Chapter Five
Summation

Maya Angelou and Mahasweta Devi who are committed to society, wish to remove the evils of the society for the oppressed and the downtrodden. To Micheal Griffiths, of the two types of commitments, “The first is that it is to be a once-for-all committal and the second that it is to be an oft-repeated committal” (185). Both types of commitments make the committed writers to dedicate themselves for the welfare of the society. Maya Angelou, criticizes the American society, which is not compassionate to the coloured native people, negroes. Likewise, Mahasweta Devi, a moralist, finds fault with the Bengali society, being unsympathetic towards the downtrodden. Within their activist writings, they create awareness in the readers and thereby expect changes in the society. Colour discrimination, casteism, and classism, cause people to writhe in agony. The novelists wish such nightmarish living conditions to be wiped away from the face of earth.

In sociology, marginalization is the social process of becoming or being made marginal, to relegate and confine to a lower social standing, outer limit or edge. Marginalization positions, gaps and silences a person or group, and deny mainstream status. In its extreme form, marginalization could exterminate groups, and refers to, being separated from the rest of the society, forced to occupy the fringes and edges. Thus, marginalized people are considered as not part of the society. Many communities experience marginalization, with particular focus on colour, caste and gender. Today, various communities continue to be marginalized from society due to
the development of practices, policies and programmes that meet only the needs of the Whites or the Upper castes. Whiteness, caste and class maintain and enforce norms and discourse. The marginalized or subaltern groups are forced into a new system of rules, face social stigma from the dominant groups in society, which further marginalize and exclude them.

_The Muted Voices of the Marginalized_, brings out the voices of the marginalized that are muted in the novels of Maya Angelou and Mahasweta Devi. In the autobiographical novels, Maya Angelou reveals the horrors of racism that threaten the Black Americans. The novelist portrays the excruciating pain and traumatic experiences of the Blacks in South America and Africa. The autobiographical novels, as a chronicler of the novelist’s own life, narrate Angelou’s views, perceptions and fears faced during segregation without any inhibition. She is in need of identity in the cruel world of the Whites, and liberation from the oppressors. Mahasweta Devi deals with the sufferings of the Dalits due to casteism and classism. The Dalits in India are debtors to the high caste Maliks and are bonded labourers. They are compelled to contribute money and free labour for the Malik’s festivals. The novelist depicts the Naxalites who suffer for the poor, brutally killed, and their voices crushed and crumbled.

Double marginalization refers to the marginalization of women. Women are psychologically and physically beleaguered due to their caste and colour and are ‘the second sex’. They are excluded from the labour force, and their work in the homes are not valued. The Black women in America are the marginalized of the marginalized, and suffer both, as Blacks and women. Akin to the Blacks, the Dalit women are recognized as Dalits of the Dalits because their alienation is manifold, and
they also suffer, as women, and Dalits. They are the victims of the unholy alliance of patriarchy, caste system, and capitalism. Their lives are characterized by subordination, violence, drudgery and sexual exploitation. The Black and the Dalit women are subjected to sexual harassment. An attempt is witnessed on the part of the Whites and the communalists to demolish the self-respect of the Blacks and the Dalits. Human sexuality, a sacred relationship, companionship and a means of communication at the deepest level, is forced on the Black and the Dalit women as a measure of retaliation, a sign of rejection and exclusion.

