Meena Alexander’s Autobiography: A Postcolonial Migrant Narrative
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ABSTRACT
Autobiography has been recognized as distinct literary genre, a challenging space for critical controversies about a range of ideas including authorship, selfhood, representation and the separation between fact and fiction. The representation of life accomplished by the writers enable them to construct a vivid perspective of their ‘self’ with myriad of memories. Meena Alexander's Fault Lines: A Memoir (2003), an expanded edition of autobiography in the cross-cultural memoir series is probably one of the most authentic life stories written by a South Asian American writer at the turn of the twenty first century. When it was first published, this autobiography was chosen as one of Publishers Weekly’s “Best Books of 1993”. It traces her gradual evolution as a postcolonial writer from a privileged and protected childhood in India, her turbulent adolescence in Sudan, her academic journey to England and finally her migration to Manhattan, New York. Her memoir swings back and forth in time and space like a flashback narrative, in zigzag rhythm reflecting her multicultural life in four continents, Asia, Africa, Europe and North America. In this regard, this paper is an attempt to disclose her difficult recovery from racial, diasporic and traumatic experiences that revolutionizes the entire landscape of her writing space and of her very self, now and before. It investigates the major thematic concerns like racial consciousness, diaspora and migrant experience in the backdrop of gender and culture cognizance. It also examines the multicultural experiences of the writer that provoked her imagination and forced her to fabricate, to weave tales to chisel out a personal space amidst the agonies of her migrant life.

KEYWORDS
Autobiography, postcolonial, migrant, memoir, narrative, diaspora, trauma, life writing.

INTRODUCTION
Meena Alexander is a famous Indian-American memoirist, poet, novelist and critic. She is also acclaimed as one of the original thinkers of Asian American aesthetics. Her autobiographical memoir Fault Lines (1993) signifies the areas of fracture between one cultural tradition and another in the context of her migrant life in diverse parts of the world. She intertwines multiple strands of personal and intimate memories unraveled from her past and present, to construct a rich intertextual autobiographical narrative. In fact, it is with a proposal that the narrative begins, of which she was initially skeptical. She illustrates how immigrants in America are constantly under threat to explain and justify themselves. The initial publication of this memoir coincided with the emergence of postcolonial feminist thought. Born into a Christian family in 1951, with strong cultural roots in Kerala, South India and having a good command of the colonial language, she earned a covetable position among South Asian English writers. Since 1976, she has written thirteen books of poetry, edited an anthology of Indian love poems, written two novels, a memoir, three works of literary criticism and a play. Her poetry collection Iliterate Heart: Where Translations Perish (2004) won Faulkner Foundation’s Open Book award. The novel Nampally Road (1991) was a Voice Literary Supplement Editor’s Choice. She has received awards from various foundations, including Rockefeller, Fulbright, New York State and Altrusa International. In 2009, she received the Distinguished Achievement Award in Literature from the South Asian Literary Association for contributions to American Literature. At present, she is a distinguished Professor of English at the Graduate Centre/Hunter College, City University of New York.

LITERATURE REVIEW
Memoir or autobiographical writing is customarily understood as a record of one’s personal life experiences in a socio-political, historical, and cultural context. Authors and critics generally agree that this particular genre of literary writing engenders a great relevance for the narrators whose geographical, temporal and cultural boundaries have
become indistinct, and their identities or roots have always been challenging. Memoirs are the reinterpretations of the reality, recollections of the past in the present that transforms the whole site of memory. Schacter (1996) states: “…we do not store judgment-free snapshots of our past experiences but rather hold on to the meaning, sense, and emotions these experiences provided us… memories are records of how we have experienced events, not replicas of the events themselves” (5-6). Hutcheon (1992) writes that “the autobiographical memoir has a long history in fiction as a form of asserting the primacy of individual experience” (161). Bhabha (1994) in the introduction to his seminal work The Location of Culture explains: “it is the space of intervention emerging in the cultural interstices that involves creative invention into existence” (9).

