Chapter One

Introduction

Literature, a mirror, through which a dedicated writer communicates his outlook in relation to the evils of society, devotes himself for the wellbeing of it. For C.S. Lewis, “literature adds to reality, it does not simply describe it. It enriches the necessary competencies that daily life requires and provides and in this respect, it irrigates the deserts that our lives have already become” (01). An astonishing feature of the committed writer is that, he passes on the issues, which affect the society, and the reality of it through his works. According to Williams, “A committed writer deals with ‘real’ social relations, for he is engaged in writing in a specific society and period […] and the ‘style’ and ‘form’ or content’ of his work, now (are) considered […] but as expressions of these relations” (203 – 204). The moralistic and committed writers bring to light social and ethical issues through their works. The primary obligation of the committed writers is to engage with social and ethical issues that they care deeply about. The study of the select works of Maya Angelou and Mahasweta Devi explore different perspectives on a range of social problems such as poverty, homelessness, caste, racial and gender inequality. The literary authors who have commitment towards the social order, attempt to find out the errors in it and seek to provide solution. Thus, a committed social writer, who voices for an ethnic group, is also a moralistic or an ethical writer. In Drama and Commitment, Rabkin points out that commitment is, “a pledge, a bond, an obligation … includes any belief which incurs an obligation” (qtd. in Nair 77). The main obligation of the writers is to illustrate the authentic image of society. For the purpose of parallel study, three novels of the African American writer, Maya Angelou, namely I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings, Gather Together in My Name, All God’s Children Need Traveling
Writers of all ages highlight the need for a moralistic approach in literature. J.A. Cuddon opines: “A committed or engage writer is one who, through his work, is dedicated to the advocacy of certain beliefs and programmes, especially those which are political and ideological and in aid of social reform” (161). Ancient philosophers such as Plato and Horace gave significance to morals in literature. According to Wilfred L. Guerin and et al, “the larger function of literature is to teach morality and probe philosophical issues” (25). Didactic writers accentuate the value of ethics in their works. An ethical writer takes freedom to instruct moral to a society, which is scrappy with tribulations. As D.H. Lawrence remarks, “Morality […] proceeds and accompanies a true relatedness” (128). T.S. Eliot, writes that the moralist critics “make their attempt to impose their ‘view of life’ upon individuals […] that each reader would be impressed in his reading […]” (53). Didacticism is an artistic philosophy that emphasizes instructional and informative qualities in literature and other types of art. The primary intention of didactic writings is to teach the readers through morals or motifs. Didactic literature contributes to personal edification. Maya Angelou and Mahasweta Devi, create awareness in readers through their works by disclosing the sufferings of the marginalized women of the respective societies.

Comparative Literature studies literature across different times and cultures. The academic discipline of Comparative Literature practices literary criticism on works written in different languages or from different cultures. Parallel study relates the similarities of culture, tradition and aspects in various societies. Prof Henry H. Remak defines comparative literature as:
Comparative literature is the study of literature beyond the confines of the particular country, and the study of the relationship between literature on the one hand and other areas of knowledge and belief such as (e.g.) painting, sculpture, architecture, music, philosophy, history and the social sciences, political economics, sociology, the sciences, religion etc. on the other. In brief, it is the comparison of the literature with another or others, and the comparison of literature with other spheres of human expression. (01)

African Americans, referred to as Black Americans or Afro-Americans, and formerly as American Negroes, are citizens or residents of the United States who have their origin in any of the Black population of Africa. In the United States, the terms are generally used for Americans with partial Sub-Saharan African ancestry. African Americans are the direct descendants of captive Africans, who survived the slavery era within the boundaries of the present United States. As a result of slavery, racism and discrimination, African Americans as a group remain at a pronounced economic, educational and social disadvantage. Persistent social, economic and political issues for many African Americans include inadequate health care access and delivery; institutional racism and discrimination in housing, education, policing, criminal justice and employment; crime, poverty and substance abuse. One of the most serious and long standing issues within African American communities is poverty, related to marital stress and dissolution, health problems, low educational attainment, deficits in psychological functioning, and crime. Racism, a man-made phenomenon, is defined, by Hernton as:
All of the learned emotions on the part of a group of people towards another group whose physical characteristics are dissimilar to the former group; behavior and emotions that compel one group to...treat the other on the basis of its physical characteristics alone, as if it did not belong to the human race. (qtd. in Sumana 23)

Black Writing has always been under cordon and during the two hundred and fifty years of slavery, it was a legal crime for the Blacks to read and write. The fixation that provoked the Blacks to write, was the condition of oppression. They stressed the need to report on and define the condition of the race and felt that it is the intrinsic duty of the writers to communicate the wishes of the people. Black literature constitutes one of the supreme enrichments of black culture and black life. The men writers of Black American literature have ignored and suppressed the women writers. Though Black women had involved themselves in the development of American Literature, none of the pre-twentieth century Black women writers was treated as major contributors to the history of Black literature: “The question of journeying in Black women’s writing in the United States offers a variety of possible understandings of captivity and agency […] the specifics of women’s resistance to slavery are often not addressed (Davies 130). The women writers have to struggle against the confines of race and sex for freedom and selfhood. The fighting spirit of the Black women writers endured against all adversities and uncovered their ordeal through writing. They communicated their own experiences and it led to a strong correlation between the surfacing of the women characters in the fiction and approval of the Black women writers into the mainstream of American literature as proficient writers.
African American women writers have contributed enormously to their culture. Some of them wrote during the Harlem Renaissance, a particularly vital time in African American arts and letters, while others were active since the 1970s, an era in which the works by African American women are adapted into films and widely read in book clubs. Literature by African American women is important for its aesthetic qualities. Frances Ellen Watkins Harper’s *Iola Le Roy* (1892) was considered as the first novel by an African-American Woman. As an abolitionist and a Black feminist, Frances Harper was one of the leading figures in the national struggle to free the Blacks from slavery and the long time spokes-person for the black women who were not free to speak. In the 1920’s the Black women novelists chose to make their heroines light complexioned, upper-middle class black women with taste and refinement, and accepted the American Whites’ ideals of materialism, security and comfort. Black women writers such as Jessie Fauset and Nela Larsen were acknowledged during the Harlem Renaissance as significant novelists, as both had solely focused attention on the image of the Black woman.

The African-American women novelists of the 20th century such as Paule Marshall, Toni Morrison, Maya Angelou and Alice Walker are concerned with the plight of the Black women, her position in the family, the society and the world. They wrested for recognition and have to fight against their own male counterparts. Black men wrote about the Black female and felt righteous about it. When Black women wrote about incest, rape and sexual violence committed by Black men against their women, they are accused of sowing the seeds of division in the Black community and in the Black family. Toni Morrison Observes, “I think women probably do write out of a different place. There is difference in the ways they
approach conflict, dominion, and power [...]. It’s not so much that women write differently from men, but that black women write differently from white women. Black men don’t write very differently from white men” (qtd. in Ranveer 35).

