



Review Article

Navigating Violence and Trauma through Activism and Intervention: A Comparative Study of the Works of Meena Alexander and Monalisa Changkija

Rimpa Roy *

Doctoral Research Scholar, Department of English, Seacom Skills University,
Bolpur, Birbhum, West Bengal, India

Corresponding Author: *Rimpa Roy

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.19438491>

Abstract

This paper examines how violence, trauma, and resistance are portrayed in the literary works of Meena Alexander and Monalisa Changkija through a comparative approach to literature. Both authors address themes of displacement, political conflict, identity, and social marginalisation, using literary forms to manifest individual and collective experiences of suffering. The research draws on trauma theory (Caruth; LaCapra), feminist criticism (Spivak; Mohanty), and postcolonial theory (Boehmer) to interpret the ways their writings depict the psychological and social effects of violence, with attention to resilience and opposition. Alexander's poetry illuminates traumatic experiences of migration and diasporic identity. Her works engage with discontinuous memory, exile, and the challenge of negotiating between cultures. Using abstract and symbolic language, she connects personal trauma to the history of displacement and the colonial past. Changkija's writing, by contrast, is rooted in the political conditions of North-East India — specifically the conflicts and militarisation within Nagaland. Her poems and journalistic writings address state violence, cultural marginalisation, and community survival in conflict zones. Despite their different geopolitical contexts, both authors demonstrate that literature can function as activism and intervention. Their works give voice to marginalised communities and challenge dominant narratives that silence histories of violence. This paper argues that their literary expression constitutes moral witnessing and cultural agitation — instruments of awareness creation and social reflection.

Manuscript Information

- ISSN No: 2583-7397
- Received: 12-02-2026
- Accepted: 26-03-2026
- Published: 06-04-2026
- IJCRM:5(2); 2026: 423-428
- ©2026, All Rights Reserved
- Plagiarism Checked: Yes
- Peer Review Process: Yes

How to Cite this Article

Roy R. Navigating Violence and Trauma through Activism and Intervention: A Comparative Study of the Works of Meena Alexander and Monalisa Changkija. Int J Contemp Res Multidiscip. 2026;5(2):423-428.

Access this Article Online



www.multiarticlesjournal.com

KEYWORDS: Trauma, Violence, Feminist Literature, Diaspora, Political Conflict, Literary Activism, Resistance Literature

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Background

Violence, trauma, and resistance are themes increasingly central to contemporary literature, as the social and political upheavals of the modern world shape individual and communal lives in profound ways. Authors across different regions have turned to literature as a powerful instrument to document and process the psychological and social impact of war, displacement, political oppression, and gender-based violence (Caruth, 2016). Literary works function not only as aesthetic expressions but as testimonies that preserve the voices of the marginalised and challenge dominant historical records. Through poetry, memoir, and essay, authors shed light on realities experienced by individuals and communities who are victims of structural violence and cultural marginalisation.

Indian and diasporic women writers have drawn particular critical attention for their engagement with trauma and resistance (Bond and Craps, 2020). These authors explore questions of identity, exile, gender discrimination, and socio-political conflict, offering nuanced insights into the intersection of individual memory and collective history. Their writings open wider perspectives on how literature can respond to violence while fostering justice and social consciousness.

Meena Alexander and Monalisa Changkija represent two significant voices in this area, engaging with trauma and activism in different yet complementary ways. Alexander is an Indian-American poet and scholar recognised for her exploration of diaspora, migration, and memory (Balaev, 2018). Her work frequently depicts the psychological alienation experienced by those positioned between cultural affiliations, and traces the ways in which individual and historical traumas shape processes of self-representation. Through lyrical imagery and discontinuous narrative forms, Alexander conveys the emotional impact of displacement and the continuous reconstruction of identity.

Monalisa Changkija, by contrast, is a North-East Indian poet, journalist, and activist whose writing engages directly with political confrontation, social injustice, and cultural resistance in Nagaland (Baruah, 2020). Her poems and journalistic prose offer incisive commentary on violence and militarisation in the region. By recording daily fear, defiance, and survival, Changkija foregrounds communities whose voices have been systematically excluded from the mainstream literary narrative.