The life writings are an inward concentration in which there is a complete absorption with the self. Meena Sodhi (1999) observes: A work of art is a representation from the inner realm into its embodiment as an external form; it then achieves consciousness of itself. So does autobiography constantly return to the elusive centre of the self which lies buried in the unconscious, where it discovers that it was already there where it began” (33). Alexander’s life writing was received with a large critical acclaim. At the time of new edition of this autobiography, Convey (1993) comments that “Fault Lines shows us a poet intent on seeing herself straight … the narrative digs deeper into childhood and reexamines adulthood more painfully than its predecessor, but it carries the same magic of language and image”. Stimpson (2003) confirms that Alexander will be part of the history of global culture and she praises that “Ten years ago, she published an extraordinary memoir, Fault Lines. Now with her habitual courage and subtlety and eloquence, she has interlaced the memoir’s words with new experiences, perceptions, pain, and visions. Fault Lines is faultless.” Ngugi wa Thiong’o (2003) writes in the preface to the new edition: “It is difficult to find words with which to preface Meena Alexander’s personal memories. As brilliantly captured in this new edition of Fault Lines, the memories are their own preface and introduction to a mesmerizing text culled from a life lived in fragments and migrations, a quest for ‘nadu’ at home and in exile …”

Diasporic and migrant experiences are inseparably connected in her writings with the common characteristic of dispersal from homeland and the accomplishment of her dream of being at home. Friedman (2004) wonders: “Is home a place? A memory? An ideal? An imagined space? The black hole of desire? Born of displacement, diasporas spawn the creation of an imaginary homeland, a place of fixed location and identity” (195). There are different theoretical assumptions about the concept of ‘home’ held by individuals in general and diasporics in particular. Easthope (2004) comments: “while homes may be located and it is not the location that is ‘home’” (135). As Bhabha (1994) has pointed out “unhomed is not to be homeless” (9). When the realization of being unhomed strikes one, “the world shrinks and then expands enormously. The unhomely moment relates the traumatic ambivalences of a personal, psychic history to the wider disjunctions of political existence” (11). As Friedman puts it, home is a myth, an ideal, an imaginary space longed for, a land of dreams and desire—“always already lost in the very formation of the idea of home” (192). The rhetorical text echoes patriarchal questions, according to Gilmore (2001) such as “Can women tell the truth? Do women have lives worth representing?” (21) Alexander herself admits that “it is the pain of no one knowing my name that drives me to write” (182). But Singh (2008) vehemently argues that the validity of the memory of trauma enunciated by Alexander is virtually annulled by her privileged position within western academy (393).

Language is used to create meaning; and the process of meaning making is inherently political in that it is imbued with relations of power that come together to maneuver, contest and negotiate the meanings at stake (Hodges, 2007). Languages use has to do as much with subject positions as with communication. It has to do with figurative use as well. Today we recognize that we live in and through belief systems and are aware of other belief systems around us. Needless to say, with the circulation of belief systems in different forms, new consolidations of power structures establish relationships and new social orders cutting across political and cultural geographies. We perceive beliefs from positions we occupy and are also aware that such a thing is happening. The paradox here is that postcolonial consciousness is becoming more manifest in the context of globalization. This is a paradox become the newfound historical consciousness is sought to be erased by globalization, as it seeks new frontiers of the global economy without recourse to the nuisance of national borders and cultural boundaries. Globalization attempts to create a flat world, a global village, with no respect any borders and boundaries. Globalization valorizes the global citizen and the transnational individual. In this sense, it is neo-colonial, wiping out the past in its new desire to name and rename the world on its own terms. As Fanon (2008) said so aptly “colonization is not satisfied
merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native’s brain of all form and content” (57).

METHODOLOGY

In this paper, the qualitative descriptive methodology has been consistently followed to achieve its desired objectives. It is an attempt to discover the underlying literariness of Alexander’s memoir as a postcolonial literary narrative, highlighting prominent issues like, racial agonies, diasporic consciousness and trauma of migrant life. It is contended that this treatment is adequate because the findings are introduced in a descriptive manner. Efforts were taken to collect data from different sources, including primary works written by the author and also other secondary or critical works. This study is basically limited to the autobiography of Meena Alexander; however, meaningful connections are made with reference to her other literary contributions. A distinct theoretical framework has been set at the beginning, taking into account various referential sources and then reviewed previous studies of this particular genre. Finally, the chief postcolonial migrant narrative elements are identified with a critical and ideological perspective.