Paule Marshall, Toni Morrison, Maya Angelou and Alice Walker, created strong women characters such as Selina Boyce, Silla, Marle Kimbona, Sula, Nel, Celie, Tashi (the Americanised name, Evelyn Johnson) in African-American fiction. Paule Marshall, through the novels *Brown Girl Brown Stones* (1959) and *The chosen Place, The Timeless People* (1969), voice the need to create distinct human beings, affected by culture and society. As a first generation American of West Indian descent, she has experienced the merging conflict of the distinct cultures of African and American within the same psyche. The need to separate, analyze, and bring together the varying influences is one of Marshall’s concentrated thrusts. She showed the outline of the domineering mother, the Black prostitute and the martyred mother, and their essences, as they move within the space of their culture.

Maya Angelou (1928 - ), one of the most renowned and influential writers of the contemporary time, voices for the Blacks. Hailed as a global renaissance woman, Dr. Angelou is a celebrated poet, memoirist, novelist, educator, dramatist, producer, actress, historian, filmmaker, and civil rights activist. Born on 4 April, 1928, in St. Louis, Missouri, Angelou was raised in St. Louis and Stamps, Arkansas. In Stamps, she experienced the brutality of racial discrimination, and has absorbed unshakable faith and values of traditional African-American family, community, and culture. As a teenager, Angelou’s love for the arts won her a scholarship to study dance and drama at San Francisco’s Labor School. At fourteen, she dropped out to become San Francisco’s first African-American female cable car conductor. She later
finished high school, giving birth to a male child, Guy, a few weeks after graduation. As a young single mother, she supported her son by working as waitress and cook and her passion for music, dance, performance, and poetry took the center stage.

In 1954 – 1955, Angelou toured Europe with a production of the opera *Porgy and Bess*. She studied modern dance with Martha Graham, danced with Alvin Ailey on television variety shows and, in 1957, recorded her first album, *Calypso Lady*. In 1958, and moved to New York, where she joined the Harlem Writers Guild, and acted in the historic Off-Broadway production of Jean Genet's *The Blacks* and wrote and performed *Cabaret for Freedom*. In 1960, Angelou moved to Cairo, Egypt where she served as editor of the English language weekly *The Arab Observer*. The next year, she moved to Ghana where she taught at the University of Ghana's School of Music and Drama, worked as feature editor for *The African Review* and wrote for *The Ghanaian Times*.

During the years abroad, Angelou read and studied voraciously, mastering French, Spanish, Italian, Arabic and the West African language Fanti. While in Ghana, she met Malcolm X and, in 1964, returned to America to help him build his new Organization of African American Unity. Shortly after her arrival in the United States, Malcolm X was assassinated, and the organization was dissolved. Soon after Malcolm X's assassination, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. wanted Angelou to serve as Northern Coordinator for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. King's assassination, in 1968, left her devastated.

With the guidance of her friend, the novelist James Baldwin, she wrote *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. Published in 1970, the book won international...
acclaim and enormous popular success. The list of her published verse, non-fiction, and fiction includes more than 30 bestselling titles. A trailblazer in film and television, Dr. Angelou wrote the screenplay and composed the score for the 1972 film *Georgia, Georgia*. Her script, the first by an African American woman to be filmed, was nominated for the Pulitzer Prize. Dr. Angelou, who served on two presidential committees, was awarded the Presidential Medal of Arts in 2000, the Lincoln Medal in 2008, and three Grammy Awards. Dr. Angelou's reading of her poem "On the Pulse of the Morning", composed at the request of Bill Clinton, was broadcasted live around the world in 1993. She has received over thirty honorary degrees and is Reynolds Professor of American Studies at Wake Forest University. Dr. Angelou’s words and actions continues to stir souls, energize bodies, liberate minds, and heal wounded hearts.

literary career, she has developed a rapport with audiences who await each new work as a continuation of an ongoing dialogue with the author. Beginning with *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, her works have received wide critical acclaim and are praised for revealing universal truths. The broad appeal of her autobiographies and poetry is evidenced in the numerous college anthologies that include portions of the work and in the popularity of the television adaptation of *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*.

In *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1970), Maya Angelou calls displacement, the most important loss in childhood, as she is separated from her parents at the age of three and never fully regained sense of security and belonging. Displacement from her family is an emotional handicap, compounded by an equally unsettling sense of racial and geographic separation. The parents frequently moved Angelou and brother Bailey, from St. Louis to Arkansas to the West Coast. In the 1930s, racial prejudice severely limited the lives of the young children, and she sums up the demoralizing period of alienation thus: "If growing up is painful for the Southern Black girl, being aware of her displacement is the rust on the razor that threatens the throat." (4). The pain of continual rejection came from displacement itself, and more poignantly, from the child's acute understanding of racial prejudice.

In *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, Angelou recounts many explosive incidents of racial discrimination, experienced as a child. In the 1930s, Stamps was a fully segregated town. Marguerite and Bailey, were welcomed by grandmother Mrs. Henderson, who was devoted to them. As owner of the Wm. Johnson General Merchandise Store, the grandmother was highly successful and independent. Momma was their most constant source of love and strength. Momma’s presence was powerful to Marguerite, and the former used her strength to guide and protect the
family, from the confrontations of the White community. Her resilient power reassured Marguerite. The lessons Angelou received, from the racial prejudice in Stamps, effectively circumscribed and defeated her grandmother's protective influence. In the autobiographical narrative, Momma's personality provided the memories of Angelou's childhood with a sense of personal dignity and meaning.

When Angelou was thirteen, she and Bailey left the repressive atmosphere of Stamps to join their mother. During those years, she continued to look for a place in life that would dissolve the sense of displacement. By the time they are in their early teens, they had criss-crossed the western half of the country travelling between the parents' separate homes and the grandmother's in Stamps. Angelou’s sense of geographic displacement alone would be enough to upset the child's security, since the life-styles of the father in Southern California and the mother in St. Louis and later in San Francisco represented worlds completely different and foreign to the pace of life in the rural South. Each time the children moved, a different set of relatives or of the parents' lovers greeted them, and they never felt part of a stable family group, except when they had lived in Stamps with Momma and Uncle Willie.

Once settled in San Francisco in the early 1940s, Angelou enrolled at GeorgeWashington High School and the California Labor School, where she studied dance and drama in evening classes. Excelled in both the schools, the teachers quickly recognized her intelligence and talent. Later, she broke the color barrier by becoming the first black female conductor on the San Francisco streetcars. Just months before the high school graduation, she was engaged in a onetime sexual encounter to prove sexuality to herself and became pregnant. I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings, ends on a note of awakening with the birth of the son Guy and the
beginning of a significant measure of strength and confidence in the novelist’s ability to succeed and find a place in life. As autobiographer, Angelou makes use of the theme of displacement, to unify the first volume of life story and to suggest, long-term determination to create security and permanency in life as a Black.

