CHAPTER TWO

THEMES OF CONFRONTATION AND COMMITMENT

Art lives upon discussion, upon experiment, upon curiosity, upon variety of attempt upon the exchange of views and the comparison of stand points. (James 504).

Mahasweta Devi and Lorraine Hansberry are social realists. Their oeuvre largely discusses the sufferings of the underprivileged and they bring into light the confrontations of the mainstream: rural landlords, zamindars, government officials, sophisticated upper class men, hypocrisies of urbanism etc. They use their characters as a liberating force and bring out their thesis. While critical realists focus on the hypocrisies prevailing in the society and provide a critique of the society, social realists tend to move a step forward, making reverberating changes, taking political sides with the oppressed and fight for their improvement against the dominant discourses. Their oeuvre more often comprises stories around contemporary social and political realities. The social exploitation depicted by them is not singular but keep recurring incessantly. Their plots are the manifestation of the underprivileged amid complexities. They present a realistic portrayal of the sufferings and the sad tales of the exploited. Both Devi and Hansberry create situations and characters in order that the ideology of the downtrodden comes on the stage and they indulge in confrontations with the mainstream who are already in confrontations with the exploited, thereby expressing their utmost commitment, taking political sides. This is the leitmotif in their oeuvre.

Confrontation means: face to face combat, war of ideology, war of weapon, etc. Confrontation is an outcome of conflict arising at two levels; within and with the
society. The conflict with the society may be within the family or with antagonistic groups. Conflict arises out of lack of contentment, economic depression, search for identity, betrayal, money, corruption, ‘politics’ and ‘lust’.

Biologically, human body is a complex phenomenon and so is human existence in sociological terms. Man has to live adjusting himself to his surroundings. This process of accommodation itself is but a change towards something in involving a conflict both with external phenomena and internal:

Conflict emerges whenever two or more persons or groups seek to possess the same object or occupy the same space or the same exclusive position or play incompatible roles or maintain incompatible goals, or undertake mutually incompatible means for achieving their purposes. (Engade 67)

Thus conflict becomes the quintessence of human existence. Both Devi and Hansberry struggle a lot for the uplift of the exploited through their oeuvre and are keen in unveiling the ‘double faced’ attitude, hypocrisies, conflicts and confrontations of the mainstream and the process itself, with commitment: “… history does not give us complete knowledge or the final struggle but to more history” (Singh 386-7).

Mahasweta Devi and Lorraine Hansberry brought to the nations insights into the nature of confrontation and commitment. They spoke out about the evils that plagued India and America. They warned of the consequences of a dream denied and of the suffering and death that result when commitment is not strong enough. Their plays confront a world where evils envelope, but their confrontation avoids shrieking
and shrillness. Rather, a spirit of compassion dominates their work in a commitment to life and optimism rather than death and nihilism.

In the wedding of confrontation and commitment, they find roots in an earlier period and assault the world view of the theatre of the absurd. Their people are ‘infected’ with the possibility of change and growth; they are not victims of the stasis that surrounds Samuel Beckett’s characters. Like Devi and Hansberry, their characters know “that greed and malice, brutality, indifference, and, perhaps above all else, ignorance – abound in this world. Even so, they are not automatically defeated; their struggles can have meaning” (*TYGB* 24).

‘Tragedy,’ says Aristotle:

…is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play...

in the form of action, not of narrative; through pity and far effecting the proper purgation of these emotions. By ‘language embellished’, I mean language into which rhythm, ‘harmony’, and song enter. (19)

The plays of both Devi and Hansberry strictly fall on the Aristotelian principle of a good plot construction which introduces the problem of the marginalized, the beginning, their ambition for liberation, the middle and the result of their struggle, the end.

While Mahasweta Devi focuses on the hypocrisies of the Indian social set up, Hansberry portrays the American social set up. But both these writers have worked hard to present the condition of the exploited in the rural as well as the urban setting. The landlords reign supreme in the village while the politicians and upper class men
reign supreme in the town, operating their ‘political discourses’ pertaining to
discriminations based on race, caste, class, gender, etc. in order to maintain their
supremacy. Both Mahasweta Devi and Lorraine Hansberry take up the issues related
to discriminations and have fought throughout their lifetime, through their works and
express their inner consciousness which is full of commitment for the
underprivileged.

Devi’s career as an activist started during her visit to Palamu. Moving from
one place to the other place, she witnessed the savage impact on indigenous society of
absentee landlordism, a despoiled environment, debt bondage and neglect of state
duty. The Palamu incident brought change in her. So, she had portrayed humiliations
and neglect that had reduced the people to a subhuman existence.

In Five Plays, Mahasweta Devi’s themes as well as characters are real as
Samik Bandhopadhyay said: “The subjects of her stories have become the subject of
her life” (vii). Her plots are sharp, and she uses art as a medium to transcend ideology
and the inhuman treatment meted out by the underprivileged at the hands of the
landlords:

The term ‘landlord’ includes all rent-receivers above the actual
 cultivator who did not sublet. The term ‘zamindar’ would have
excluded all other grades of rent-receivers who represented
landlordism no less than the estate-holders. Sub-infeudation in its
spread-effect strengthened landlordism. (Palit 9)

In their political confrontation with the state and economic bargaining with the
primary producers, all grades of rent-receivers seemed to uphold the institution
against its possible subversion or transformation. In the scramble for rent and power,
the interactional position of landlords might have upset the hierarchy and the social system as a whole. The zamindars and the landlords figure more prominently than the intermediaries in it, it is because they were the rural elites par excellence and contemporary sources usually mentioned them and held them responsible for the good or ill of the agrarian system: “They had zemindars in Bengal, in the Circars and some other places and the opposition which they made to the collectors was one reason for putting them in, perhaps the strongest reason” (Palit 9).