DISCUSSION

As a postcolonial writer, Alexander laid a lot of emphasis to the concept of homeland in the framework of diaspora. It is self-revealing to an extent in the context of her own migration from the East to the West in the wake of India’s independence after World War II. She travelled back and forth from South India to Sudan, and then migrating to Europe and finally settled in United States. The initial publication of Alexander’s memoir Fault Lines corresponded with the emergence of postcolonial feminist thought. The diasporic female authors from the East explored the issues of gender, race, ethnicity and home. The very image of ‘fault’ used in this memoir articulates her disconnected and non-linear narrative. It signifies a geological imagery implying a planar fracture in large volume of rocks with which a profound displacement has taken place as a result of disorientation of tectonic forces. Align with this complex dislocation occurring on earth’s crust, Alexander draws the figure of “a woman cracked by multiple migrations. Uprooted so many times she can connect nothing with nothing. Her words are all askew”(3). Her struggles are recounted not as a chronological narrative, but as a thematic and flash back account dividing it into thirteen multi-genre sections, navigating her personal journey. In her interview with Jackson (2003), Alexander reveals: “Andreas, Fault and I was fascinated by this idea of a fault. And, you know, the geological plates that crash together and continents that come together and then split apart”. In this context, this memoir tries to seek the complex shifts of migrant life and raises fundamental questions on boundaries, invisible lines, demarcations that diasporics encounter in their daily life.

Alexander writes in a way to constantly negotiate these fractures and cracks that she encountered in migrant lives. Fault Lines begins with a proposal of writing a book, of which she was initially skeptical; illustrates how immigrants in United States are in a constant dilemma of explaining and justifying their status /identity in a foreign country; ends with cherishing the memories of her ancestral home marking a rejuvenation of her vital spirit and a new beginning of her life. While talking to Lopamudra Basu (2015), Alexander discloses her prime inspiration to write:

In a way there is a poetics of dislocation that I am trying to figure out, to lay bare, if you wish. What does it mean to be deeply attached to place? Or to be torn away from a place, to feel at the edge, not quite at home? So where is home for us here, now in the twenty-first century? Can language work to make a home, a shelter? These are questions that will never leave me (37).

When she decides to recount her memories, she had to struggle with multiple linguistic tweaks in order to find a language through which she can comfortably present her thoughts: “And what all languages compacted in my brain: Malayalam, my mother tongue, the language of first speech; Hindi, which I learned as a child: Arabic, from my years in Sudan; odd shards survive: French; English? How would I map all this in a book of days?” (1). Alexander cleverly sidesteps the worn out clichés that fuse discussions of the “alienness” of English versus the “authenticity” of Indian languages. In her memoir, she dares even to question the existing conventions that define, label and classify people on account of some preconceived categories.

Fault Lines is extraordinarily unique as Alexander rewrote it ten years later in the aftermath of 9/11 attacks with an inspiring chapter ‘Lyric in a Time of Violence’ to reflect on two severe traumas, one corporate and the other intensely personal, and her suppressed childhood memories. She was the eldest in her family which consists of thirteen children and her father was a government servant who was sent to North Africa, when she was just five years old. Her childhood was torn apart between continents, experienced instability and multiplicity, although her cultural roots were firmly anchored in her mother country. Her mother was a typical conservative middle class woman who remained silent and got
hold of with domestic duties. Being a traditionalist, she was simply happy with her pious rituals and religious devotion. Her maternal grandfather played the most significant role in shaping her ideological awareness and molding her political perspicacity. She frequently discusses her grandfather’s role in empowering her cultural sophistication. “I think of myself [growing up] as someone who was thrown ferociously into a new India...My grandfather was a great idealist who really believed that these were a new India waiting, a new world based on issues like land reform and equality for all people...[Through him]I had this extraordinary world available to me” (23-24). Even at the age of fifteen, her poems which she wrote as a way “to piece together some of the experiences [of social change]” were being translated into Arabic and published in Sudanese newspaper. By the age of eighteen, she left to England to pursue her doctoral studies in the University of Nottingham with a profound displacement, an experience that adversely affected her literary creativity. She writes, “in the British culture...I felt that, what I really was being left out as an Indian woman and also as someone from the Third World...I couldn’t have survived in England. And not because of anything in other people, I felt that I had to go back to India” (25). She earned her PhD from Nottingham University in 1973, came back to India, and started working in Indian universities. She was married to a westerner David Lelyweld in 1979 in Hyderabad and migrated to the west after her marriage, which can also be seen by critics as ‘an escape from misogynistic traditions’ prevailed at that period of time.