In between the conclusion of *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, and the beginning of Angelou's second volume of autobiography, *Gather Together in My Name* (1974), there is virtually no break in the narrative. As the first ends with the birth of the son Guy, the second starts, when he is only a few months old. *Gather Together in My Name* tells the story of Guy’s first three years in Stamps and California, and focuses on a young single mother's struggle to achieve respect, love, and sense of self-worth. The battle to win financial independence and the devotion of a faithful man for Angelou were not easy in the years immediately following World War II, when racial discrimination, unemployment, and McCarthyism were on the rise. Her initial optimism, was incidentally, shared by many members of the post-war Black community who fervently believed that "race prejudice was dead. A mistake made by a young country. Something to be forgiven as an unpleasant act committed by an intoxicated friend,"(2). Angelou realized that her dreams for a better America were still too fragile to survive. Worst of all, was the burden of guilt that rested on the shoulders of the seventeen-year-old mother who desperately believed that she must assume full adult responsibility. Fortunately, her mother encouraged Angelou to set high goals, to maintain sense of dignity and self-worth, and work hard to succeed.

Like many young women, who came of age in the postwar era, Angelou easily imagined herself moving into a life modelled on Good Housekeeping and Better Homes and Gardens. She described herself as a "product of Hollywood
upbringing."(36) and "romanticism" (36) and continually envisioned herself smoothly slipping into the role guaranteed by popular culture. Whenever she met a man, who might potentially fulfill the dream, Angelou anticipated the enviable comfort of settling down. The scenario was always the same: "I would always wear pretty aprons and my son would play in the Little League. My husband would come home (he looked like Curly) and smoke his pipe in the den as I made cookies for the Scouts meeting," (36) or "We would live quietly in a pretty little house and I'd have another child, a girl, and the two children (whom he'd love equally) would climb over his knees and I would make three layer caramel cakes in my electric kitchen until they went off to college."(146). Those glamorous dreams, never `materialized, Angelou maintained hopeful outlook and determination to support and protect herself and the infant son. Her primary motivation during those early years of motherhood, was to spare the son the insecurity and rejection, she had faced as a child. She worked as an absentee madam and a prostitute, hoping to achieve regular family life and easing the unabiding sense of guilt over not being able to provide herself and Guy with financial and familial security.

Angelou understood that the hurdles she had to cross on the road to success were often higher than those set by her expectations and standards of performance. Spending the first years of Guy's life in California, in the Bay Area and in San Diego, she faced racial discrimination reminiscent of the childhood experiences in the South. At one point in Gather Together in My Name, when she suspected that the thriving business as a madam of a two-prostitute house would soon be uncovered by the police, Angelou returned to Stamps with her son, hoping to find the same comfort and protection she had known as a child. She sought the grandmother's protective
embrace, courage and the shield of anonymity and soon realized that the South was not ready to welcome her and that she had outgrown its childhood protection. The five years spent in school and in California had broadened the horizons and convinced her of the right to be accepted on the basis of character and intelligence. The South, to which she returned was unchanged: "The town was halved by railroad tracks, the swift Red River and racial prejudice" (76) and "above all, the atmosphere was pressed down with the smell of old fears, and hates, and guilt."(77). After arriving Stamps, Angelou suffered the double standards of racial discrimination, during an unpleasant confrontation with a sales clerk in the white-owned general merchandise store. Momma warned her that the principles were too flimsy a protection against the unrestrained contempt of bigotry. The grandmother sent her back to California where she and Guy were more distanced from the lingering hatred of the South.

Returning to the Bay Area and to mother's home, Angelou was more determined to achieve independence and win the respect of people. Leaving her son in the care of baby-sitters, she worked long hours first as dancer and entertainer, and then as short-order cook in Stockton. The reality of the situation fell far below the ideal, and Angelou eventually turned to marijuana as a temporary consolation. During that period, she fell in love with an older man, a professional gambler, Louis David Tolbrook supported by prostitution. Angelou agreed to pay his debt by becoming a prostitute herself. She made the sacrifice fully believing that, after he had regained financial security, he would marry and provide her with the fulfillment of romantic dreams. Rationalizing the decision, she compared prostitution to marriage: "There are married women who are more whorish than a street prostitute because they have sold
their bodies for marriage licenses, and there are some women who sleep with men for money who have great integrity because they are doing it for a purpose" (163). As the dreams were shattered, she found herself on her own at the end.

The second volume of the autobiography ends, just before Angelou wished to settle down with a man, a heroin addict and gambler, pictured as an ideal husband. Before it was too late, she learnt of the embracing disaster and defeat and regained innocence through the lessons of a compassionate drug addict: "I had walked the precipice and seen it all; and at the critical moment, one man's generosity pushed me safely away from the edge [...] I had given a promise and found my innocence. I swore I'd never lose it again."(215). Ready to accept the challenge of life anew, Angelou, brought the second volume of life story to a close. In the title, Gather Together in My Name, inspired by the Gospel of Matthew (18:20), the novelist solicits her family and the readers to gather around and bear witness to the past.

The fifth autobiography, All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes (1986), has swept Angelou to new heights of critical and popular acclaim. The life story, resumed, where it ended chronologically and geographically, in The Heart of a Woman, with the son Guy's recovery from his automobile accident in Accra. Of the two earlier volumes of the autobiographical narrative which occured in Africa, the latest addition to the series has taken place exclusively in Ghana. In All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes, Angelou focuses primarily on the story of herself and the other Black Americans' attempts in the early 1960s to return to the ancestral home in Africa. As in the four previous autobiographies, I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings (1970), Gather Together in My Name (1974), Singin' and Swingin' and Gettin' Merry Like Christmas (1976), The Heart of a Woman (1981), she explores the theme of
displacement and the difficulties involved in creating a home for oneself, family, and people.

In choosing to live in Ghana, following the deterioration of the marriage to Vus Make, Angelou hoped to find a place where she and the son could make a home for themselves, free from the racial bigotry she had faced throughout the United States, Europe, and parts of the Middle East. While Guy was recuperating from his injuries, she carefully evaluated the assets and concluded that since his birth, her only home had been wherever they were together: "we had been each other's home and center for seventeen years. He could die if he wanted to and go off to wherever dead folks go, but I, I would be left without a home."(5). Her initial expectations, therefore, for feeling at ease and settling down in West Africa, were understandably considerable: "We had come home, and if home was not what we had expected, never mind, our need for belonging allowed us to ignore the obvious and to create real places or even illusory places, befitting our imagination."(19). Unfortunately, the Ghanian people did not readily accept Angelou, Guy, and the Black American community in Accra. Thus they unexpectedly found themselves isolated and ignored.