During 1970’s, Bengal was severely affected by famine and with the policies of the government; there was a period of emergency and thousands of persons indulged in revolt. Issues of poverty, theft, food etc. were serious problems. Even people were arrested for theft of food and punishments were severe. Even the relief allotted by the government was swindled by the landlords and politicians. The social as well as the economical problems lead in lot many youths turning into rebels and there were many naxalite movements. There was serious conflict between the antagonistic stratum; the main stream and the downtrodden. The mainstream was always in confrontation with the downtrodden and cruel methods were employed by the people of the upper stratum in controlling or having high-handedness over the deprived. They employed all means to keep the voiceless meek, if failed into dead bodies. Mahasweta Devi was very keen in analyzing the socio-political and economic condition of the rural Bengal, its impact on the city life and the problems of the downtrodden society in leading life. Such a case is presented in Mother of 1084.

The play exhibits the incidents of a single day in the life of the poignant character, Sujata the mother of corpse number 1084, is from a good affluent middle class. She is a sensitive wife and a loving mother. But she is a stranger in her own household where she is reduced to a mere cog. In contra, she feels at home in the
company of her younger son, Brati Chatterjee, who, unlike her other children, is a man of commitment. And it is his life and activities that Sujata is unaware of, which add the tragic agony of the play. Exactly two years after the demise of her dear son, Brati, Sujata comes to know of the facts behind his sacrifice. She is aware of Brati’s ways on her birthday, which is a coincident. The learning process continues till the end of the play involving her in a series of encounters with the people; Somu’s mother and Nandini whose cause Brati championed. At the end of the play Sujata, shorn of all prejudices, finds herself striking a kinship with her son’s ideology as Sujata bursts out angrily against the insensitive audience.

_Mother of 1084_ adheres to the Aristotelian theory of drama with a beginning, middle and an end. The identification of the corpse number 1084 forms the beginning of the play. Sujata’s discovery of Brati’s ideology constitutes the middle and her furious appeal to the audience forms the ending of the play.

Being the most dominant character in the play, Sujata Chatterjee is one of those victims whose kith and kin had been done away with in a confrontation with the people in power. In fact, with Sujata, the playwright seeks to bring to light the darker areas of life where the subjugation of the innocent continues unabated.

Sujata enlists herself in the list of the terrors or what one might call as ‘naxal’. She finds Brati’s call and commitment as valid. Sujata severs all her ties with the family and joins the folk expressing her utmost social commitment and responsibility as a mother. She wants herself to be called as ‘Mother of 1084’ rather than the mother of Bini or Tuli.

Dibyanath Chatterjee represents a part of the whole who indulges in absolute hypocrisy. In order to protect his public image, he prepares himself for the worst. As
A.G. Gardiner remarks, a man has three statures in his life namely public, private and secret. Though Dibayanath has a secret life, he never bothers it. Rather he wants his mask unremoved for which he is prepared to wound anyone’s sentiments. When there is a call from the police Morgue, that Brati, his younger son is encountered, he remains unaffected. Unlike Sujata, he hushes up everything:

DIBYANATH. I need the car. I’m going to Chaudhari. You. Ring up Dutta. Tell him…why don’t you go over straightaway?... Jyoti, there may be time till. Isn’t there a relation of your mother-in-law’s in the police?...Ring him up. Chaudhari must help hush it up. (Mother, Five Plays 4-5)

The nonchalance attitude in Dibyanath and his children is the dominant characteristic in many elites who indulge in narcissism. The mask of detachment they put on is only to escape punishment. Devi unveils such hypocrisies through Sujata. The transformation in Sujata is hastened through a catalyst. The catalyst is none other than her son Brati.

Brati, the younger son of Sujata, like many other youth is hopeless in the present social system that harbours many evils which flourishes on the innocence of the gullible people, responds accordingly to the People’s Movement sparked off with the peasant revolt in the rural West Bengal and spread to the cities when the urban ideologies, out of a sense of urgency, decides to take part in it.

Brati’s world of activism is discovered through his mother Sujata, who is the principal character. Her meeting with Somu’s mother and Nandini marks the development of the play.
*Mother of 1084* is couched in irony. Sujata suffocates under the yoke of the stifling ‘values’ enjoined on her by the patrilineal society. But she dares to extricate herself from them. She is aware of Dibyanath’s womanizing and corrupt practices, but she is submissive. Rather she escapes all the reticence by getting up an employment in the bank. At times she resents the immoral acts of her children but she continues to discharge her familial duties, bearing calmly all kinds of oppression. She is very fond of her younger son, Brati who unlike her other children is a man of ideology and integrity. Sujata finds in him an alter-home that she misses in her household. The natural bond between the mother and the son is extraordinarily evoked by the playwright.

Brati, being an ideal rebel, hides his true self known to Sujata for he never wants the familial sentiments presist upon his revolutionary fervor. For Brati, the ambition in life is to liberate the mankind from the yoke of the exploitative mechanism and to create a class-less society where people enjoy equal rights.

But the officials like Saroj Pal regard the young rebels as “cancerous growth on the body of Democracy” (*Mother, Five Plays* 9) and view their activities as a threat to the establishment. Hence, there is a conflict pull between the antagonistic; exploiter and the exploited – leading to senseless assaults and counter – assaults and chain of murder and violence in the name of fake encounters. Brati, the 1084, is pathetically killed along with his friends – Somu, Partha and Bijit, in such an encounter with the hooligans of the ruling party.

Sujata’s visit to the people who are beyond the confines of her experience is, in a way, a confrontation which opens up the secret arena of understanding. The play is full of such confrontations which serve a two-fold purpose-of letting Sujata come face to face with the realities of life and of self-realization.
Discovering the past life of Brati, Sujata is in conflict with the world around her. Forced to adapt herself to the existing social norms, Sujata has foolishly become a part of them. They have gone into her psyche. Yet, she is not bold enough to bring about a revolution to change them. As a result, she pays no heed to Brati’s revolt against the age-old social values. And what is more surprising is that Sujata has been pathetically ignorant of her fault until Nandini, turns:

NANDINI. It’s a deadly time when people do not belong to one another by virtue of kinship or ties of blood. Everyone remains a stranger these days to every other one. It’s a crime to allow this to persist. It’s an obligation these days to know one’s son.

SUJATA. Is it an obligation for parents alone?