1.2 Research Problem

Although trauma has become increasingly visible in literary discourse, violence rooted in war, displacement, political repression, and patriarchal structures remains underrepresented in comparative literary scholarship. Writers such as Meena Alexander and Monalisa Changkija break this silence, transforming individual and community pain into constructive literary activism. Nevertheless, comparative analysis of how these two authors engage with trauma and intervention remains scarce, and the gap warrants focused scholarly attention.

1.3 Research Questions

This paper is guided by the following questions:

- I. How do Meena Alexander and Monalisa Changkija represent violence and trauma in their respective works?
- II. What roles does writing assume as a form of activism and intervention in their literary production?
- III. What are the significant similarities and differences in their literary strategies?

1.4 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this paper are:

- I. To study the depictions of trauma and violence in the works of both authors.
- II. To examine how activism is manifested as a literary form.
- III. To compare the narrative strategies and thematic concerns across their writings.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study contributes to scholarship on trauma literature and feminist literary criticism by examining how literature articulates experiences of violence and marginalisation. By bringing together the works of Meena Alexander and Monalisa Changkija — one writing from a diasporic position, the other from a politically marginalised regional space — the research foregrounds voices that have been insufficiently examined in comparative literary studies. It demonstrates how literary narratives can serve as powerful interventions, fostering awareness, empathy, and the conditions for social transformation.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Trauma and Memory in Contemporary Literature

Trauma and memory have emerged as central fields of inquiry in modern literary criticism. Cathy Caruth and Dominick LaCapra have been instrumental in developing theoretical frameworks for understanding the representation of traumatic experience in literature (Baruah, 2020). Caruth (2016) argues that delayed comprehension and fragmented memory are defining characteristics of trauma: the traumatic event is not fully processed at the moment of occurrence, but returns belatedly through intrusive recollection and narrative disruption. This insight has encouraged literary scholars to examine how texts represent memory through gaps, silences, and non-linear structures.

LaCapra, meanwhile, highlights the ethical dimension of trauma narrative, distinguishing between 'acting out' — the repetitive reliving of past trauma — and 'working through' — a more reflective process of coming to terms with painful experience (Thakur and Singh, 2021). This distinction proves productive for literary analysis, enabling scholars to ask whether authors re-enact or critically examine the violence and loss they address. These theoretical frameworks find frequent expression in contemporary literature, which represents trauma through disjointed narratives, unreliable narrators, and symbolic imagery. Literature thereby serves a vital communicative

function: it articulates experiences that resist straightforward representation and conveys the emotional and psychological consequences of violence, displacement, and loss.

2.2 Feminist Literary Activism

Feminist literary criticism has made significant contributions to the discourse on violence and trauma, particularly in relation to gendered experience (Spivak, 2019). Feminist authors and theorists emphasise literature as an effective medium for exposing patriarchal systems of oppression and advocating for social transformation. Through poetry, memoir, fiction, and essay, women writers have documented experiences of gender-based violence, discrimination, and marginalisation that have long been suppressed within mainstream discourse.

The act of writing thus becomes a political practice (Mohanty, 2018). Feminist literary activism seeks not only to reflect pain but to interrogate the structures that perpetuate injustice. By articulating personal cases alongside broader social truths, feminist writers make literature a space of resistance and advocacy. Their work typically emphasises solidarity, empowerment, and the reclamation of voices suppressed by dominant cultural discourse.

2.3 Scholarship on Meena Alexander

Critical scholarship on Meena Alexander has focused primarily on her engagement with themes of migration, exile, trauma, and identity. Scholars have examined the ways her poetry and autobiographical writing depict the psychological consequences of displacement and the difficulty of negotiating between multiple cultural identities (Boehmer, 2021). Memory and belonging are recurring preoccupations: Alexander demonstrates that migration produces not only creative possibility but also profound emotional discontinuity.

Researchers have also highlighted the significance of memory in Alexander's writing, attending particularly to the ways personal recollection intersects with historical and political contexts (Banerjee and Singh, 2021). Her poetic language carries a sense of fractured selfhood, informed by colonial histories, diasporic experience, and gendered realities. Through lyrical imagery and reflective narrative, Alexander reveals the intricate relationship between individual trauma and collective social history (Thakur and Singh, 2021).