*All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes* recounts the sequence of events that gradually brought the autobiographer closer to understanding and accepting the seemingly unbreachable distance between the Ghanians and the Black American expatriates. Within the first few weeks of stay in Ghana, Angelou suspected that she had mistakenly followed the misdirected footsteps of the other Black Americans who "had not come home, but had left one familiar place of painful memory for another strange place with none."(40). In time, she understood that their alienation was based on the fact that, unlike the Ghanians, they were the descendants of the African slaves,
who painfully understood that "not all slaves were stolen, nor were all slave dealers European."(47). No one in the expatriate group could feel at ease in Africa as long as they carried the haunting suspicion that "African slavery stemmed mostly from tribal exploitation"(48) and not solely from European colonial imperialism. Angelou, persevered and settled into lasting friendships with both Americans and Africans and has found work through talents as journalist and performer. With professional and personal contacts, she met many African political activists, diplomats and artists from around the world. Those acquaintances, in addition to a brief tour, in Berlin and Venice with the original St. Mark's Playhouse company of Genet's The Blacks, enlarged Angelou's perspective on racial complexities and helped to locate a place in Africa, where, she could live, albeit temporarily, at peace.

In *All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes*, Angelou continually reminds the reader that the quest for a place to call home is virtually endemic to the human condition. During her stay in Ghana, she understood the search, as seldom successful, regardless of the political or social circumstances involved. Toward the end of the personal narrative, Angelou summed up the conclusions about the struggle, to find or create a home: "If the heart of Africa still remained allusive, my search for it had brought me closer to understanding myself and other human beings. The ache for home lives in all of us, the safe place where we can go as we are and not be questioned." (196). In the vision of home, Angelou created for herself and the son in Ghana, she discovered a heightened sense of self-awareness and independence. By the end of the stay in West Africa, she attained a renewed image of herself as woman, lover, mother, writer, performer, and political activist. In that state of fortified strength, she left Africa and returned to the country of her birth, with its disturbed
memories of slavery and the reality of racial hatred. Angelou ends her sojourn in foreign lands, to commit herself to Malcolm X's struggle for racial equality and social justice in the United States, by planning to work as an office coordinator, for the Organization of Afro-American Unity. Thus, she has finally freed herself from the illusion, of claiming ancestral home in Africa.

African-American literature is often compared with Dalit Literature in its depiction of the issues of casteism, subordination of women and injustice. Dalit literature is not merely protest literature, the eternal emotions of love and sacrifice reverberate in it. The word ‘Dalit’ originated from the Sanskrit and means ‘ground’, ‘suppressed’, ‘crushed’, or ‘broken to pieces’. ‘Dalit’ was first used by Jyotirao Phule in the nineteenth century, in the context of the oppression faced by the erstwhile ‘untouchable’ castes. Mahatma Gandhi’s coinage of the word ‘Harijan’, translated roughly as ‘Children of God’, is used to identify the Untouchables. The official terms ‘Scheduled castes and scheduled tribes’ are used in Indian government documents to identify the ‘untouchables’ and the tribes. ‘Adi Dravida’, ‘Adi Karnataka’ and ‘Adi Andhra’ are used in the states of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh, respectively, to identify people of the former ‘untouchable’ castes in official documents.

In the traditional law books, and in popular usage, the three thousand jatis, or castes of India are grouped loosely into four varnas (from the Sanskrit, ‘colour’), or classes. At the top of the hierarchy, are the Brahmins (priests and scholars), then the Shatriyas (warriors and rulers), the Vaishyas (merchants, traders and farmers), and lastly the Shudras (artisans, labourers, servants, and slaves). Those who have the most defiling jobs, ranked beneath the Shudras, are called ‘untouchables’, or the
Harijans. In early Brahminic circles, great emphasis was traditionally placed on bodily hygiene and dietary restrictions. The latter practice contributed to the store of ‘austerities’ conducive to attaining the spiritual goal of \textit{moksha}, or release from the cycle of transmigration. An added factor was the increasing value of ahimsa or refusal to kill for nonsacrificial purposes. First among such animals to be excluded from consumption, and which is held in great sanctity was the cow.

In the context of the traditional Hindu society, the status of the Dalit is historically associated with occupations regarded as ritually impure, such as those involving butchering, removal of rubbish, waste and leatherwork. The Dalits worked as manual labourers, cleaning latrines and sewers, and clearing away rubbish. Engaging in those activities was considered to be polluting to the individual, and the pollution was considered contagious. Thus the Dalits are segregated, and banned from full participation in Hindu social life. For instance, they could not enter temples or schools, and are to stay outside the village. They are not allowed in the tea shops in the villages and if allowed, are served coffee and tea in separate glasses which they have to wash. Elaborate precautions are observed to prevent incidental contact between the Dalits and the other castes. Discrimination against the Dalits still exist in rural areas in the private sphere, in everyday matters such as access to eating places, schools, temples and water sources. It has largely disappeared in urban areas and in the public sphere. The Dalits in North India include Dombas, Chandalas, leather-workers or Chamar, carcass handlers called Mahar, poor farmers, landless labourers, night soil scavengers or Bhangi, street handcrafting people, folk artists, Pasi, village watchmen, street cleaners, sweepers or Chura and washermen or Dhobi.
“Besides the slave and serfs mentioned in the Narada Sutra, Hindu law
makers had treated Chandals as the most despised people. They were
condemned to live outside the villages and earn their livelihood by
removing the dead animals, garbage, sweeping the streets and drains.
They had to live in the company of donkeys, dogs and pigs. Manu is
particularly harsh on them. Existence of Chandals is mentioned by the
Chinese travelers and Arabic historians like Alberuni and Ibn-Batuta.
Their touch polluted, their shadow polluted, their sight polluted and if
a Chandala caste his eye on the food served to a Brahmin it was also
polluted”.(Dalits and Caste System,59)

In South India, the Parayas, the Pulayas, the Malas, and the Madigas are the notable
Dalit groups, amongst many others. Traditionally, Dalits were considered to be
beyond the pale of Varna or caste system. Considered as Panchama or the fifth group,
they were not allowed to let their shadows fall upon non-Dalit caste members. They
carried brooms tied to their bodies, so that while passing through such 'upper lanes',
they could wipe away their footprints. They were bound to hang clay pots from their
necks so that they might not pollute the streets of the privileged by their spittle. Thus,
the Dalits, treated worse than animals, were banned from upper-class localities.