NANDINI. It’s for you to take the first step. Isn’t it your obligation to set a model for the younger generation to follow? Why do you demand loyalty by virtue of relationship? Why don’t you try to earn it by virtue of your integrity? You won’t be honest, won’t forge relationships, and then put the whole blame on us. (Mother, Five Plays 24)

Further, the play portrays the inhuman treatment and tortures meted out by the underprivileged at the hands of the official machinery which reminds us of the colonial period. Saroj Pal, a representative bureaucracy, surpasses all those persecutors who have come to stay in our memory by virtue of being notorious. In the interrogation scene the police officer employs savage means to get information from Nandini, which is highly pathetic:
SAROJ PAL. (the same voice) What was your relationship with Brati…(Bends close to her, lights a cigarette, presses the lighted cigarette to Nandini’s cheek. She screams.)…He puffs at cigarette and then presses it again to Nandini’s cheek. The questions and the pattern continue. (Mother, Five Plays 28)

The episode of the complaint of Somu’s father explores the horrible nature of police officials who carry out the orders of the rich landlords in exchange of handsome rewards. Like others, he believes that the government would come to his rescue. He runs to the police for help when the outrageous mob attacks and kills his son, Somu and others. But all his hopes of saving them are shattered, which is clear from the statement of Somu’s mother, “…they didn’t do a thing. That was more than he could bear, and he died of the shock. O God! No justice? He went on asking till he was dead” (19).

Consequently, a ‘whole generation’ of people between ‘sixteen and forty’ is wiped out. And the survivors of the killed either learn to adjust or revolt. The revelations made by Nandini and Somu’s mother are severe indictment of the Establishment’s inhuman attitude towards its rebels. Nandini says: “Nothing’s changed. Thousands of young men rot in the prisons without trials, they are denied the status of political. …Torture continues with greater sophistication and secrecy” (29).

As the play progresses one could realize the supreme irony of the situation – the men who like Brati, committed to the cause of humanity, are subjected to physical torture and death whereas the turncoats like Anindya go scot-free. And the reward for the mothers like Sujata is only a sophisticated number – “1084” (Mother, Five Plays 35) to identify the corpses of their sons among a thousand other corpses at the official mortuary.
The number ‘1084’ conferred on the corpse of Brati symbolises at once the countless horrors that gripped the common life during the brutal suppression of the People’s Movement in the seventies and the Establishment’s endeavour to reduce its insurgents to the level of an insignificant being.

The rift between Dibyanath and Sujata has widened further when the former accuses her of being responsible for the death of Brati. Baseless though it is, the accusation accelerates her realization of which side she is on ideologically. She seems to have felt relieved of the burden of sinful life she has lived all these years. But in a society which is full of Dibyanaths and Saroj Pals, she seems to have realized that a greater revolt and higher sacrifice like Brati’s is essential to safeguard human values.

Sujata is a working mother for whom her work, per se, is a form of protest and self-assertion against the patriarchal authority of her husband. But she cannot help obliging the familial responsibilities. Forced to take part in the festive occasion, Sujata does not feel at ease. Thus, a stage is set for the inevitable when Saroj Pal, the DCDD (Deputy Commissioner, Detective Department), a friend of her son, Tony turns up to convey his best wishes. His presence strikes a chill into her heart. She feels hemmed in on all sides by the enemy. The direction reads: “She grips her throat to stop the scream from breaking forth. There is a state of disbelief in her eyes” (34). She is reminded of Saroj Pal’s cold and business-like attitude on the day she was summoned to morgue to identify Brati’s dead body. Having found Saroj Pal “still in uniform…still on duty…still the Black Maria, the revolver in the hoister, the helmeted policemen within the van”, she becomes alert for there will be another mass action “in Baranagar and Kashipur today” (Mother, Five Plays 35).
The play ends with Sujata exhorting the audience that is people, not to be silent sufferers, but respond actively to the reality and the cause. She knows it is a common cause in which she has merged her ‘self’:

SUJATA. Why don’t you speak? Speak, for heaven’s sake, speak, speak, speak! How long will you endure it in silence? Where is the place where there’s no killer, no bullets, no prison, no vans?...Where can you escape it all...in Calcutta, in West Bengal, from north to south from east to west? (35)

Sujata’s voice comes out as a universal protest against the heartless society which is always in confrontation with the downtrodden. From silent suffering and a sense of imprisoned guilt within, Sujata moves in the direction of issuing a clarion call to the society to awake and arise or be forever fallen.

Through Sujata, Devi makes a direct address to the audience, i.e., from a plane of the theatre as illusion to the theatre as a message giving social reality. Sujata communicates her transformation and the intended transformation to be brought about in society.

Contemporary literature provides important insights into the society that has changed rapidly and is still changing from a jingoistic outpost of British Empire whose inhabitants a mere fifty years ago believed in the superiority of the white race and in the “White man’s burden” (Dhawan 9) to bring true civilization. In the world wide context, if history or literary history is traced, one can witness discriminations based on race, class and gender irrespective of being developed or under developed countries. The term ‘race’ is often used to indicate groups of men differing in appearance, language or colour. To some, race means a nationality or all of humanity.
Some even define race as the group which mixed in nearly all aspects but socially designated as different. Race is scientifically defined as “a group of people possessing the same biological inheritance, identified on the basis of external physical characteristics” (sociologyguide.com). Thus shape of head, colour of the hair, eyes, skin etc. are some of the physical characteristics which are taken into account in determining race. Race is a biological concept but in course of time the members of a particular race develop a kind of consciousness. This race consciousness becomes a sociological phenomenon and it has an impact on social relations.

When the term ‘race’ is used, it combines a set of unrelated features such as physical characteristics, language, religion, cultural traditions and behaviour patterns which differentiate a given people from others. Furthermore, there is invariably an implicit value judgment in this sense of the term. Some races are regarded as being naturally and inherently superior to the others. This is a wrong view. There is no necessary connection between race, language, culture and nationality. Racial features are largely determined by genetic and biological factors whereas culture and languages are learnt, acquired and transmitted through training and education. Racial prejudice is based on false and irrational premise.