Alexander's collection

2.4 Scholarship on Monalisa Changkija

Critical attention to Monalisa Changkija has concentrated on her engagement with political conflict and social injustice in North-East India (Baruah, 2020). As both a poet and a journalist, Changkija addresses the realities of militarisation, state violence, and cultural marginalisation in Nagaland. Scholars emphasise that her works constitute powerful testimonies of daily life in conflict zones, making visible communities that are systematically underrepresented in Indian mainstream literature.

Changkija's poetry is marked by political critique, affirmations of cultural identity, and messages of resilience. Her collection

2.5 Research Gap

While the existing literature provides valuable insight into the individual works of both authors, the majority of scholarship treats them separately rather than comparatively. Few studies have undertaken a sustained comparative analysis of the intersection of trauma and activism in the works of Meena Alexander and Monalisa Changkija. Additionally, relatively little research has examined literature as a mode of intervention within narratives of violence and political conflict across diasporic and postcolonial regional contexts simultaneously. This paper aims to address that gap by bringing the two authors into dialogue and constructing a broader understanding of how literary expression can simultaneously function as representation, resistance, and social intervention.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Trauma Theory

Trauma theory provides a productive framework for analysing how literature documents experiences of violence, pain, and psychological disturbance. Caruth (2016) and subsequent scholars have established that trauma is characterised by fragmented rather than coherent memory: traumatic events overwhelm the individual's capacity for full cognitive processing at the moment of occurrence and return belatedly in the form of delayed memory, narrative lacunae, and symbolic language (Balaev, 2018). In literary texts, trauma is typically registered through imagery, silence, and fragmented narrative structure — formal indices of the brokenness of memory. These narrative strategies allow authors to convey the emotional and psychological impact of violence and dislocation in ways that conventional realist narration cannot.

3.2 Feminist Theory

Feminist theory assists in examining the gendered dimensions of experiences of violence and the power relations they inscribe (Misra, 2019). Women's writing has historically brought to the fore the particular forms of oppression and marginalisation that women experience within patriarchal social structures. Literature written by women records instances of violence and discrimination, refuses prevailing cultural discourse, and enables the recovery of suppressed voices. Writing thus becomes a feminist practice — one that affirms agency, advocates social justice, and creates spaces of resistance and solidarity (Mohanty, 2018).

3.3 Postcolonial Perspective

Postcolonial theory offers frameworks for understanding cultural identities, social conflicts, and literary representation in the context of colonial histories and their continuing effects. It foregrounds questions of displacement, cultural hybridity, and the marginalisation of communities positioned outside dominant political and cultural centres (Boehmer, 2021). Literature shaped by postcolonial perspectives characteristically engages with identity conflict, political opposition, and resistance to both historical and contemporary forms of subjugation — concerns that are central to both Alexander's

diasporic writing and Changkija's engagement with regional political struggle.

4. METHODOLOGY

This paper adopts a qualitative comparative literary analysis approach, examining themes of violence, trauma, and activism across selected works by Meena Alexander and Monalisa Changkija. The study is grounded in close reading and textual interpretation, focusing on the ways each author represents political violence, gender oppression, displacement, and resistance through specific literary choices.

The primary corpus includes Alexander's memoir

These primary texts are interpreted through the combined lens of trauma theory, feminist criticism, and postcolonial perspectives — frameworks that illuminate the literary expression of suffering while situating it within broader political and social contexts. Secondary sources, including scholarly articles, books, and literary criticism, contextualise the authors' works within wider debates about trauma literature and feminist activism.

5. Analysis

5.1 Representation of Violence and Trauma in Meena Alexander

Alexander's experience of migration across India, Sudan, England, and the United States profoundly shapes her writing, informing her sustained engagement with displacement, the quest for identity, and the emotional costs of moving between cultures (Bond and Craps, 2020). Migration in her work is not a simple matter of geographic relocation but a complex process attended by loss, fragmentation, and the continuous negotiation of selfhood. In

Memory functions as a central formal and thematic device in Alexander's poetry. She returns repeatedly to childhood scenes, family histories, and moments of self-reflection, revealing how the past continues to structure present identity. Yet these memories rarely emerge as coherent, chronological accounts. They appear instead as multi-layered, associative, and disjointed, reflecting the psychological effects of displacement and exile (Balaev, 2018). In 'Muse,' for instance, the lyric speaker inhabits a 'broken geography,' where images of the body — hair, skin, voice — become sites at which trauma registers itself. This discontinuous form evidences the difficulty of fully articulating traumatic experience: memory is partial, emotionally saturated, and structurally resistant to the linearity of conventional narrative.

