and pleasure of family life they came to America to make money. Soon they realized that besides being a land of freedom and opportunity, America is a land of "making up and breaking up" (Alexander, 129) of families. Sakhi and Ravi represent the modern wife and modern husband. Alexander here highlights the value conflict experienced by the modern husband when the modern wife is confronted with the problem of multiplicity of roles she has to perform. Ravi's expectations of an ideal wife in Sakhi confronts with the reality of Sakhi the modern wife; and Ravi the modern husband is pulled apart between these two opposite images. The western life style wipes out the virtue of tolerance. For them everything is the individual right: right to love, right to make love, right to make a family, right to break- up a family and so on. When everything is looked upon in terms of rights and money, there is no obligation in the name of love and relationship; so, no sacrifice and no tolerance. Relationships are valued only where there is love, and Indian society is rich in that.

Sandhya's affair with Rashid was not merely for a bodily pleasure but for her he was peace, shelter and comfort. Whenever a woman's expectations are not satisfied in marital life, she will try to look for it outside. A growing awareness of the incompleteness of her marriage with Stephen led Sandhya to a gradual alienation from everything. At the same time, though willing to help, Stephen remained helpless because there had developed a wide

gap between them. It is this gap that develops between the husband and wife that acts as one of the main causes of the family break down. Rashid looks at women as a source of pleasure and he prefers variety. When he was fed up with Draupadi, he left a note under the door about his decision to break up. It was with the same ease he broke up with Sandhya. Men like Rashid are always there to trap women like Sandhya, and thus causing many a family break down.

Though Alexander is depicting a family atmosphere in Manhattan, it reflects the family atmosphere common in modern India - an atmosphere of pretended love and smiles between husband and wife. Now-a-days many families which appear as sweet homes or ideal families to the public have the husbands and wives, the life partners living like strangers within the four walls of the house. Rashid appeared to Sandhya as a permanent escape from the torments she was undergoing. For her he was peace and pleasure. A mere glance into Sandhya's marital life shows that it is the gap of communication between her and her husband that led her to develop an affair with Rashid. She becomes so detached from her familial role that "Sometimes her child seemed part of a life she no longer needed. And it was hard for Sandhya to refigure herself as the one who must coax and cuddle, wash and dry and heal." (Alexander, 141) About Stephen she thinks, "the distance between her and Stephen grew. They wandered apart, each seemingly content to let the other be. But underneath something boiled, a dark root of rage". The western style of man-woman relationship, that is, a relationship with little value on morality has been imbibed by the Indian families in the diaspora. This trend makes them look at sex as a biological need that has to be satiated as per the need arises. This attitude has wiped out the sanctity of family life in the Indian diaspora. The sanctity and privacy attributed to sex in the Indian tradition has a significant role in the uniqueness of the husband -wife relationship in Indian families. As Vinod Kumar Maheswari says, "Once man-woman relationship is perverted from within and distorted from outside, there is no end to human perversion" (Maheswari,136). Sandhya in her dilemma of choice between her husband Stephen and the lover Rashid even thinks "Why could she not love two men?" (Alexander, 181) For an Indian wife who is in the image of a -pativrita' can never dare to have such a perverted thought even in her worst dreams. Though well-educated and with good exposure the modern women lose the morale enjoyed by the women of last generation. The modern trend is to run away from problems. Both men and women have proved their mettle in reaching to the heights of glory; but retaining the glory of family life is becoming an impossible dream to them. Sakhi's reflection on marriage in the novel *Manhattan Music* is very significant. For her - marriage meant setting up a new home; but she hated that word 'home' because marriages are now-a-days making-up and breaking-up. Still people got married, in the hope of some permanence. But all around them, those who married were getting divorced.... Perhaps these divorces were just another sign of human beings saying, "Yes I have some control over my life, yes - A minimal sense of

control and the pleasure of beauty, what else was there?" (Alexander, 131) Today's youngsters marry according to their interest and preferences. As Sakhi says they make home soon through marriage. With the same speed they break up with a smiling 'good bye'. The modern trend towards sex as a biological need to be satiated, marriage as a social necessity and divorce a powerful right of escapism from all the problems are again the indicators of man's failure and the crumbling of human values which in turn result in the break-down of family. The incidences like Sandhya's attempt to commit suicide, Sakhi's longings to hold back the warmth of family life instead of the wealth they could make, the eagerness of the immigrants to remain united through celebrations and gatherings and their readiness to inculcate a strong sense of belonging to the homeland and willingness to help each other in the marginalized community emphasize the Indian spirit in the expatriates. All these gestures are again an attempt to refill the mind and the self with what they lost in the new culture. Each Indian is blessed with the remarkable ability to retain his own culture within, irrespective of any influx or influence. Indians can remain as Indians wherever they are. So let the Indians learn to live as an Indian in the diaspora upholding the Indian values.

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