The Dalits are forbidden to worship in temples or draw water from the same
wells as the caste Hindus. They live in segregated neighborhoods outside the main
village. In the Indian countryside, the Dalit villages are separate enclaves, a kilometre
or more outside the main village, where the other Hindu castes reside. James Massey
in the article “Historical Roots” in Indigenous people: Dalits : Dalit Issues in Today’s
Theological Debate writes:
the way an outcaste is compared to a dog or a swine or the manner in which the ‘womb’ of the uppercaste is addressed as ‘a pleasant’ one and the womb of an outcaste as ‘a stinking’ one, shows the further degradation of the Dalits[...] The verse from the Upanishads above also seems to hint that the dalits (chandala) and the fourth caste Sudras are same, as it refers only to the first three upper castes and no reference has been made to the fourth caste Sudras. Instead of that it refers only to Chandala, which commonly is understood as one of the titles given to the Dalits by their opponents.(29)

Bonded labourers in many instances, are the Dalits. The state of being bonded has wider ramifications – to enhance the bonds of poverty and ignorance. The Dalit community is still ravaged with homelessness and hunger. Their consciousness is to fix the food for the next day and run for shelter when the slum huts or pavement plastic homes are ransacked.

The Dalit women, as unequal partners, are further down the ladder of caste and sub-caste. They bear the burden of patriarchy, as well as low caste, and are unaccounted bonded labourers. The landlords and other upper caste people took advantage of their poverty to satisfy their lust. The Dalit women continue to be dragged off as temple prostitutes and are increasingly, the target of caste violence – “In some states women had to be dedicated to the goddess Yellama to serve as ‘Devdasis’ in the temples and cater to the needs of the pilgrims and priests after having been deflowered by rich landlords” (Dalits and Caste System, 61). They are excluded from the normal women’s struggle, as far as their representation is concerned in the decision-making bodies.
The Dalit women are identified as the oppressed of the oppressed. They suffer silently as women encarved in the minds, being signs of untouchability and impurity. Untouchability, physical pain of hunger and poverty, violence of the high caste people, sexual harassment, sexual violence and ill treatment are not new phenomena for the low caste, untouchable Dalit women and their sufferings are justified and supported by society and religion. Untouchables suffer from wounded psyche and seek for healing. A Dalit woman’s problem extends from illness to permanent uncleanness. She is not allowed to enter the holy places of worship and is considered ritually impure, and threat to holiness. She is restricted, denied spiritual enrichment and social interaction, and thus is seen and treated as an ‘untouchable’, a woman without dignity and honour. Both religion and society, have restricted, and confined her to loneliness, in addition to physical suffering. Instead of liberating her from pain, the sufferer is re-victimized by society and religion. Surviving as carrier of pain, she is destined to live on the edges of society, untouched and unloved. Traditionally, girls in the family are taught that young women should be obedient, submissive and subservient.

Dalit literature is the literature about the Dalits. The literature of the oppressed class, under Indian caste system, forms an important and distinct part of Indian literature. Sreenivasan says, “Dalit literature matters, and matters significantly, both because of the power and quality of the writing and its positive contribution to the awakening of social consciousness” (46). One of the first Dalit writers was Madara Chennaiah, an 11th-century cobbler-saint who lived in the reign of Western Chalukyas, regarded by scholars as the ‘father of Vachana poetry’. Another poet who finds mention is Dohara Kakkaiah, a Dalit by birth, six of whose
confessional poems, survive. Though Dalit narratives have been a part of the Indian social narratives since 11th century onwards, with the work Cekkilar’s *Periya Puranam* (*Big Epic*) documenting Dalit life, Dalit literature emerged into prominence, as a collective voice after 1960. It started with Marathi, and soon appeared in Hindi, Kannada, Telugu and Tamil, through self narratives, such as poems, short stories and autobiographies known for fierce and stark realism, and contribution to the Dalit politics.

In the modern age, Dalit literature received its first impetus with the advent of leaders, Mahatma Phule and Ambedkar in Maharashtra, who brought forth the issues of the Dalits through their writings. By 1960s, Dalit literature saw a fresh crop of new writers such as Baburao Bagul, Bandhu Madhav and Shankarao Kharat, though its formal form came into being with the publication of Little magazine movement. *Dalit Voice*, a political magazine, started in 1981, was another force in the rise of Dalit literature in India. A Christian Dalit activist with the pen name Bama Faustina, wrote novels which provide a firsthand account of discrimination by upper-caste nuns and priests in South India. *Karukku* (1992) by Bama is considered a watershed. To M.F.Jilthe, “the autobiographical compositions arouse sympathy and guilty conscience among the people saddled in superior positions by virtue of their caste” (A Note on Dalit literature 26). Severe insult and contemptible behaviour of oppressive upper caste persons made hell the lives of the Dalits, along with the question of hunger and survival. Filthy food like gobraha (cakes made from cow dung) was given to them for the hard labour. In the *Untouchables*, (1935) Mulk Raj Anand has portrayed the social, cultural and economic conditions of the Dalits through the untouchable sweeper boy, Bakha, in North India. Bakha, reflected the status of the
Dalits that prevailed in the contemporary Indian society. Thus, the Indian caste system is basically a socio-cultural one based on the hierarchical division of labour, supported by social, cultural, economic, and political factors. As such, it depends on a human being looking at others in terms of the work and the order of society based on the division of labour, exclusively determined by birth and legitimized by religious theory and practice.

In Marathi, a whole generation of Dalit writers have developed it as narratives of resistance against caste. Sarankumar Limbaley’s Akkarmasi and Daya Pawar’s Baluta, written in Marathi, were translated into many Indian languages. In Hindi, autobiographies were written to express the sub-human living conditions of the Dalits such as Om Prakash Valmiki’s Joothan, Mohandas Namisray’s Apne-Apine Pinjarey and Surajpal Chouhans’s Tiriskrat. In Tiriskrat and Apne-Apine Pinjarey, the writers have given the account of the other side of reality, in which the Dalits are also divided according to caste hierarchy; the Jatavs consider themselves superior to the Chamars. One of the striking features of such writings is the vehemently social critique of varna vyavastha which has declared the Dalits as inferior and untouchable in society. In the struggle, to remove evil, which is admittedly a blot on humanity, autobiographies served as moral sources for Dalit movement. They split open the pain and sufferings undergone by the Dalits under the rigidity of tradition. All such autobiographers lived in cities and they revisit the villages in those writings where they have spent childhood and suffered the cruel experiences of untouchability. The true stories woven in the autobiographies reveal that caste identity predominates all other identities and a man’s caste brings innumerable obstacles in life. Aesthetics, debated among the Dalit writers, demanded different parameters to judge the Dalit
The argument is that since the Dalits do not have access to education and high literature, they portray reality which torment them and are forced to live like beastly creatures.