One of the most recognized statements of these principles is the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. Article 1 of this Declaration states: “All human beings are born free and in equal dignity and rights.” Article 2 says that “everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedom set forth in this decimation without distinction of any kind such as race (caste in Indian context) colour, sex and language.” Article 3 guarantees the “right to life, liberty and security” of every person. Article 7 states that “All are entitled to equal protection against any discrimination.” Article 22 says “every one…has the right to social security, social
and cultural rights indispensable for his dignity,” Besides, article 13 of the UN World Conference on Human Rights Instruments Proclamation of Tehran (1968) clarifies that “since human rights and fundamental freedom are indivisible, the full realisation of civil and political rights without the enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights is impossible” (qtd. in Dasan 128-129). India or America, the inhuman discrimination is the same, only the treatment differs. These different, extreme, racial prejudices set against tribals in India and African Americans in America whose ancestry is from the African roots have been handled both by Devi and Hansberry in their oeuvre.

Lorraine Hansberry burst into the theatrical limelight in 1959 with the Broadway production of her first play, *A Raisin in the Sun*; it won the Drama Critics’ Circle Award for that year and is called “the most perceptive presentation of Negroes in the history of American theater” (Turner 18). Lorraine Hansberry was a playwright writing with conscious involvement in the social, political and philosophical issues of her day. Nevertheless, most critics agree that she refrained from the temptation of sacrificing her art to the expediency of argument. This would seem to be what good drama is all about. If the conclusions drawn from a study of American drama of commitment of the thirties can be validly used as criteria for today’s plays, then this yardstick can be applied: “…political commitment in itself is an inadequate test of aesthetic effectiveness….The crucial fact is how the writer utilizes his commitment” (Rabkin 294). Gerald Weales takes a measurement of her writing:

> It is impossible to guess how she might have grown as a writer, but her ... plays indicate that she had wit and intelligence, a strong sense of social and political possibility and a respect for the contradictions in all men; that she could create a milieu with both bite and affection; that
she was a playwright – like Odets, like Miller – with easily definable flaws but an inescapable talent that one cannot help admiring. (543)

Lorraine Hansberry, being a black, has experienced discrimination and has been subjugated under the tyranny of the Whites. This problem has been dealt with honestly and seriously by Lorraine. Her honest approach to racial issues has changed the political and intellectual climate and has also contributed to greater self-awareness of the blacks. The play espouses the Blackman’s eagerness to define his identity and his determination to seek his identity.

*A Raisin in the Sun* is a bold attempt. Hansberry resists all sorts of racial oppression, and deals with identity crisis and black sentiments. Y.S. Sharadha in this regard, remarks: “It is a play about what kind of conviction and commitment it takes to bring hope out of hopelessness, courage out of fear, and idealism out of fatalism” (199). The play deals with a black family – the Youngers – and their ordeal of trying to move out of a segregated Chicago borough.

The dreams that Big Walter’s family have about the insurance money’s uses represent a cross-section of Black America’s dreams that have been systematically suppressed by White racism. Each of the four main characters has a dream. For Lena, matriarch of the Youngers, it is to have a place for her family to live where they will not have to be continuously battling cockroaches, rats and other pests. Walter Lee wants to enter business by becoming a partner in a liquor store. Ruth, pregnant with their second child, wants a place to lay the child when it is born. Beneatha attempts to develop her intellect and be of service to humanity by practicing medicine. The catalyst for the action in the play is a cheque for 10,000 dollars.
Lena’s reflections on her past provide the audience with insight into her tenacity. She had clung for nearly forty years to her dream of extricating her family from the ghetto. Even after the formulation of slave abolition acts, discrimination has been in practice based on colour and an entire race had been treated inhumanly: not allowed to travel, to go school, to play, to live equally with White but looking at them with aversion, torturing them to lead a life of ghetto. The Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary defines *ghetto* as: “an area of a city where many people of the same race or background live, separately from the rest of the population. Ghettos are often crowded, with bad living conditions”.

Leading a life in the *ghetto* makes the life of many people miserable. Ruth in the play goes to the extent of aborting the child; for it will have to suffer in the “rat trap” (*ARS* 322). She says “Yes I would (abort) too, Walter” (346). It is for these reasons - for the scars of ghetto, a symbol of humiliation - Mama wants to escape it. For her, the only way a black person could escape discrimination in the South of that time, was to move North. She is still a fighter and proves it by buying a house at Clybourne Park, to bring about a change which she feels is needed for her family’s welfare. As Mama utters the name Clybourne Park, conflict arises within the family.

Occurrence of conflict can be delineated into two branches – verbal and symbolic. The verbal level of conflict is the outspoken response of either of the partners against each other, or of the characters around. The symbolic conflict is more poignant in the sense that the partners confront each other from unarguable points of view, mostly social or religious, thus generating “cognitive dissonance”: “Conflict occurs only when the overt, verbal, symbolic or emotional responses required to fulfill one motive, are incompatible with those required to fulfill another” (Engade 45).
Walter indulges in a war of words with Mama, “so that’s the peace and comfort you went out and bought for us today…you butchered up a dream of mine…” (ARS 363). Walter knows very well that the Whites will not let them live in a White area, and hence he criticizes her and screams when Mama disapproves his plan for investing in a liquor store. When all his dreams are shattered, he becomes despondent. After Mama hands over him the responsibility, he becomes enthusiastic. Walter wants to earn himself a social status using his father’s money. Unlike his older generation, he aspires to live a life of Whites. Because of his race and lack of experience in business he has only carried out the orders of the White owners, he loses his money. Life becomes nihilistic for him and he is hopeless. The reason for his failure is not Walter but the age old suppression. Even if he aspires to succeed, it pulls him down.

The representative of the Clybourne Park Improvement Association, Karl Linder’s presentation of his mission that the “…people are happier when they live in a community in which the residents share a common background” (Sharadha 207) is the attitude of the Whites towards coloured people. Linder’s conniving dishonesty provokes disgust at Whites.