*Double Marginalization* pours out the sufferings of the African American and the Indian doubly marginalized women in the novels of Maya Angelou and Mahasweta Devi. In the autobiographical novels, Angelou distinguishes her struggles as a woman, to come out of the cultural schizophrenia of the Blacks. Mahasweta Devi, in her œuvres, pictures caste based slavery in India that is stamped upon the hapless population by the institutions, quite harmful to women. The novelists reveal the sufferings of women who are used as objects and are essential to men for sexual gratification. Angelou discloses the ways she is duped by the men of her own community. Mahasweta Devi treats of child marriages and the tortures of mothers-in-law. The Dalit women, such as Somu’s sister in Mahasweta Devi’s the *Mother of 1084*, and Lachhima in *The Glory of Sri Sri Ganesh*, are a hard working lot; theirs is a twenty-four hour work schedule. They are similar to the Black women in America such as Mrs. Henderson and Angelou, who toil hard to keep their families together. Maya Angelou portrays Black women as victims of male chauvinism, her sufferings as a teenage mother, deceived by men under false pretences of love, introduction to drugs and illicit activities, and the hardships of bare economic survival.
Spacing the Marginalized throws light on the areas where the marginalized and the doubly marginalized are provided space. The Blacks and the Dalits occupy low status in society. They break up at some point in their lives to seize new space for liberation and freedom. The marginalized community has to recognize and honour its own institutions by entering into mutual relations. The oppressed groups protest and want to uphold rights, in order to establish their identity. There are instances in the novels of Maya Angelou and Mahasweta Devi that are cordial to the Blacks, the Dalits and the doubly-marginalized in the days of catastrophe. Angelou, whose dark ugly conscience, is transformed to great communal hope, is proud to be Black. Through her graduation, she breaks the shackles of superstition that only the Whites are beautiful and intelligent. Analogous to Maya Angelou, Somu, a low class boy in Mahasweta Devi’s the Mother of 1084 is intelligent enough to win scholarships every year, though they are not encouraged to get educated. Mahasweta Devi, through the characters voices for the destitute. The rich people such as Pallavi Shah, Brati and Sujata, help, suffer, and sacrifice their lives for the poor. Resembling the rebellion of the Black revolutionaries in South America, Mahasweta Devi pictures out the revolution of the peasants against the Zamindars and the British colonialists. The martyrdom of the Naxalites espouse and envisage a new social order. Characters such as Sujata, Putli, Bhudeb Pal Chaudhury and Bailey, break the norms of tradition and gender and speak for the suppressed men and women. Thus the marginalized assume optimistically, that the future world would be better for them, bereft of divisions, casteless and without racial prejudice.

Mahasweta Devi, who knows the agony and sufferings of the poor and the downtrodden from first hand experience, is genial towards them. Unlike Mahasweta Devi, Maya Angelou, herself belongs to the dispossessed race. Mahasweta Devi,
portrays the varied moods of the high caste and the permanently grim faced low caste. For the Blacks in South America, life means agony and torture, mental and physical and a close look at their existence, unveils the gravity of the situation. Maya Angelou, an autobiographer, through her own life divulges the state of affairs of the Blacks. The novelist writes of the denial of opportunities to the Blacks to live as human beings. The five volumes of the autobiographical novels of Maya Angelou, “emphasize a movement towards the interior self, a movement that encompasses also the effect of the community on the individual’s achievement and retention of an integrated, acceptable self that is however possible only after fragmentation and pain” (Nair,26). The self becomes the representative of all the Blacks who are crushed down due to their Black identity. The entire life narratives gain representative qualities and impart the true feeling of the sting they have suffered. The protagonist of the autobiographies is, Maya Angelou herself, and her personal experiences; instead of being mystically unique and individualistic, they encompass the condition of the whole Black community. As Angelou discerns, "Being black in today's America has caused me great adversity, adversity which I have needed great courage to overcome, but much of the adversity I have faced has come from my status as a woman. Being a woman in today's America also requires enormous courage." (The Onion). Describing her life as a Creole cook, streetcar conductor, cocktail waitress, dancer, madam, and an unwed mother, Angelou emerges as a successful singer, actress, and playwright, the editor for an English-language magazine in Egypt, lecturer and civil rights activist, and popular author of five collections of poetry and five autobiographies. In the struggle for freedom, Maya Angelou, joined hands with renowned personalities like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X et alia. Thus Angelou, a remarkable renaissance woman, emerges as one of the great voices of
contemporary Black literature. Though the stories in the autobiographical novels are grim, as in the author’s revelation, that she was raped at the age of eight by her mother’s boyfriend, Mr. Freeman, the volumes recount the self-awakening of the young Angelou. She opts to recreate and accept the past and identifies its beauty and ugliness, assets and liabilities and strength and weaknesses. Eventually Maya Angelou declares reassertion of self-acceptance.

