

ISSN: 2278-9529

# GALAXY

International Multidisciplinary Research Journal

*May 2016 - Vol. 5, Issue- 3*

**Editor-In-Chief: Dr. Vishwanath Bite**

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## Meena Alexander's *Nampally Road*: A Critique of Social Protest

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The present paper attempts to make sense of Meena Alexander's own troubled past and future. In short, her novel, *Nampally Road* analyses how protest is presented as essential to societal change. In the novel *Nampally Road*, the character Mira is persuaded to join the struggle against authority. So this shows that, the Women writers think that they have emerged as the protectors of the common people's rights and freedom. How the Women character, in the novel, *Nampally Road* is even ready to wage a war against the authority is represented in the novel delightfully.

It happens at times that a novel is being written for the sake of propaganda or for the sake of persuading the readers to take part in a particular protest. Protest is a form of reaction and can be felt in any action of the people. For example, Independence Movement of India is, in fact, the protest of the nation. And so many novels have been written with this theme. Manohar Malgonkar's "A Bend in the Ganges" and Khushwant Singh's "A Train to Pakistan" are some of the novels which portray the Protest at various levels. A careful consideration of such novels will lead to discussion of Meena Alexander's *Nampally Road* which also deals with the theme of protest.

Man's life is characterized by abundant problems and he is always in search of solution for such problems. When one becomes aware of the multitudinous problems, one resorts to protest. Protest is one of the best ways to seek solution for any kind of problem. To reform any kind of existing norms, protest is used to show one's dissatisfaction with the existing norms, sometimes, people may want to change over to a new kind of social set-up. For that, they protest to show their dissatisfaction in the irrelevant ideals being forced to be followed by the concerned authority. Occurrences like these take place in the novel *Nampally Road*, Meena Alexander has vividly narrated a lot of protest and social movements. She tried her best to show the protest as the remedy to all kind of existing problems.

Ramu, the hero of the novel, *Nampally Road* is very much active in the protests. When he was a research scholar in Jawaharlal Nehru University, he waged a war against the concerned authority who was responsible for imposing the emergency period. During the emergency period, the Government imposed a lot of unfollowable conditions on the citizens of India. So all over India, all the people were against the emergency. Even the Politicians and press persons began to stay in hideouts in order to escape from the onslaughts of security personnel. But the Student community was very much active against the emergency. They never failed to show their protest to the Authority.

Ramu was pursuing his research, When emergency had been imposed Most of the students in some way or other were showing their protest against the governments. The scholars started a manuscript newspaper. Writing newspapers in a room may be a job which does not need courage. But to circulate the newspapers, the circulators ought to be courageous. Hence the challenging job of circulating underground newspaper was taken up by Ramu. He had been circulating the newspaper during emergency period. In his job, he had been arrested and often released though Ramu never gave up his fighting spirit. A true warrior cannot be suppressed easily. Ramu also could not be suppressed by imprisonment and any kind of Punishment:

*Ramu was active in the protests during that time, he helped produce the underground newspaper that students set by hand, moving form a house to safe house in the rocky terrain around the University. Several times Ramu was detained and held in custody but let out after a few days. (Nampally Road 3)*

Ramu wanted to make the people around the university to know what was happening around them. By taking this problems even to the ordinary citizen of India, he was very much sure to persuade them to make them to participate in the social movement. Because of this, people from all walks of life came to know about the withdrawn civil liberties. Ramu's capacity to persuade even the ordinary people to participate in a social movement is a noticeable aspect of his character.

To be in the forefront of any kind of a social movement or protest, one has to have the ability to persuade. And, he has to have a definite plan to fight for his own right. Ramu has the capacity to persuade and has the definite plan in organizing a social movement. Ramu succeeds in persuading even passive students to take part in the social movement against the government. During the emergency period, policemen were empowered to arrest anybody if they found them indulging in actions against the government. But moved by his struggle for the noble cause, even ordinary people began to support him. Even before Ramu and Mira reached the spot where Rameeze had been kept under police custody, some crowd gathered. It can be cited as an example, for the spontaneous participation in the protest:

*Already a small crowd has gathered and they stood talking in knots. They were agitated, unresolved about action until a loin of a man tugged off his red shirt, unwrapped his bandana and with shoulder muscles gleaming above his great chest, raised his arms with a loud martial cry. (Nampally Raod 56)*

State Government levied taxes very much on Orange sellers. The Orange sellers wanted to protest against the recent tax hike on orange sellers. In order to Organize their protest,they have formed an organisation "Orange sellers of Telungu Desam". They decided to start peacefully under the same banner.