Hansberry, aware of the disappointment, false hope, and despair, commits herself to any level in lifting up the Black Americans. She is keen in not allowing the black family to shatter into pieces. Further, she renews Walter Lee that he makes a decision to move into the white neighbourhood. As he makes such a move, he regains his dignity and manhood, Ruth decides to have her child, Beneatha gains in understanding and tolerance; and Ruth and Walter restore the sweetness to their marriage. The ending is not blindly happy, for Clybourne Park is potentially violent, but the Youngers are once again a family – a family that symbolizes some of the aspirations of black Americans.
Hansberry examines not only the problems in an American *ghetto* but also the importance of African roots, traditional versus innovative women, the nature of marriage, the real meaning of money, the search for human dignity. Most significantly, she addresses the sensitive question of to what extent people, in liberating themselves from the burdens of discrimination, should aspire to a white middle-class way of life.

Most of the African material in *A Raisin in the Sun*, however, surfaces in conversations between Beneatha and Joseph Asagai. Touched by Beneatha’s beauty and idealism, Asagai lovingly nicknames her Alaiyo – a Yoruban word for “One for Whom Bread Food – Is Not Enough” (*ARS* 439). After Walter Lee has been duped out of his 6,500 dollars, Asagai visits an embittered, distraught Beneatha. Speaking of his beloved Nigeria, Asagai reveals his basic philosophy of life, of Africa: “A household in preparation for a journey…it is another feeling. Something full of the flow of life… Movement, progress….It makes me think of Africa” (59). Perhaps he sees in Beneatha a microcosmic America – one struggling to overthrow the limitations imposed on her by an alien culture.

Asagai’s village in Nigeria is one where most people cannot read, where many have not even seen a book. In the village, there are mountains and stars, cool drinks from gourds at the well, old songs, people who move slowly, anciently. But Nigeria also has guns, murder, revolution, illiteracy, disease, ignorance, etc. Asagai understands the inevitability of change and progress in Africa. Rebuking Beneatha for becoming discouraged over one small frustration (Walter’s losing the money), Asagai views his possible death as an advance toward freedom for himself and his people, Asagai’s beliefs certainly contribute to Beneatha’s transition from brittle idealist to a
more tolerant human being. Thus Hansberry proves her commitment throughout the play using her characters.

Rousseau has prudently asserted that man, though born free, “everywhere is he in chains” (qtd. in Engade 27). The chains are invisible conventions and traditions that a society imposes on individuals. Man is a social animal ruled by instincts and memories and fallibilities, attitudes and aptitudes, illusions and harsh realities. It is these ‘instincts’ that make him an absolute animal rather being social which craves for power. Even this is the case with America which is supposed to spend more money for human rights.

The human rights discourse in our country has been focusing on state vs. individuals or exploiting classes. Hardly has it talked seriously the societal violations – modes of violence, human indignities and destructive processes/practices resorted to by Hindu/Brahminic system. The relationships of any advanced civil society cannot be left to the individuals or groups or castes’ likes or dislikes. It involves the human rights of caste hierarchies because one caste constantly keeps violating the human rights of another caste.

It is indeed, reservations have helped marginalized sections of people gain economical freedom. But while compared to that of the overall population of the country, only two percent of the people get jobs in government services. Even if they occupy positions the tribals are the worst sufferers rather than the scheduled castes.

The Indian experience has proved that Brahminism and caste, sanctioned by Hindu scriptures – particularly Code of Manu had contributed to the violations of basic human rights of much larger sections of the society more than the state has done. The violation of human rights by the Brahminical civil society and the White
supremacy in America were/are far more brutal and subtle and hence can sustain the hegemonic amid subordinate relations in stronger forms. It has kept a section of people as slaves/bonded labour.

The bonded labour system was abolished in November 1975. Following that, a new system of recruiting bonded labourers was very quickly introduced in the bonded labour areas. Since their ex-masters would not give them work and since little was done by the state governments towards their rehabilitation, the landless ex-bonded labourers were in acute distress. The agents of various masters came to lure them away to faraway places with promises of good jobs. Once they reached these places, they found themselves in a worse form of bondage.

The land given to the freed bonded labourers is uncultivable. The good land is held by the master, though the ownership—paper is in the freed labourer’s name. There is no water for drinking or irrigation; no chance of being employed by government agencies for road–repairing, timber–felling etc. Outside labour is brought for such work. Forsaken by the government and society, there the people, in order to stay alive, enter debt–bondage. They do not have any alternative. Once they were caught, they can never come out of it. They have to work generations after generations to payback the debt.

Devi in Aajir and Water and Hansberry in The Drinking Gourd, unveils the exploitation of the innocent tribals over generations by the rich land owners. The tribals have a rich custom of exchange system i.e. barter system and money is not used for transactions. The agricultural product is used in the exchange system. The agriculture economy opens up the possibilities for family expansion on the basis of culture and technical equipment. In pure shifting cultivation, labour is the only asset of the family; land has no value as capital. But the asset or the labour is exploited.
They are not paid in a proper manner and are kept as bonded labourers. The mainstream having an upper hand over the tribal, abolishes the tribal exchange system and forces them to follow the mainstream economic system i.e. money. Thus the mainstream crushes the meek tribals. They are forced to evict from their native land and are forced to become aboriginals in a way nomadic.

Colonial policies brought in momentous change in Bengal’s agrarian economy and rural society reeled under their destabilizing impact. To maximize land revenue, experiments in the land tenure systems were undertaken which ultimately culminated in the introduction of the permanent settlement in 1793. Deteriorating land relations and recurrent famines throughout the period reveal the maladies in the agrarian economy, despite apparent signs of prosperity such as increase in cultivation, expansion of the market for agricultural produce, and rising agricultural prices. Rural Bengal, moreover, became subject to the fluctuations of a wider capitalist economy. The colonial state initiated economic changes in the countryside both directly through redefining property rights and also indirectly through its effects on the pace of monetization of the indigenous economy. Though everything undergoes the process of change, their history remains the same.