Maya Angelou who broke the colour line, inspired the Blacks, and was praised by the Whites in America, for bringing a wide transformation in the minds of the Whites. Citing her outstanding contribution to the field of literature written by African Americans, the nation's top cultural luminaries gathered at Morehouse College to present the author and poet Maya Angelou with the first-ever ‘Maya Angelou Lifetime Courage And Blackness Achievement Award’. Angelou, a Black American, racially discriminated in America, is formally educated. She equips that, though the Blacks are stamped out, they could revitalize themselves and come out of their sufferings. During the time of severe economic depression and intense racial bigotry in the South, she spent time either in school, at the daily meetings of the Coloured Methodist Episcopal Church, or the grandmother’s general merchandise store. Stamps, Arkansas, in the 1930’s, was not a place where a Black child could grow up freely or reach full intellectual and social potential. Yet, the town was nevertheless the home of Angelou’s grandmother Momma, who symbolised to the child, courage and stability to own a store in Stamps. Angelou’s rich education energized and woke up Black American women from the age-old labyrinth of servitude and repose.
Black women are not treated as humans; yet, Angelou shattered the shackles of slavery and faced the world by taking various professions. She was the first Black conductor on the San Francisco streetcars. Her career as a professional entertainer began on the West Coast of Europe, where she performed as a dancer-singer at the Purple Onion in the early 1950s. While working in the popular cabaret, she was spotted by members of the Porgy and Bess cast and invited to audition for the chorus. Returning from the play's 1954-55 tour of Europe and Africa, she continued to perform at nightclubs throughout the United States, acquiring valuable experience that had eventually led her into new avenues of professional work. Thus, Angelou’s wide travel and achievements in the fields she has set foot, brought supplementary brainwave to Black women. Being a poet, educator, historian, best-selling author, actress, playwright, civil-rights activist, producer and director, Dr. Angelou continues to travel, spreading her legendary wisdom. Her autobiographies are rich with references to the childhood home in Arkansas and to the South. For Angelou, as for many Black American writers, the South has become a powerfully evocative metaphor for the history of racial bigotry, social inequality, brutal inhumanity and failure. The South also represents a life-affirming force energized by spiritual bond to the land itself. It is a region where generations of Black families had sacrificed the brightest dreams for better future and whose blood had nourished the soil. Sandra Cookson says, “Maya Angelou does not stint and she does not spare the often painful details of her people. Still, she somehow gives hope” (800).

In the autobiographical novel *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* Angelou delineates the sufferings of the Black women in South America, who are doubly marginalized. As in any savage conflict, women are brutalized and destroyed in order to inflict humiliation on the other side. In *Gather Together in My Name*, L. D. 
Tolbrook involves women in the field of prostitution for the sake of money. He had started his profession as pimp in South America involving White women, thus taking revenge on the White race. Soon he engrossed poor Black women to broaden business. Angelou also became a victim to his greed for money. She is duped by Guy’s father, Curly, R. L. Poole and L. D. Tolbrook. Angelou pictures Black women who are the most affected and duped victims in society. They suffer, and gain victories that are supportive, which give buoyant hope.

In *All God’s Children Need Traveling Shoes* Maya Angelou reveals the quest for identity. She travelled to Africa to discover her African past. To the novelist, the Blacks, in status, are not lower to the Whites, but are deliberately lowered. Accepting Africa as homeland, Angelou painfully portrays that being, an African-American, she is not accepted in the mother continent. Neither Africa nor America is ready to accept the poor Black American and once again she becomes rootless, nameless and pastless. The novelist uncovers the anguish of the blacks during colonization. Seeing the Cape Coast Castle and the Elmina Castle at Ghana in Africa, through mind's eye, she renders the sufferings of the Blacks and poignantly pictures the distress of the Black men, women and children who are agonized and beleaguered by the colonizers. The Black men are tortured physically, whereas the women are tormented physically and sexually.

Angelou delineates the plight of Blacks in the United States during segregation. Angelou, a doubly marginalized Black woman, defends Africa, the new country. She shouted at and scolded the Englishman, a Yugoslav woman, a Canadian, the German professor and an African for criticizing the democracy of Ghana. A courageous Black woman showing spirit and nerve in front of the Whites and the
oppressors confirms that she has come out of bondage, and gained confidence that they are equal. The Black boy Kojo’s passion for education discloses his strife to come out of slavery. The Africans wish to prove that they are intelligent and have the capacity to attain the equal Brioni or the White education.

If Maya Angelou is herself oppressed, Mahasweta Devi, writes for the oppressed. Jaidev remarks: “India can be a dangerous place if you possess a conscience. Mahasweta Devi’s fiction is dangerous because it can create a conscience in you” (This Fiction is injurious to illusions 5). Mahasweta Devi firmly believes that all human beings should be treated equally, regardless of class and caste distinctions. The Bengali society she lives, is enclosed with class and caste systems. As Satyanarayana says, “However, what ensures her a place in the history of modern Indian literature is her bringing a passionate commitment and sense of history to her exposure of injustice and exploitation” (Revolt Myth in Mahasweta Devi’s Operation?– Bashai Tudu 185). In response to the question in a 1998 interview ”What would you like to do for the rest of your life?” Mahasweta Devi replied: ”Fight for the tribals, downtrodden, underprivileged and write creatively if and when I find the time” (Guha). The novelist admits that, “I have never had the capacity nor the urge to create art for arts sake” (qtd. in Bandyobadhyay xii). As, “a seasoned realist” (Ghatak xv),