Alexander further addresses the fragmentation of identity that results from inhabiting a cultural borderland. In

5.2 Political Violence and Resistance in Monalisa Changkija

Changkija's poetry and prose are rooted in the socio-political realities of North-East India, and particularly in the experience of Nagaland under conditions of protracted conflict and militarisation. In contrast to Alexander's predominantly inward-looking, diasporic perspective, Changkija's writing emerges from local struggle and collective cultural resistance (Baruah,

2020). Her poems document the lived experience of communities navigating uncertainty, political instability, and state intrusion in their daily lives.

The impact of political violence on ordinary people is among the most persistent concerns of Changkija's work. In Simultaneously, her writing affirms cultural strength and communal identity. In

5.3 Writing as Activism

Both Alexander and Changkija demonstrate that literature can function as a mode of activism. Their works extend beyond personal reminiscence to engage with wider social and political concerns, making literary expression an instrument of enlightenment and advocacy (Thakur and Singh, 2021). By sharing experiences of displacement, violence, and marginalisation, these writers illuminate realities that dominant cultural narratives have typically ignored or suppressed.

Literature thus emerges as a potent political instrument. By articulating stories that connect to universal experiences of suffering and injustice, authors can contribute to social knowledge and moral awareness. Alexander and Changkija give voice to communities that are frequently marginalised in mainstream discourse (Spivak, 2019): their literary works invite readers to interrogate the political systems and power dynamics that produce violence and inequality and to recognise the humanity of those who suffer their effects.

Moreover, literature cultivates empathy and enables ethical dialogue. By depicting the emotional texture of trauma and conflict, both writers offer readers access to viewpoints that may differ substantially from their own experience. In this way, literature creates conditions for moral and social consciousness — a function that, as Caruth (2016) suggests, may be particularly significant where direct political discourse has been foreclosed.

5.4 Comparative Perspective

Comparison of the works of Meena Alexander and Monalisa Changkija reveals both significant convergences and important differences in their engagements with trauma and resistance. Both authors share a commitment to feminist principles of solidarity, and both use literature to record and respond to instability and violence. Memory, identity, and resilience are central concerns for each writer, and both demonstrate how personal testimony can reflect broader social and political realities.

Their respective vantage points, however, are shaped by markedly different contexts. Alexander's primary focus is the inner psychological conflict produced by displacement and cultural hybridity — the consequences of migration and the experience of belonging nowhere completely. Changkija's writing, by contrast, is anchored in the specific political struggle of North-East India, foregrounding collective oppression and communal resistance rather than individual psychological fragmentation.

These contextual differences manifest in formal as well as thematic terms. Alexander's poetry tends toward the reflective

and introspective, using personal memory and emotionally nuanced imagery to render the experience of cultural dislocation. Changkija's writing is more direct and politically assertive, making explicit demands for recognition of social injustice and cultural rights. Yet despite these differences, both authors demonstrate how literature can challenge violence, sustain memory, and contribute to ongoing conversations about identity, justice, and social transformation. Taken together, their works expand the range of literary strategies available for the representation of trauma and resistance.

6. DISCUSSION

A comparative reading of Alexander and Changkija demonstrates the diverse ways in which literary narratives can effectively represent the experience of violence, trauma, and resistance (Boehmer, 2021). Both authors employ poetry and reflective prose to make sense of individual and communal suffering, transforming traumatic experience into purposeful literary expression. Their works collectively reveal that trauma is not merely an individual psychological phenomenon but a social and political one, shaped by historical circumstances, displacement, and organised conflict.

Trauma narratives carry significant political implications: by rendering visible concealed or under-privileged histories, they contribute to the formation of critical political awareness (Baruah, 2020). Alexander and Changkija bring into focus specific experiences — migration, cultural displacement, militarisation, social injustice — that might otherwise remain outside the reach of mainstream discourse. Literature compels readers to think critically about the political systems and power dynamics that produce violence and inequality; by documenting these experiences, it fosters informed discussion of complex social realities.