*Aajir* is a social satire. It depicts how an ordinary human being is reduced to the level lower than an animal and the feudal hegemony over the tribal. In her capacity as an active social worker and journalist, she has come into contact with the lives and struggles of the under-privileged communities settled in the border regions of the three neighboring states of West Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. She has been a witness to many a pathetic incident in their lives which has hitherto found no expression in the contemporary writings.
In fact, as she is aware, even after four decades of freedom and enlightenment, India miserably fails to realize what could be called the ideals of Welfare State. The innocent people still experience the trauma of inhuman subjugation by the landlords who reign supreme in the villages.

*Aajir*, a story of a slave held in slavery by a bond signed by an ancestor. Further, it unveils the tragic condition of not only a single man but a whole race being subjugated due to caste hierarchy. They suffer without food, water and shelter. Even they could not think about any issue. Thus is the position of the tribal. Even today, most of the bonded labourers belong to this section of the people.

Unlike his predecessors who sold themselves and their progeny into the ‘perpetual slavery’ for a meager amount of three rupees, Paatan craves to escape tradition:

GOLAK. We’ll be slaves, husband and wife. Our children?

RAAVAN. They’ll be slaves too.

GOLAK. Their descendants?

RAAVAN. I’ll buy them all up…

GOLAK. …We’ll never have to worry about our food again, But, master. What’s the price?

RAAVAN. (in prose)…I’ll give you three rupees. Have you ever seen three rupees in your life? D’you know the look of them? (*Aajir, Five Plays 46*)

Paatan makes it possible for him which could not be dreamt of by his forefathers. He forgoes the conventions and longs for freedom. His position is similar to that of Joseph in *The Bible* and Joseph Andrews in *Joseph Andrews* by Henry Fielding being victim of their respective master’s mistresses.
Paatan being ignorant of the history of the *gaamchha*, believes that it is yet there. Further, he yields to the plot of the mistress only to escape the clutches of the age old suffering. When he could not materialize it, Paatan becomes furious. So, he murders his mistress out of betrayal. Though, Paatan becomes a murderer, he is happy that he is a free man. Mahasweta Devi raises forth the voice of the voiceless using Paatan. Being not able to withstand the age old inhuman treatment – so many generations of people die without knowing the meaning of life for no fault of theirs – their destiny being caught in ‘bond’, the suffer. Using Paatan and the ‘bond’ Devi not only revolutionizes him but also to the future generations to come. Thus Devi is committed to the bonded labourers.

Slavery had been practiced for private profit by the economically strong, thus furthering their gains. In the process, they dominate over the unfortunate and convert them into slaves and develop slave estates. A slave is “a man whom law and custom regard as the property of another. He is wholly without rights, a pure chattel like an ox or an ass. Slavery is an extreme form of inequality” (Hobhouse 27).

As per historians, the system of slavery had emerged out of human needs – the aristocrat utilizing the services of the poor in exchange for the consideration of some material. When the period of mortgage expires, and the material or money could not be repaid, the borrower was obliged, under the terms of lending, to discharge the debt by rendering manual labour. But the indebted was forced into perpetual menial labour, generation after generation, on the pretext that the interest over the principal had also been multiplying.

Hansberry’s television play *The Drinking Gourd* is a highly charged social study of three levels of antebellum Southern society – planters, slaves, and poor whites. The links between personal choices and social conditions are evident.
throughout. For example, ambitious people exist in all societies, but the ways in which they may fulfill their ambition are largely determined by their societies. In the Southern United States before the Civil War, the most satisfying achievement was to establish a thriving plantation. For Hiram Sweet, this success is indeed sweet, and he continually recalls both to himself and others how he started thirty-five years earlier “with four slaves and fifty dollars” and “planted the first seed (himself) and supervised (his) own baling” (*DG* 121). He is proud that his hard work and ambition have paid off in the terms his society has declared to be highest. His son Everett too is ambitious, although a bit weaker-willed because he has grown up in the shadow of his powerful father. Everett’s path to fulfilling his ambition is somewhat different from his father’s as a result of both his different personality and different social conditioning.

Rissa’s son Hannibal has a level of ambition that rivals and probably exceeds that of the man who calls himself Hannibal’s master. However, his attempts to satisfy that ambition by obtaining an education (in defiance of the law forbidding slaves to learn how to read and write) and by preparing to escape to the North, as his brother Isaiah may have, demonstrate the dangers that a man faces whose ambitions are not sanctioned by his society. Hannibal fully recognizes that the labour demanded of him on the Sweet plantation is not for his benefit but for the Sweets’. On his own land, he would push himself to exhaustion every day: on the Sweet plantation, he works only to make the Sweets feel bitter. As he affirms to his mother:

I am the only kind of slave I could stand to be – a bad one! Every day that come and every hour that pass that I got sense to make a half step do for a whole – every day that I can pretend sickness ‘stead of health, to be stupid ‘stead of quick – I aims to do it. And the more pain it give
your master and the more it cost him – the more Hannibal be a man.

(DG 123)

When his desire to struggle against his exploitation and improve his knowledge of the world and his life bring him to a confrontation with Everett Sweet, Hannibal finds how cruel and absolute are the restrictions placed on his ambition.

Hannibal is presented not simply as an individual, but also as a representative of a large number of slaves willing to pay any price to gain freedom. When enough personal wills are joined together to achieve the same end, social conditions can be changed. It is this that Hansberry wants to achieve through her writing.

Everett, Hiram Sweet’s eldest son holds views which are opposite to those of his father. He considers slavery as a necessary institution for the White man’s survival in the South and blacks as human beasts to be used at his discretion. He is eager for the reopening of the African slave trade and is waiting to fight the North in defense of slavery. As Hiram Sweet is suffering from heart trouble, Everett takes over the plantation. He hires a new overseer Zeb Dudley, a poor white and together they start a new regime of terror in the plantation. The poor White who suffers from poverty is a representative of most section of people who are victims of class inequalities that prevails in the globe. Though he is affected by class hierarchy, he has not stopped practicing hierarchy upon others. He misbehaves with Hannibal, the black for no reason.