Mahasweta Devi portrays the real conditions of the tribals, the poor and the bonded labourers in works such as the Mother of 1084, The Glory of Sri Sri Ganesh, and Titu Mir. As the novelist discloses, “After reading my work, the reader should face the true facts and feel duly ashamed of the true face of India” (qtd. in Chanda viii). Fired by enthusiasm, Mahasweta Devi writes for the benefit of, “the Tribals, the
Harijans, the Mundas, Santhals, Lohas, the Ganjus and Dusads” (Chakraborthy 160). To Murali N. Krishnaswamy, “She (Mahasweta Devi) wanted to be with the poor and do something for them” (The Hindu).

The “exploitation and oppression” (Satyanarayana 46) of the tribals by the Zamindars are reflected in her works. These issues recur in every part of India. Mahasweta Devi states, “Iam often asked how long am I to bore my readers with the same themes. My answer is as long as hunger, poverty, naked exploitation by the rich and the landed, oppression by the machineries continue, I will continue to write the same as poverty, things” (Kakatiya Journal of English Studies 20). She believed in the dictum that pen is mightier than the sword and so constantly writes about the tribulations of the downtrodden by visiting the abodes of the tribals to gather reports. In an interview to Siva Sankari she declares, “Just as people seek to wash their sins in the waters of the holy rivers, I sought the dwellings of the tribals […] I went there to learn and not to teach” (100). Accepting her as their “elder sister”, (Chakraborthy 160) the tribals express their inner woe to her.

The duty of a writer is, to hold a mirror to the society and “by lending voice to the voiceless, Mahasweta emerges as a fighter for human rights” (Dason 45). Dr. Nelson Mandela opined that, “She (Mahasweta Devi) holds a mirror to the conditions of the world as we enter the new millennium” (qtd. in Ghatak x). To Urmila Chakraborthy, 

She (Mahasweta Devi) has accepted as her true kin the unlettered, downtrodden masses, the harijans, the tribals, the bonded labourers, the simple village people exploited and oppressed for generations in Indian villages. Her very presence in the sophisticated circles of well-clad
pampered people is a form of protest. Her face has the harsh
unrelenting lines of one who had opened herself o a life of
commitment: Commitment to the cause of the people whose very
presence city-bred people prefer to be ignorant of. (Art as Protest:
Social Commitment in the Novels of Mahasweta Devi 159)

Mahasweta Devi’s the Mother of 1084 is stuffed with the afflictions of the
urban browbeaten people. The mothers in the novel face the distraught circumstances
because of the carnage of their cherished ones particularly the male members. Sujata,
the mother of Brati, and the mothers of Somu and Partha –suffer due to the loss of the
wage earners in the family. Sujata, faces traumatized situation, as she is thrown in a
male-chauvinistic society. Brati, is the only comforter to her and his loss leads to
agony. Nandini, the young social activist, who is the follower of Brati, faces
tribulations due to the cruel treatment received in the prison cell. Young men suffer
in prison and face sudden death.

Sujata, a career woman, shows resistance, when forced to leave job, is a
favourable point in the liberation of women. Nandini though tortured, had not turned
against the ideologies of the Naxalite movement. The death of Brati and his friends
did not mean the end of the cause. They had already inspired and injected Naxalite
principles in the minds of people who wish to suffer for the downtrodden. As
Urmila Chakraborty remarks:

She (Mahasweta Devi) saw the Naxalite movement as the only
possible mode of revolt of the peasant community and her involvement
with the Naxalite cause started off what became for her her true
vocation as an artist. Trying to understand the peasant-intellectual
coalition movement, she tried to understand the peasant community
with its roots in centuries of oppressions. (Art as Protest: Social Commitment in the Novels of Mahasweta Devi 166)

Sujata, the mother of corpse number 1084, meets a cruel death and before breathing her last, voices against the cruelties of society.