The memoir is quite unlike a conventional bildungsroman narrative and in author’s own words “it is a rag of words wrapped around the shade of recollection...written in search of a homeland” (4). The writer Uma Parameshwaran (1995) comments on the interconnectedness of past and the present in immigrant imagination and the interchanging of imagery drawn from the landscape of one’s memory with the imagery from one’s immediate, actual landscape. It is obvious that Alexander weaves imagery from varied cultural landscapes: an idyllic childhood in Thiruvalla, Allahabad and Pune, turbulent adolescence in Khartoum, and adulthood in Nottingham, Delhi, Hyderabad and Manhattan. The writer Rebeca Sultana (2002) makes an outlandish observation: Alexander’s periodic return to the Indian landscape as a backdrop is hard to dismiss and is an indication of the significance of India in her varied cultural recollection”(242).

Alexander is incredibly influenced by Virginia Wolf, who was considered as the ‘foremother’ of all women’s writing. She is brave enough to write her recollections of the past muddled by patriarchal conventions and her memoir begins with Kalidasa’s words from Kumarasambhava 1:30: “when the time came for her to learn, all the knowledge from her past lives returned to her, as wild geese return in autumn to the Ganga River”. Sam Naidu (2008) explains how Alexander uses the memory of a shining past to anger and root herself in the face of many migrations. Following the tradition of many other autobiographers, she makes use of “a conscious use of memory that plays cathartic function for the author” (375). Diasporic issues of uprooting and exile, nostalgia, trauma of migrant memories, alienation and loneliness are recurring features of her memoir.

4.1 The Racial Reality

The experience of immigrants who carries the burden of being a racial and ethnic minority in the United States is vividly portrayed in Alexander’s writings. She draws upon personal experiences in her essays and collection of poems The Shock of Arrival: Reflections or Postcolonial experience (1996). She demonstrates the experience of racial victimization, by “walking down a crowded sidewalk, descending the subway, there is always one’s own body, which is marked as other in this country. Ethnicity can draw violence and this is part of the postcolonial terrain, part of sorrow and knowledge of our senses” (7). Violence is born of religious bigotry and this evident in the mentioning of the fanatics who tries to attack places of worship and eliminate people on account of their faith. She observes that violence is worldwide and country seems to be immune to it. Not only is violence endemic, but also it takes different forms and encompasses all aspects of human society, race, religion, language, region, nation, economics, politics, culture and so on. Having seen violence in different parts of the world and having observed different forms of violence, she exclaims: “I sometimes think that in this generation, there is no more cruelty, no greater damnation” (8).

Literature is an important tool in negotiating life, attempting to suture into place a shifting identity that knows no original source of meaning. As Hall (1996) has said, cultural identity is not a once-and-for-all thing, not an essence, concept of identity as renegotiation, that identity is not merely constructed, but depends upon the other that opens up possibilities for marginal/marginalized groups to challenge the
identities that are enforced by the dominant historiography. Alexander expresses disillusionment with westernized morality and domestic violence. She draws upon personal experiences as immigrant woman of color and she offers a “healing response”, according to Macrowitz (2004), to people who are displaced and dispossessed. Her narrative account provides “a reprieve to all phases of in-betweenness-travel and adventure, newness and strangeness, alienation and confusion and unpredictability “(24). Alexander narrates the experience of racial discrimination in her poetry and presents racism, as a threat to immigrant’s peaceful existence. A feeling of deep social and personal despair is a psychological consequence of this dehumanizing projection. Experience of racial discrimination strikes her harshly and, makes alienation more painful. She refers to experience of oppressive racial setup of white supremacy at Clergy House School in Khartoum being a non-white child. During her stay in Nottingham, she was blamed by the Head of English Department, for publishing articles beyond her area of research. She perceives it as matter of discrimination against the women of color from the third world. This feeling of discrimination compels her to write that “I always felt that what I really was being left out as an Indian woman, I felt I had to go back to India. Years later in America, the racial hatred reaches her through angered exclamatory abuse, “You black bitch” (169). She ponders over it, “Can I make lines supple enough to figure out violence, vent it and pass beyond” (169).