During his service as an overseer, Zeb whips Hannibal for general behavior rather than for any specific offense, meets with Everett’s disapproval. But he proudly asserts that “there’s some things have to be left up to me if you want this here plantation run proper, Mister Sweet” (DG 290). However, when he is later compelled
to blind Hannibal, an act he finds totally abhorrent but can only avoid by giving up the job that means so much to him, Zeb takes refuge from his painful, guilt-ridden acquiescence in the classic excuse of so many arrested Nazis, “I was just following instructions” (Carter 124). At this point, he gladly accepts the dehumanizing role of instrument that had formerly repelled him. At the end of the play, Everett can proudly announce to his mother that “Zeb is beginning to understand how I want this place run” (295), a statement that leaves no doubt that Zeb has fully capitulated and reached the ceiling of his ambition: “Ambition is manifestly a powerful part of human nature that can have strongly beneficial or destructive consequences, depending on the social framework in which it is exercised” (Carter 124). For earning his ambition, Zeb indulges in confrontation with Hannibal, attacks him violently and satisfies his thirst. Only he could wage a war against the black but not against the White Master, which is an act of a typical White.

Hannibal is no more prepared to allow his mind to be enslaved to religious or any other traditional way of thinking than he is to accept physical enslavement. In this instance and in many other instances, Hannibal, unlike Hiram, Everett and Macon Bullett, combines education with reflection. Hannibal has carefully analysed every element of slavery; he knows that his labor is being stolen from him for another’s benefit and that what is good for his master is bad for him. Moreover, he has consciously adopted a policy of sabotaging his master’s thievery by laziness, tool breakage, and defiance. In planning his escape, he finds himself “savoring the notion” (DG 295) that “there ain’t nothin’ hurt slave marster so much…as when his property walk away from him” (295). Hannibal is acutely aware of the meaning of every step he takes – and its risks. He knows full well what could happen if he is discovered studying with Tommy, but feels that literacy is worth any price. After being blinded,
he still feels it is worthwhile to try to escape. Hannibal’s reflectiveness and imagination extend beyond his analyses of slavery.

Hannibal taunts Zeb, “I kin read and you can’t –” (298). This statement is accurate and infuriates Zeb because it establishes Hannibal’s superiority in one important way, thus undercutting Zeb’s only claim to any form of superiority – his whiteness. However, it is equally challenging to Everett, who has constructed his self-image on the basis of his education and bitterly resents that a “monkey-faced idiot” (295) can perform any part of his elite accomplishments, even if on a demonstrably lower level. The severity of the punishment he metes out is perhaps as much in response to his wounded ego as it is to his slaveowner’s fear of the effects of education on a slave. Everett says, “When a part is corrupted by disease one cuts out the disease. The ability to read in a slave is a disease” (DG 297). Everett and Zeb are united in believing that only the white race has a culture worth speaking about, although Everett does not really believe that Zeb shares in it except perhaps in the most superficial way.

Hiram Sweet’s idea of manhood significantly involves violence, power, and family tradition. As he tells Rissa about his most treasured possession, an old weapon he has kept in perfect condition, “My father gave me this gun and I remember feeling – I was fourteen – I remember feeling, ‘I’m a man now. A true man. I shall go into the wilderness and not seek my fortune – but make it!’” (282). Hansberry uses the gun as an object of liberating the blacks, which she learns from the Master. Thus, after Hiram’s death, when Rissa takes the gun out of the cabinet to help her son Hannibal, a new family tradition based on mutual affection and survival is established in place of the older, more destructive one. Even more significantly, Hiram’s selfish vision of manhood is symbolically replaced by Hannibal’s, which entails both profound
resistance to all the dehumanizing forces of the plantation system and concern for other people.

Although Hiram is not directly involved in Hannibal’s blinding and torturing, in a sense he is indirectly responsible. He actively supports the widespread prohibition of learning among slaves because he, like other slave owners, recognizes the dangers of education. Slaves who could read could gather information about the outer world, the abolition movement, the conflicts between North and South, the slave revolts, the means of keeping slaves under control, and so on. Slaves who could write could forge passes, pass messages, and more effectively conspire to escape, rebel, or even massacre their owners. Thus, slaves had to be prevented at all costs from gaining knowledge. In addition, the way that Hannibal acquired his ability to read and write was sure to offend his master personally. He had convinced Hiram’s younger son Tommy, a boy around ten who has not yet been poisoned by an awareness of his place in the system, to teach him these things in exchange for lessons on how to play the banjo. When he discovers this, Everett, who knows that Hannibal has been protected by Hiram for Rissa’s sake, asserts with outrage: “You have used your master’s own son to commit a crime against your master….Even my father wouldn’t like this, Hannibal” (297). Thus, when Everett acts against him, he believes he can do so with impunity because Hannibal’s crime is beyond condoning in his father’s eyes. He is not entirely right about his father’s attitude, of course, but there is also no doubt that there is considerable justification for the assumption, and to the extent that this justification exists, Hiram must share in the guilt.

Like kindness, the bonds of love and family relationship are essential aspects of human nature profoundly affected by the conditions of plantation life. As he demonstrated in his decision to sell young Joshua’s mother, Hiram, like so many slave
owners, felt that family and romantic ties among importance – than those among their masters or even among the poor whites. It was vital that these ties be diminished; otherwise the master’s power to sell whomever he chose – and thus serve his economic needs – would be greatly restricted. However, as Eugene D. Genovese affirms in *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (1976), the plantation owners never succeeded, although they often claimed in their propaganda that blacks had no sense of family.

Hansberry also focuses on the conflict within the White family. Hiram holds an attitude as a typical master towards his family members. Everett’s love for his father is blocked, at times, by his resentment at Hiram for holding him down. He yearns to have the same power and prestige as his father, but he has no way to attain it while Hiram stands in the way. Ironically, one of the major sources of conflict between this selfish, but loving father and this self-centered, but loving son is the education that Hiram provides so Everett might acquire a social polish and an understanding of the world that Hiram lacks. As Hansberry develops it, thirst for knowledge, another highly influential aspect of human nature, was surrounded by a multitude of ironies in plantation society. Anne Cheney, in this connection, observes: “Many writers have chronicled the physical suffering of slaves, but Lorraine Hansberry had the rare insight that the institution of slavery maimed the psyche and soul of whites and black alike” (248).