Beyond awareness creation, literature can constitute a form of ethical witnessing. By recounting the experiences of violence victims and communities, authors preserve memory and resist the silencing of marginalised voices. Both Alexander and Changkija demonstrate how storytelling can become a moral practice — one that refuses to ignore suffering while insisting upon human resilience (Misra, 2019). Their works emphasise that writers occupy the role of cultural activists: their task is not only to reflect reality but to challenge injustice and awaken social consciousness through literary means.

This comparative analysis also highlights an important divergence. Where Alexander's activism operates primarily at the level of psychological and cultural representation — making visible the inner life of diaspora — Changkija's operates at the level of direct social and political critique. Both modes are legitimate and necessary, and their coexistence within a comparative framework enriches our understanding of the multiple registers at which literature can intervene in conditions of violence and marginalisation.

7. CONCLUSION

This paper has examined the representation of violence, trauma, and resistance in the works of Meena Alexander and Monalisa

Changkija, demonstrating how literary devices serve to articulate both individual and collective dimensions of suffering. The analysis reveals that literature functions not only as a mirror of personal and communal distress but as a meaningful social intervention, capable of expanding political awareness and ethical sensitivity. Both authors demonstrate the indispensability of women's voices in narrating experiences of displacement, conflict, and exclusion, and affirm, through their writing, the centrality of memory and storytelling to the pursuit of justice.

The comparison illuminates both the shared commitments and the distinctive contributions of each author. Alexander's diasporic lyric, with its fragmented memory and cultural ambivalence, charts the inner geography of displacement; Changkija's politically direct poetry and prose chart the outer geography of regional conflict and cultural survival. Together, they expand the possibilities of trauma literature and feminist literary activism.

Future research might examine trauma narratives and literary activism in other cultural and geopolitical settings, applying comparative methods to writers from different postcolonial contexts. Scholars might also attend more closely to the reception of these works within their respective communities — asking not only how literature represents suffering but how communities use literature to process, resist, and recover from it.

REFERENCES

1. Balaev M. *Contemporary approaches in literary trauma theory*. London: Palgrave Macmillan; 2018.
2. Banerjee P, Singh KM. The postcolonial memoir, language of dislocation and fragmentation in the poems of Meena Alexander. *Int J Recent Adv Multidiscip Top*. 2021;2(6):45–51.
3. Baruah S. *In the name of the nation: India and its Northeast*. Stanford: Stanford University Press; 2020.
4. Boehmer E. *Postcolonial poetics: 21st-century critical readings*. London: Palgrave Macmillan; 2021.
5. Bond L, Craps S. *The Routledge companion to trauma studies*. London: Routledge; 2020.
6. Alexander M. *Fault lines: A memoir*. New York: The Feminist Press; 1993.
7. Alexander M. *Illiterate heart*. Evanston: TriQuarterly Books; 2002.
8. Alexander M. *Quickly changing river*. Evanston: TriQuarterly Books; 2008.
9. Caruth C. *Unclaimed experience: Trauma, narrative, and history*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press; 2016.
10. Changkija M. *Weapons of words on pages of pain*. Kohima: Heritage Publishing House; 2014.
11. Kumari R, Prasad S. I am a fault line: Meena Alexander and the poetics of fragmentation. *Mankind: Adam to Me*. 2025;14(2):112–123.
12. Misra T, editor. *The Oxford anthology of writings from North-East India*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; 2019.

13. Mohanty CT. *Feminism without borders: Decolonising theory, practising solidarity*. Durham: Duke University Press; 2018.
14. Spivak GC. *Can the subaltern speak? Updated edition*. New York: Columbia University Press; 2019.
15. Thakur S, Singh S. Diasporic distresses and female expression in the poems of Meena Alexander and Sujata Bhatt. *J Contemp Issues Bus Gov*. 2021;27(2):3401–3409.

Creative Commons (CC) License

This article is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution–Non-Commercial–No Derivatives 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0) license. This license permits sharing and redistribution of the article in any medium or format for non-commercial purposes only, provided that appropriate credit is given to the original author(s) and source. No modifications, adaptations, or derivative works are permitted under this license.

About the Corresponding Author



Rimpa Roy is an Assistant Professor of English at Subhas Chandra Bose Centenary College, Murshidabad, affiliated with the University of Kalyani. She is a doctoral scholar at Seacom Skills University. Her research interests include Feminist Studies, Indian Writing in English, and Postcolonial Literature, with active participation in academic conferences.