As an immigrant woman of color, she uses dislocation as a metaphor, and describes the multiple changes she underwent while encountering racial subjugation. She also relates her uncanny encounters with racists and bigots, as well as the murderer of a playwright during the performance by political enemies. She uses this instance of tragedy as a prominent example to show how western societies deal with issues of racism and migration. It is seen that the stigmatization of Asian and African immigrants often cast a neocolonial rhetoric of assimilation and integration in the postmodern writings. From her childhood, Alexander recalls the plight of young unwed mothers who belongs to the state of Kerala, had to end their lives to avoid social scandal and to protect the honor of the family. She remembers: “the image of women jumping into wells was constantly with me during my childhood” (106). These photographic visuals continued to haunt her for a long time along with the horrible sight of young “married women being burnt in their homes” (53) which are euphemistically called ‘dowry deaths’. The patriarchal society professes double standards, one for women and the other more convenient, for men. Men involving in premarital sex were not considered guilty or inferior, but on the other hand women, if involved in it, were treated harshly and considered as a social outcast. The civil wars held in Sudan for many years during the period of her schools years etched her mind with dreadful imageries. During her school years in Hyderabad, three upsetting incidents took place: one is the gang rape of a woman by the law enforcement officer in the police station, followed by violent demonstrations and rampant protests; the second one is the setting on fire of a railway coach in a moving train by members of People’s War group killing many innocent passengers though this gruesome act of incineration. The third incident is the giant cyclone that devastated the entire east coast region of Andhra Pradesh in South India, sweeping away thousands of people and their homes.

As a writer, she is sensitized to the surrounding violence and at the same time conscious of the “marginality of female existence” (83) and states that “a woman’s voice pits itself,” translating violence against patriarchal and colonial power. She exhorts South Asian women writers to “turn blood in to ink” that is, “to engage in a bitter translation of self, required by violent conflict” (84). She demonstrates the struggle for women’s rights that came up side by side with anti-colonial struggles for freedom and, reflects o the problematic responses of the gendered bodies when she cites about socio-cultural issues. In many ways, her memoir is a large canvas sweep, because it contains geographies of home and migration for a number of racially diverse characters. Some of her ancestors migrated from India to work in Caribbean sugar plantations, intermarried with the Japanese and other races, and eventually migrated to New Jersey. In that sense, she postulates a complex notion of South Asian-American racial identity. Although there was an inflow of highly educated Indians to United States after 1970s, she exposes continuing racism against immigrants in one form or other through the example of stoning of Indian women by skinheads in suburban New Jersey.

4.2 Diasporic Consciousness

The term ‘Diaspora’ is quite an ancient term and has been used to refer to two of the oldest ethno-national Diasporas in the world-the Jews and the Greek. This could be the reason that the term ‘Diaspora’ has been coined from the Greek world ‘Diasperein- meaning to scatter about and to disperse. It was the Jewish scholars who first used the term diaspora during the third century BCE in a Greek translation of the Bible (Helly, 2006). Diaspora could be seen as a socio-political formation that is created as a result of either
voluntary or forced migration, who permanently resides as minority in one or several host countries. They maintain regular or occasional contact with what they regard as their homeland, maintain a common identity, and could organize and are active in the cultural, social, economic and political spheres in their host countries. The first formal definition of diaspora was offered by John Armstrong in his article ‘Mobilized and Proletarian Diasporas’ (1976) and afterwards discussion in this filed gained importance especially after 1990s in the background of recurring migrations to Western/European countries.