Mahasweta Devi’s The Glory of Sri Sri Ganesh, is replete with traumatized situation of the lower caste in the village Barha. The novel equally unveils the tribulations of the lower caste women in the hands of the high caste virile Rajputs. Lachhima, becomes the keep of Medininarayan Singh, she could not marry Mohor Karan, as Medini Singh put his son’s care until the boy attained the age of eighteen. Thus a low caste is made to work as bonded labourer. People in the village were indebted to the same money-lender, and become bonded-labourers, alienated from their own land – “Whenever a tribal requires money, he has easy access to the money-lender or “Mahajon” who is on the spot and ever present in the scene” (Tribal India 71). The Dusads, the scheduled caste, who are evicted due to their debt to the Maliks, were dispossessed from their village, farm, jobs and lived in the forest. Mahasweta Devi pictures the evils of the society in Barha and the subsequent labeling of the village as the hotbed of casteism. The low caste were given a chance to sing of their sorrows, sufferings and criticized the high caste atleast once in a year, during the Holi festival. Pallavi Shah, who came to Barha to help the low caste Bhangis is an unquestionable positive point in the novel. Though she is made to evacuate from the village, she loved the downtrodden, and gave money to Abhay Mahato to help the Bhangis. Mishir, a high caste, who is touched by the battering of Putli, is a categorical point that goes against male chauvinism.
Swarup Singh, a high caste landlord, and forest contractor sent his daughter to school. He discloses to Ganesh that his wife has come out of the purdah system. Suraj Singh, the Malik in Singhbhum district, made Haroa, the scheduled caste to put his thumb impression on a bond. The latter’s killing of Suraj Singh, is an indication of his rebellious spirit. Ganesh, the Malik, warped by casteism, becomes a menace to society. Putli, the wife of Ganesh, breaks tradition and leaves him once for all with her daughter. She dared to safeguard the life of Haroa, an underprivileged. The story of Ganesh, a vengeful individual, blinded with caste indoctrination, is handed over to the armed angry mob. The confinement of Ganesh and his assumed death at the hands of the resilient rabble brings the rebirth of the village Barha, with peace and harmony. The death of Ganesh, a caste fanatic, symbolizes the death of caste bigotry.

In Titu Mir, Mahasweta Devi recounts the heartrending stories of the poor peasants and the farmers who underwent untold sufferings in the hands of the rich heartless Zamindars, the sahibs and the indigo planters. The low caste, the poor Hindus and the Muslims found it difficult to live in the pre-independent India. In the Bengal famine in 1770, people died like flies. The fakirs and sanyasis who revolted against the Zamindars, the East India company and the government were marked as robbers. Titu Mir pictures the gruesomeness of poor Indians, when, the agricultural lands were transformed to indigo plantations. Titu Mir, a real hero rescued the lower class and shielded the rural poor against the exploitation of the landlords and the sahibs, at the cost of his life. He inspired people of all religion for a good cause. By a proclamation in the market place, he demanded that Hindus and Muslims should not pay taxes to the Zamindars, whereas the landowners, the money lenders, the rich anti-Wahab Muslims and the planters should pay taxes to him. His Mujahids (Muslim revolutionaries) looted the rich Muslims in Ramchandrapur and Hooghly. Though the
government was against Titu and his troop, some of the officers secretly supported him.

Thus, Maya Angelou through the autobiographical novels, create awareness in society by revealing the horrors of colour discrimination and double marginalization. She believes that women should enter into a new world of freedom and equality from the doom of harassment and torture. Her works thereby provide moral to the society by making the marginalized, realize reality that enhances further transformation. Analogous to the Black Americans, who make up the single largest racial minority in the United States and form the second largest racial group after the Whites, for more than three millennia, the Dalits in India have held on doggedly to life, refusing to be scared down, estranged and wiped away from the face of the earth. They have recognized their lives on the solid foundations of resilience, extensiveness, equality, justice, peaceful coexistence, liberty and community living. They have sustained themselves despite continuous Brahminic assault on their humanity. The burden and bondage imposed on them by coarse civilization needed strength of an extraordinary nature to be borne for such a long period in history. To the Dalits, freedom of faith, of expression, the right to information and knowledge systems and the right to learning should be asserted without fear. Maya Angelou and Mahasweta Devi, through their novels make individual attempts at a reconstruction of the past. The novelists reveal the tragic experiences of casteism and racism with differences of emphasis and tone. An analysis of each of the works taken for study reveals it to be a literary apperception of a historical reality illustrative of the writers’ creative transformation of the facts of life into art.
The novels of Maya Angelou and Mahasweta Devi can be further explored in terms of sociological, psychological, existential and various other perspectives paving ways for the future researchers to evolve through their novels.