Dalit literature, one of protest against all forms of exploitation, is based on class, race, caste and occupation. It has been acknowledged as a literature in its own right, and its reverberations are now being heard all around the globe. Waman Nimbalkar opines: “Dalit literature has breathed a new life in this emotional world. Dalit literature has blossomed to provide expression and meaning to life that was suppressed for so many years. It started spitting fire at the atrocities and injustice inflicted upon Dalit life. It started proving its heroic nature (through heroes) in stories and novels” (Dalit Autobiographies: Graphs of pain 15). In their world, men are brutally murdered, women, stripped and molested, for centuries and generation after generation. These are Untouchables who invite death if dared to quench their thirst from a common pond. The Brahmin's God is not their god. Their problem is neither ideological nor philosophical. The reality of their life is hideously shocking, beyond the capacity of fantasy or imagination. Their tragedy is universal, trampling them down, disfiguring humanity, and subjected to the worst form of atrocities.

Mahasweta Devi (1926 - ), one of the two authors taken for parallel study, does not belong to the marginalized community; yet she voices for the poor. Like Harriot Elizabeth Beecher Stowe, a White, who voiced for the Black slaves in Uncle Tom's Cabin, Mahasweta Devi, though not a Dalit, writes about the sufferings of the Dalits. The novelist, a rare combination of writer and crusader against oppression, is known for the compassionate crusade through art and activism to claim for the Dalits and the tribal people, a just and honourable place. It is therefore, an apt action on the
part of the French government, to honour her with the second highest civilian award of France “officer des arts et des lettres” (officer of arts and literature).

Mahasweta Devi, born in Dhaka of undivided India, inherited literary traits from Manish Ghatak, the father, a poet and a novelist, and the mother, Dhariti Devi, a writer and social worker. She, had the first schooling in Dhaka in East Bengal (now Bangladesh) but after Partition, she moved to West Bengal. After finishing high school at Beltala Girls’ School in Calcutta in 1942, she attended Asutosh College of Calcutta University (1943–1944), and joined Vishvabharati University in Santiniketan and completed BA (Hons) in English in 1946. She did private tutoring, before taking a job with Indian government in 1949. Though she never joined political party, she was accused of being communist and lost job the following year. Mahasweta Devi turned to writing light fiction for Sachitra Bharat, a Bengali weekly, under the pen name Sumitra Devi, and published the first book, Jhansir Rani (The Queen of Jhansi), a fictionalized biography in Bengali in 1956. Her first novel, Nati, written in 1957, followed by four more novels in the next two years which chronicled the social realities of Indian lives. Early years of marriage had been constant struggle for her and those were the days of dire poverty as well. She divorced her husband, a cardholding member of the CPI in 1962, and took to serious writing and did not subscribe to any particular ideology. Her leanings were leftist since the age of twenty and literature too springs from a fight for the rights of the oppressed and the downtrodden. In an interview to Enakshi Chatterjee, the novelist reveals, “Though I am a Left-winger, I am not affiliated to any party. I think my political agenda is more than evident in my writing” (Mahasweta Devi in conversation with Enakshi Chatterjee 168). In 1963, she earned M.A. in English Literature from Calcutta.
University and taught English at Bijoygarh Jyotish Roy College, a small private one that served the poor students in a refugee area, until 1982. She took a two-year leave of absence from the college in 1982 and joined Jugantar, a daily Bengali newspaper, as reporter. In 1984, retiring from the college, she became a full-time writer and activist, and joined Bartaman, a Bengali daily in 1986 and wrote weekly column until 1991. Mahasweta Devi, wrote primarily in the mother tongue Bengali and has published many novels, twenty collections of short stories, five plays, and numerous essays and articles. She has also served as the editor of Bortika (Torch), a Bengali Quarterly journal, dedicated to the cause of the oppressed communities within India, since 1980. When her father was the editor of the journal, Bortika, it was, “a forum where small peasants, agricultural labourers, tribals, workers in factories, rickshaw pullers” would air out their problems and the socially downtrodden people, “could write about their life and problems” (Ghatak xii). Regarding her journalistic career, Mahasweta Devi, spoke at the Frankfurt Book Fair in 1986:

As a journalist I play the same role as an editor. I travel extensively in the villages and collect information about the people’s sufferings, complaints, political exploitation, their protests and wrote about these in the press… As an editor, journalist and writer I experience no conflict between the three roles.” (qtd. in Katyal 27)

Indicative of her prolificacy, Mahasweta Devi’s works in Bengali are being published in 40 volumes. Along with creative writing, exposing the brutal oppression of the tribals and the downtrodden in the Indian society, the novelist is equally well known for her activism. Jagannathan says “Mahasweta Devi has not only participated and led protest movements of tribals and other members of the underclass but is
continually involved in the engendering of a consciousness of their rights. For this purpose, she has used, among other things, Bortika” (Champion of the Downtrodden 11). Beginning in the 1970s, she intervened directly by bombarding the government with complaint letters, publishing a profusion of articles documenting abuses against tribal communities, helping them lodge grievances, setting aside tribal rivalries, and thus achieving their development. She is also the recipient of the prestigious 1995 Jnanpath award, and the 1996 Magsaysay award. The novelist donated the prize money from the awards to tribal communities and continues through writings to establish a dignified position for them in India.

At the center of a half-century of tumultuous changes, the lifetime of Mahasweta Devi has spanned the British period, Indian Independence, and fifty years of postcolonial turmoil. Her writings have contributed to Indian literature, a new life and inspired two generations of writers, journalists and filmmakers. Maitreyi Chatterjee remarks: “Mahasweta Devi has excelled in the docu-fiction form. Reality is frozen in time to represent the deprived of the earth. None of the conclusions are forced or wish fulfillment. They are inevitable as destiny” (Three faces of Eve 20). A celebrated writer and tireless activist, for five decades, she has led a battle on behalf of the De-notified tribes of India-indigenous groups. The Naxalite movement of the late 1960's and early 1970's exerted tremendous influence on the novelist. In an interview in 1983, Mahasweta Devi pointed to the movement as the first major event, she has felt as "an urge and an obligation to document" (Bandyopandhyay viii). The leftist militant movement, which started in West Bengal, began as a rural revolt of landless workers and tribal people against landlords and moneylenders. In urban centers, the movement attracted participation from student groups. Mahasweta Devi's
*Hajar Churashir Ma (Mother of 1084)* deals with an upper middle class woman whose world is forever changed, when the son met with brutal death for his Naxalite beliefs.