Diasporic studies came to the limelight when migrant issues pop up and were reported widely in the media. The migrants wanted to retain their ties with their homeland and that was facilitated by the advancement of communication technology and globalization. There is a close interdependence between Diasporas and homeland. The reason being that homelands give rise to Diasporas and they have the capacity to shape if not creates homelands. In most cases, Diasporas have a sense of belonging to the same ethnic nation. Diasporas in their host countries could often go through a very disruptive experience, which in most cases, could result in a feeling of insecurity. This experience could subsequently result in marginality in these countries. Once the Diasporas settle in a different country, they go through various cultural processes of adaptation, acculturation, integration and assimilation. During these processes, these immigrants would redefine not only their self-perception but also their collective identities viz-a-viz their host nations. These identities could be multiple depending on the context of the other and hence are constructed and eventually could lead to the reinforcement of perceptions of -us and them, leading to further ethnic (national/religious) identifications. This could make Diasporas more assertive and have a confrontationist attitude with the host countries.

The term ‘diaspora’ needs to be understood as a process that is subjective not as an object that is-out there somewhere. As a subjective experience and process, ‘diaspora’ would probably need to talk about feeling of insecurity, dispossession, and longingness for the homeland. Along with the different cultural processes, the process of racialization also needs to be explored. If diaspora can be subject to a subjective analysis then what would be of interest would be to analyze, how do communities become diasporic, rather than dwell on the nature of it, and understanding the process of creation of new identities, spaces for growth, resolutions of conflicts, and new culture, either composite or plural. Sometimes ghettoization and stigmatization can occur in spite of the fact that the immigrants are successful. Again, the boundaries and spaces these Diasporas own, occupy and control will actually determine the power and their influence and negotiating abilities that they have. Identities get formed and re-formed in the process of subjugation and subordination. This then becomes part of the subjective experience of diaspora.

Diasporas analyzed from a subjective experience also questions and redefines the issue of citizenship particularly cultural citizenship. Cultural citizenship becomes an important pointer in understanding the actual life lived by the Diasporas. Cultural citizenship could be seen as process defined through cultural phenomena from cultural, social and religious practices in daily lives, within families and communities that contribute to the making of an identity. It can also be argued that diasporic predicament can be interpreted as a fertile ground of creativity.

In the context of Diasporas and identity, Alexander’s memoir provides a panoramic view of a growing sense of rootlessness of Asian immigrants in America. She writes in a reflective vein as she unearths her identity:

…I am a poet writing in America. But American poet? What sort? Surely not of the Robert Frost or Wallace Stevens variety? An Asian-American poet then? Clearly that sounds better. Poet tout court? Will that fit? No, not at all. There is very little I can be tout court in America except perhaps woman, mother. But even there, I wonder. Everything that comes to me is hyphenated. A woman poet, a woman poet of colour, a South Indian woman poet who makes up lines in English, a postcolonial language…(193).

It is relevant to look into the obvious presence of hyphen in the life of Diasporas in terms of homes, languages or identities, although she attempts to dispel it in her life writing. Multiculturalism encourages the construction of a public ethnic identity instead of a purely private one. In that sense, one would think Diasporas are best integrated. There are also studies that state, ethnic minorities are more likely to identify with the national identity if they feel that ethnic identity is publicly respected. Thus, multiculturalism seems to have brought in more inclusiveness. This again needs to be looked into from the perspective of micro level experiences, as well as from the background of a retreat from Multiculturalism in Europe. Particularly in the context of globalization, these could be embedded in
the dark horror of unequal citizenship, and in the process of racialization that turns human beings into disposable migrants and undesirable ‘others’.

4.3 Migrant Experience

The wave of American Realism in literature stressed hard to depict a contemporary view of what was happening; an attempt at defining what was real and accessible now stood at a dead end. All the knowledge that we have of the world is the knowledge of history, we remain incredibly naive on the details of our future. For this reason, the word- ‘before’, is a vista through which history is elucidated. Alexander interweaves the Indian and immigrant experiences which results in her awaking of consciousness of the past and present. Reflections of the themes of memory and home are obvious in her works. To portray the solid migrant experience, she transforms the minority space into a highly vibrant zone of creativity, carving a new artistic hybrid aesthetic, from linguistic, cultural traditions of her colonial education and conventional heritage of Kerala lineage. She reflects on her own migrant life and creatively engages in the postcolonial discourse on identity, language and gender in this cultural background.