When the orange sellers of Nampally Road were about to start their procession, the Gowdamen attacked them mercilessly in order to suppress their protest. During the reign of Limca Gowda no one was allowed to protest or demonstrate or take procession to show their disregard against the government. If anybody tried, in that time to show their disregard, that will be suppressed by the police force of the Gowdamen. How the Gowdamen tried to suppress the procession taken by the orange sellers is very much evident from the following lines:

*A woman ran in front of the three men. She had a pile of oranges Clutched in her arms. She cradled the fruit against her ribs as she ran. The people started to march behind her. But they had barely started when the motorcycles appeared, bearing straight down on the orange Sellers. The first one buzzed like a gnat, its black body gleaming, headlights glinting in the heat. Then fifteen or sixteen, like a whol horde in formantion, creashing through the unarmed men and women. The riders in their khaki uniforms were armed with latthis. They were Limca Gowada's special branch, the Ever Ready men. Each had a torch in his waistband. Each of the motor cycles had its headlights on, the bulbs donated by the Union Carbide people in return for favors received.The Ever Ready men leaped off their machines and started beating the orange sellers, dragging them to the pavements, kicking them. (Nampally Road 7)*

Actually in the proposed procession than more two hundred men and women gathered to take the procession to show their protest from the recent tax-hike on them.

Everreadmen attacked the orange sellers, they even attacked women orange sellers. Their cart carrying oranges had been fully damaged and the baskets of orange carried by them were kicked off. They attacked the orange sellers brutally. The impact of the brutal attack on the orange sellers was evident from the deserted look. Most of the orange sellers who took part in the procession were injured and they had lost their way. It is very much evident from, the next day of the proposed procession, The deserted look worn by *Nampally Road*:

*It was all over fairly soon; the peaceful demonstration that had not even started the savage interruption, the cries and blows, then the whirring sirens and the backfire of motorcycles starting all over again. A quarter of an hour later the street was empty of people. All that remained was torn clothing, broken stones from the unfinished wall and smears of blood, a dark wetness on the asphalt. (Nampally Road 8)*

Mira and Siddarth were non-resident Indians. They went aborad for higher studies. Usually those who went abroad for their higher studies used to be enslaved by the habits and cultures of the Western countries. But Mira always wanted to keep herself away from the Westerners, not to be influenced by the cultures and habits of Westerners. She often tried to change her friends. But she was very much interested to be in the company of Indians. On one such occasion she happened to meet Siddarth during a protest.

In England, Margaret Thatcher had cut short the milk which had been provided for the school children. Though Siddarth and Mira were non-resident Indians, they participated in the protest against the recent cut-short for children. This shows that such a noble cause would affect people who are not at all involved personally in the problems and yet they would participate in such protests to uphold rights. The participation of Siddarth and Mira in the protest is one such example. This, infect, establishes their rebellious spirit:

*“Remember when we first met?” I quizzed Siddharth, as Vanessa Frowned at me from the middle distance.  
“Your were in that student protest shouting ‘Mrs. Thatcher, Milk Santcher! Mrs. Thatcher, Milk Snatcher!’ over and over again. She’d Just cut the milk for the school lunches. Your voice was quite hoarse. And now, imagine, you’re giving me directions on how to reach Nampally Road in our own country!”. (Nampally Road14 )*

Along with Siddarth and Mira most of the local students, research scholars and people from all walks of gathered there and started to raise slogans against the cut short of Milk for the school lunch. Siddarth along with his fellow researchers raise slogans the government and the then Prime Minister, “Mrs. Thatcher, Milk Snatcher, Mrs. Thatcher, Milk Snatcher!” So it is revealed that fighting for the noble cause can not be suppressed by any amount of force.

Mira was appointed as an English lecturer in Sona Niwas College. She wanted to lead a life of a care-free woman. What she intended at the beginning is to lead a life of care-free and gentle life without disturbing others and not being disturbed by others. But after she had met Ramu, her love for poetry and love for literature began to decline. Ramu was rebellious by nature. He shaped her to fight for the downtrodden people. At the beginning, she was very much interested in writing poetry. When she was disturbed or pleased by something she began to write poems and showed her reaction through her writing. After she has been disturbed by the Rameeza is episode, she failed to write in a coherent manner. When she sat for writing that showed that she began to feel for the oppressed society.

Gradually she lost interest in writing poems. Ramu had told her not to waste her time by writing poems. He persuaded her to think practically. And finally he had succeeded in his attempt to take her on his side.

This vivid description vouchsafes to the fact that protests might, at times become destructive in nature. In fact, in Meena Alexander’s novel, things become very tragic that readers are sympathetic towards protagonists. Meena Alexander’s Nampally Road is a manifesto proclaiming the ideology that the downtrodden will not be quiet for a long time and that if they begin to protest, that protest would really be a destructive weapon.

Alexander’s voice in the novel is powerfully evocative. Her language both caresses and shocks; her words are rich and sensual, capturing an unusually broad emotional range from the beast instinct for survival to an almost ethereal celebration of love.

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