Another important motif in the novels of Mahasweta Devi involves the position of tribal communities within India. The novelist, a long-time champion for the political, social and economic advancement of these communities, characterizes them as "suffering spectators of India that is traveling towards the twenty first century" (*Imaginary Maps*, xi). These concerns are seen in the novels such as *Aranyer Adhikar (Rights of the Forest)* (1977) and in the anthology *Nairhite Megh (Clouds in the Southwestern Sky)* (1979). The novels deal with the sad plight and struggles faced by the tribals and bonded labourers in the southern part of Bihar, in the last nineteenth century. These people also suffered in the hands of the British people. To Maitreya Ghatak, “Ruthless exploitation” (X) of the tribals occupies more space in these novels. They focus the disintegration of the agrarian and social order of the people and the militant struggle against the intruders under Birsa’s leadership, a century ago. Mahasweta Devi travelled throughout the rural areas of Bengal in 1980 – 1981 and found out the causes which bar the progression of the tribal and the bonded labourers. The novelist wrote in newspapers and journals about the struggles of the poor and their desperate conditions, stressing the need for educating the village urchins, providing clean drinking water to all and making arrangements for the abundant water supply for irrigation. Her activist writings were received well by the readers and soon the name of the novelist became a household one in Bengal.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, who has translated two collections of Mahasweta Devi's stories including those in *Imaginary Maps* into English, suggests:
This interplay of activism and literary writing in Devi’s fiction can be of substantial interest to current academic discourse and practices. Devi’s work suggests a model in which activism and writing can reflect upon each other, providing a necessary vision of internationality, and the possibility of constructing a new kind of responsibility for the cultural worker. *(Imaginary Maps, xxvi)*

Mahasweta Devi’s mind is preoccupied with the issues of the tribals, and did what was best for them. She felt that only through “organized group action” *(Ghatak xv)* the people could solve their problems. In 1981 she formed an organization for the upliftment of the poor in Palamau district along with the local journalist Rameshwaram, and took care to document the travails of the people, which reflect the pathetic condition of the unfortunate people of Palamau. They suffered due to their poor economy and cruel exploitation. Clan and caste system prevailed there. Mahasweta Devi writes, “I say ‘India’, through the location of these stories, is Palamau. Palamau is a mirror of India” *(qtd in Chanda vii)*. The novelist had a strong belief that through the organization, people could plan, and implement, communal development programmes. Enakshi Chatterjee opines, “The plight of the tribals and of bonded labourers in the southern districts of Bihar has moved a number of other writers, but nobody has ever plunged himself or herself so completely into the tribal experience like Mahasweta” *(In Splendid Isolation: Enakshi Chatterjee pays tribute to Mahasweta Devi, Winner of the 1996 Jnanpith Award 5).* She linked herself in organizing and starting small groups and firmly believed that reformation would be the result of the small groups in the “grass-roots-level-organization” *(Ghatak xv)*. The Government of India acknowledged Mahasweta Devi’s unwavering
support to the poor and privileged her with many desirable awards. In 1979, she was the recipient of Sahitya Akademi award for the memorable novel *Aranyer Adhikar*. In 1986, she was honoured with Padmashree, for the dedicated service among the tribals and Dehikottam (1999), and the selfless service among the socially deprived people.

Mahasweta Devi’s works are translated into languages such as Hindi, Assamese, Telugu, Malayalam, Marathi, Oriya, Punjabi, and Gujarati. As Meenakshi Sharma asserts, “This writer who refuses to be classified as only a Bangla writer, characteristically regards her works as being true to the lives of indigenous people all over the world, which is why she encourages translations of her writings” (162). Besides these Indian languages, the works are also translated into English, Italian, Japanese, and French. Folk Literature fascinated Mahasweta Devi and she has visited the tribal areas to capture the real facets of them, by collecting folk tales and folk songs. In an interview to Siva Sankari, Mahasweta Devi reveals,

I used to read a lot and also travel in order to collect data. All my work evolved this way. I would travel to the villages, meet the carpenters, the potters the blacksmiths and others and collect information from them. It is the responsibility of the writers to reproduce the words of their original form. (99)

Mahasweta Devi’s the *Mother of 1084* (1986) is a powerful thought provoking, critical assessment of the enigmatic social revolution, the Naxalite movement. The novel pictures men, condemned as being misguided, dying under a hail of police bullets for the welfare of the poor. The protagonist, a middle aged woman, Sujata Chatterjee, of Calcutta, a fairly affluent social class, has lost the youngest son, Brati Chatterjee. She is entrapped in an unhappy marriage and the
husband, Dibyanath, a corrupt accountant, has long sold his soul to evil. Sujata, despite being beautiful and Loreto educated, is pushed into the marriage by the parents and has submitted to the incessant demands of the husband and the mother in law. The former has used her exclusively to gratify his body’s vices, and the latter, blamed the daughter-in-law for the son’s perversions. After bearing three children, Jyoti, Neepa and Tuli who are modeled exclusively on their father and the ideals of the grandmother, Sujata is reluctant to bear more children, but, is rendered pregnant once again. The sorrowful mother, is dreary of the prospect of childbirth, yet as the time approaches, the pangs of the motherly conscience overwhelms her apprehensions. The moment she realized that “her life and the child’s was in danger” (4), Sujata demanded to save the child regardless of the risk entailed. In the birth of the youngest son, Brati, she succeeded in knitting a bond of love, which was unknown to her, a relation that was poles apart from the other children.

Sujata took utmost care to shield Brati from the worldly influences of the father. In time, the father realized that the little boy absolutely hated him, and had never cared to discover the son. Brati, found nothing in common with his brother and sisters. In the threshold of adolescence, he came to know of his father as a womanizer. It was beyond his comprehension as to how his mother could tolerate such a man. Often he alluded to the mother on the question, to which she maintained a dogged silence. He believed that someday he would be able to take the mother away from the wicked house, and ironically the mother also felt that the moment Brati was able to stand on his feet, she would do the same.

Brati drifted into the world of the Naxal movement, and the parents were totally oblivious of the fact. One day, Sujata received a phone call, that the son was
shot dead, which drastically changed her life. An archenemy of democracy, Brati had leagues with the Naxal gangs. For Dibyanath, who had his reputation at stake, after intense efforts, managed to keep his son’s name out of the papers. The dead body of Brati was not handed to the mother and he had the tag of a misguided youth, and the case was closed as No. 1084. He became a stigma, a conspicuous blot, on name of the family, hindering their careers and relationships, and so, had to be effaced through every device possible, from their lives. For Sujata, the light of her life was gone, and all that remained, were memories of another day which would bring many unanswered questions reverberating in her mind, “Was there anything in the way she had brought up Brati that had made him into number 1084 in the decade that headed towards liberalism? Or was there something that she could have done, or not done, to make him number 1084? Where did she fail?” (15)

Sujata discovered a stranger in the son that she had never comprehended. To the society, these rebellious young men are also strangers, whose motives are obscured by upper class societal selfishness, and decadence. The hypocritical intellectuals, the decadent elite and the apathetic middle class, have failed to comprehend the disillusioned, rebellious youth. From the family of Somu, a poor, friend of Brati, who had also perished with him, Sujata discovered that Brati and his friends were betrayed by a new member of their group. She was aghast to realize that unlike the elite, those simple folk attempted their best to dissuade their children from protesting against the establishment. She got an eerie glimpse into the ways in which the youth, are brutally tortured, and murdered by the guardians of justice. Accidentally, Sujata met Nandini, a plain looking, girlfriend of her son. The girl had been taken into preventive detention, and was tortured with thousand watts bulbs
glaring at the naked eyes, with cigarette being clamped to the skin of the face. Close to blindness, her anger remains, and does not know to find an outlet for the same. The family, the society and the country at large have failed to understand her motive. With death staring at their faces, the Naxalite youth never faltered.