The final transnational crossing of the author was from Hyderabad to New York, as a married woman. In America, she is just a South Indian/ Third world woman writer and she contemplates:

“Was this what a woman’s life had to be? Often I did not recognize myself. I felt I had lost my soul, that it was sucked into the vortex of an Otherness. I had no words for; that all I was, had contracted into being a wife, being a woman who had crossed a border to give birth in another of country. Seasons of birth have stripped me, formed me afresh” (164).

She also worries about the ethnicity of her ‘Indian-American’ children and tries “to hold on to the reality of mechi and mecham” in “another soil, another earth” (170). She is also obsessed with the memories of nadu as a “real solid place” (51) that she intensely desires her children to at least cling on to memories of an imaginary homeland. The choice of names for her children, Adam Kurivila named after Ilya and Swati Mariam named after Kozhencheri Valyammachi and Amma (grandmother), indicate a deliberate attempt to bridge the gap between the cultures. The graphic narration of idyllic childhood and paradisiacal images of Kerala- the bring filtered sunlight, the clear blue of the pre-monsoon sky, the covetous range of tea plantations, the green paddy fields, the glorious beads of golden coconut, the extraordinary blueness of the Arabian Sea, acres of intricately bordered fruit trees, crimson carpets of ripe peppers, and the frangipani tree with thick clusters of white blossoms-reveal the nostalgic migrant angst to reclaim her homeland. She affirms passionately: “In India, I rest, I just am, like a stone, a bone, a child born again” (176).

In writing a memoir, Alexander has created “a space into which the writing subject disappears “(Foucault, 142). Sultana (2002) analyses Alexander’s concept of nationalism and identity as its corollary in Fault Lines: She cannot claim the cultural modes of one national identity” (240). Naidu (2008) observes “the narrative is aimed at representing many selves of the author along the journey to its present location” (376). Multiple dislocations have imposed a hyphenated identity on her that strengthened her as a woman and allows her to identify herself with the culture of her adopted country without abandoning the culture of her homeland. As sultana perceives, alexander has attempted to create multiple autobiographies using a “circular pattern, the use of stories within stories and the flexibility of using time and space in the narrative…a literary technique that allows her to address the multiple identities that she has taken up “(242).

Alexander feels that in Indian culture marriage has a great social relevance but at the same time it can be a traumatic experience for a woman. She recalls candidly: “For a woman, marriage makes a gash. It ears you from your original home…once married you are part and parcel of your husband’s household” (23). She had gone against her parent’s wishes and married an American and the only way she would be able to make her way back into her family was following certain traditional rites for her marriage and ‘having children’. The autobiographical narrative also highlights childbirth as an exclusive prerogative of woman who is thereby initiated into the joys and pangs of motherhood. The text praises “woman’s natural instinct for reproduction, the maternal instinct, which is supposed to be the baseline of all her behavior, her ultimate raison d’ etre” (Coward, 18). The sentiments of guilt and sorrow in leaving the family and the homeland are characteristic features of her memoir. The annual vacation trips to homeland evoked in her a sense of belonging and stability amidst a life filled with motion and change. Being a Third World woman, she had been “tormented by a sense of having transgressed a boundary” and so returned home, as a “grown adult” to discover and to make up her history. She says: “I had to unlearn my tortuous academic knowledge, remake myself, learn how to read and write as if for the first time.” (142).
She in fact changed ‘history’ to ‘herstory’ with her literary contributions, bypassing all hurdles that stood on her way.

CONCLUSION
Alexander’s autobiographical narrative Fault Lines: A Memoir vividly addresses the pertinent issues like racial identity, diasporic consciousness and trauma of migrant experience. She attempts to construct her multifaceted hybrid identity with a retrospective narration of her vibrant life experiences. The multiculturized life of the writer functioned as a catalyst and transformed her imagination to construct a fabulous and inspiring memoir. In her postcolonial literary production, she presents multifaceted experiences in different continents, among diverse ethnic and religious communities colored with colonial and cultural demarcations. No doubt, her narrative skillfully depicts the racial consciousness of the migrants, the challenging diasporic experiences and the interconnectedness of their past and present, with an imaginative coloring.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
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