Sujata found fault with the decadent society for the death of the son; the martyrdom they espoused, envisages a new world order. The decadent elite are not interested in the new ideas, for, they are, warped in their own stereotypical ideals. Those who betray the cause, are more interested in jobs, life and security. Brati and the other young men of the Naxalite Movement, are thoroughly disillusioned with the traditional edifices of an essentially unethical, society. Thus, Mahasweta Devi’s the Mother of 1084 pictures an epic tale of a generation lost, of martyrs ignored, and a stinging indictment of the decadent society, the apathetic and callous countrymen who had rejected their cause and souls without comprehending them.

The Glory of Sri Sri Ganesh (1981) is considered as one of Mahasweta Devi’s most significant work, on the lives of the underprivileged, as a contrast to their powerful overlords. The title of the work itself becomes a tool for subversion which takes the reader through a multilayered narrative, into the socio-economic malaise of post-independence rural India. The sprawling work narrates the sufferings of the landless and the low caste Lachhima, Rukmani, Mohor and Haroa at the hands of the rich Malik such as Medininarayan Singh and Ganesh. The locale of the novel is the village, Barha, where the Rajput Malik were the masters of the low caste. In Barha, the village heads were the soldiers of the former rajas. In the village, there would be nine Malik families, and the rest were bought subjects, the descendants of those who had taken loan from the Malik. Thus, they became bonded slaves. The Malik had
kept the village underdeveloped. The novel commences with the birth of Tritirthanarayan (Ganesh), an infant boy born with a tooth in the mouth. The mother Chhotki, seeing a sharp tooth in his mouth, screamed and died. The father Medininarayan Singh, employed Gulal, a barber-woman, and midwife and Lachhima, her granddaughter, to look after the child. Lachhima, the low caste has to be the keep of the Malik. Ganesh, a sadist, encouraged his father to beat the poor and the helpless. The Maliks were rich cunning masters, who knew the tricks to usurp the land and extract free labour from the poor. They did not mind giving out land for sharecropping. The sharecroppers took loan from the Maliks and after paying their share, the former had nothing left with them, and thus got bonded. By repaying the interest on loan, they had lost their own piece of land, and to stay alive, were forced to sharecrop or serve the Maliks. Pallavi Shah, the twenty-three year old daughter of Tejlal, a rich businessman and later the Finance Minister of India, is a social worker, who wanted to serve the lowest of the low and the most deprived. She identified the Bhangis in Barha as the most dispossessed and came there to help them. Due to her bitter experience, she suffered nervous breakdown and was removed to the nursing home for psychiatric treatment. Lachhima, whose bitterness and anger of a lifetime against Medininarayan Singh and Ganesh, was liberated at the end of the novel. When Ganesh begged her to save his life, she consented, but on her own terms. Lachhima, screamed and awakened the angry mob and handed Ganesh, who was killed by the rebels. The novelist's corrosive humour and cryptic style are at their best as she takes on issues of agrarian land relations, inter-caste violence, rural development and the position of women in rural India.
In *Titu Mir* (2000), Mahasweta Devi depicts the real story of Titu Mir, a rebel, against the Zamindars and the British colonial system in the 19th century Bengal, which was part of British India. He was influenced by Wahabi seers, who preached a mixture of militant Islam and anti-colonial thought and wished for religious and political reforms in Bengal. On his return from the pilgrimage to Meca, Titu Mir organized the peasants of the native village Badur, against the Zamindars and the British colonialists. He also wore the ‘tahband’, a tube shaped garment worn around the waist, in preference to the dhoti, seen as more overtly Hindu, and enjoined his followers to do likewise.

Titu Mir opposed a number of discriminatory measures in force. The rift between his followers and himself on one side, and the local Zamindars supported by the British rulers on the other side, continued to widen, and armed conflict broke out at several places. He, served a Zamindar as a 'lathial or 'lethel', (a fighter with the quarterstaff, which in Bengal is made of bamboo) and had trained his men in hand to hand combat and the use of the bamboo staff. The followers of Titu Mir, believed to have grown larger, readied themselves for prolonged armed conflict. They built the fort of bamboo at Narikelbaria, near the town of Barasat. It was surrounded by a high double curtain wall of bamboo stakes filled in with sun-baked mud cladding.

Titu Mir declared independence from the British, and the regions comprising the current districts of twenty four Parganas, Nadia and Faridpur came under his control. The private armies of the Zamindars and the forces of the British, met with a series of defeats at the hands of his men as a result of the strike-and-retreat guerrilla tactics. The British forces, armed with cannon and muskets, mounted concerted attacks on 14 November 1831, on Titu Mir and his followers. With their simple
swords and spears, Titu Mir and his forces could not withstand the might of modern weapons, and were overwhelmed. The bamboo castle was destroyed, and Titu Mir was killed along with several of his followers. The commanding officer of the British forces noted his opponent’s bravery in despatches, and commented on the strength and resilience of bamboo as a material for fortification, since he had to pound it with artillery for a surprisingly long time, before it gave way. The saga of the bravery of Titu Mir and the bamboo castle continue to be a source of inspiration to the Bengali people, and is believed to have inspired the freedom fighters of Bangladesh in the liberation war of 1971. Inspired by the real legend of Titu Mir, Mahasweta Devi wrote the novella *Titu Mir*.

Maya Angelou and Mahasweta Devi, who are committed towards the social order of society, create awareness among the oppressed, that they are not inferior. Maya Angelou criticizes the American society, which is not compassionate to the coloured people, the natives. Correspondingly, Mahasweta Devi, a moralist, finds fault with the Bengali society, which is unsympathetic towards the downtrodden. Within their activist writings, they expect changes in the society. Mahasweta Devi voices for the oppressed, whereas Maya Angelou is herself oppressed. Angelou’s achievement is in breaking the colour line and inspiring the Blacks in America, thereby bringing a wide transformation in their minds. Her education energizes and wakes up every Black American woman from the age-old labyrinth of servitude and repose. Angelou and Mahasweta Devi have succeeded in their mission to instill in the minds of the downtrodden that they are in no way inferior, and should be treated equally regardless of race, class and caste discrimination. The writers’ involvement
with the agony and sufferings of the demoralized and the downtrodden make them
genial towards the marginalized, thereby mirroring the reality of the society and
essentialising social and ethical concerns.