Begin to defy the traditionally defined class roles who become martyrs in pursuit of their self in order that they can liberate them from the clutches of the hierarchical system which they value more than anything else.

Maghai Dome, the protagonist in the play, is a traditional water-diviner. He is an untouchable. The untouchables of the village are not allowed to draw water from
the public wells, even though they are dug with Maghai’s help. The mainstream or the upper class men want to possess the natural resources and thereby control the tribal society. The unavailability of resources makes the tribal surrender themselves to the mainstream and become bonded labourers. In one of the stories in *Breast Stories* (2002) named “Draupadi” the conflict arises when Surja Sahu, the land lord of Birbhum refuses to give water for cultivation to the tribal people during drought in Birbhum and artificially created a famine: “No water anywhere, drought in Birbhum. Unlimited water at Surja Sahu’s house, as clear as a crow’s eye” (*Breast Stories* 29).

In *Water*, Devi addresses the problems of the tribal who are suffering over ages, devoid of the fundamental right of water. The tribal are refused water, their petitions to dig wells are declined and individual petitions are taken and the tribal are subjugated by the caste Brahmins. Further, the men in power swindle the ration reliefs and medicines which are due to them. Since the tribal are prevented from enjoying what is due to them, they turn into ‘naxal’. The opening of *Water* deals with such conditions of the tribal who had turn into ‘naxal’. It is the humiliation that forces them to turn into ‘rebels’. Even Dhura in the play supports the cause of the ‘rebels’. People like Dhura who belong to the present generation are aware of the exploitation. And so they rebel against the system. But, the tribal belonged to the previous generation are unaware of the exploitation.

Unfortunately, Maghai, interdicted by the age old customs and conventions, could not go against Santosh. The irony is that he is well-known that Santosh is the root cause of all their problems. He is exposed to humiliation. But, Magahi accepts and surrenders himself to religious dogmatism. Always, his conscious mind interprets him as below ordinary.
Struck by consecutive draughts, the life of the rustics becomes miserable and they turn for help to Santosh Babu who, like Gourdas in Bayen, is a dissembler and a typical exploiter. He is an orthodox Brahmin by caste, and for him, “the shadow of a Dome pollutes his pitcher and he’d throw away the water” (124). In fact, he wields power in the villages and even authorities stand in awe of him. He gets a large amount of relief material from the government and hoards it to create an artificial famine so that the innocent folk obey his dictates. He does not allow the outcastes to draw water even from the Panchayat wells for “we worship our gods in our houses and you eat pigs and fowl…isn’t the water polluted if you touch it?” (117). Although he has a greater ‘respect’ for Maghai and always takes his help for digging the new wells, Santosh denies him water too.

Despite government’s instructions to employ local people for relief works, the contractor, Santosh’s brother-in-law has brought people from town and deprives the Doms of employment opportunities. Even when they work they were denied the fair wages. Santosh only pays them thirty paise instead of fifty paise. He says to Maghai: “Take it or leave it” Water, Five Plays 136) and threatens to bring in dawals from other places to work in his fields.

The tribal people of the area are also denied their right to education and political representation. The free books, slates, copybooks, and mid-day meal for which the students of primary school are eligible are denied. Moreover, employees there prevent tribal children from attending schools by employing them in the upper caste’s households and fields; grazing cattle, collecting firewood, and so on.

With the help of Jiten, the educated Mahishya, the tribals fight against all kinds of discrimination and exploitation. To Jiten’s queries regarding the ineffective
laws and the exploitation of upper castes and denial of human rights, the government official, the SDO, expresses his helplessness:

Laws are made because they have to be made. They’re never enforced. The laws have not abolished agricultural debt, the system of bonded labour is banned…The landowners and the moneylenders still lend money and live off the interest. They still extract labour from their debtors. I am powerless. If I threaten a moneylender, the minister will jump on me. (Water, Five Plays 137)

Jiten, a gandhian who took part in the movements of Gandhi commits himself for the oppressed. He gives the tribal not only education given in school but he enlightened the entire tribal community and Jiten is ready to fight against anybody for the cause he has self-assured. In a way, he teaches the tribal that self help is the best help. He lives with the Domes and teaches their children. His identification with them is complete as he fights for their rights. It is through him that Mahasweta Devi traces the horrors of the racial discrimination, negligence and failure of the official machinery and how the officials act as agents of the hierarchical system:

SDO. Don’t tell me of new problems, ‘please don’t. As it is, the district has a load of problems already. Drought followed by drought, flood followed by flood…chronic! Problems stick to this district like incurable dysentery. Chara’s only a block in the district like incurable dysentery. Chara’s only a block in the district, and has regular supply of relief. A lot of cash too!

JITEN. Not the block, it’s Santosh who gets it all…
SDO. I know all about that, but it’s for the BDO to see to it, It’s such a shaky system!

JITEN. There’s more to it, there’s caste discrimination. Santosh doesn’t let the Domes have water.

SDO. No, there isn’t.

JITEN. Are you sure?

SDO. Officially speaking, there isn’t… Unofficially speaking I’ll admit, it’s there. It’s there in the blood of the people… how can you get rid of it? (Water, Five Plays 145-46)

As poet Bharathi has mentioned, it would be dangerous if educated people join hands with the corrupt. Indeed, the system becomes null and void deserting the tribal through artificial famine.

Mahasweta Devi’s characters are realistic. Employing such characters, she travels to a certain magnitude towards her theme i.e. in tracing the process of exploitations and the exploits. Unveiling the nature of Santosh, Devi reiterates the treacherous traits of the landlords and politicians especially when they are caught red-handed.

Santosh, who is supposed to be eavesdropping the conversation between the SDO and Jiten, request not to betray him rather Santosh indulges in lobbying over the corruption that has been done. Jiten is nonplussed.

Further, the SDO assures Santosh of the help from the Geological Survey to dig wells, Santosh mockingly says: “A fat lot of good they’ll do. They’ll only bring machines, drill the earth, blast the rocks. Maghai can beat them hollow, with nothing of that” (160). Although Santosh is aware of the value of Maghai, he refuses to treat
him as a human being but as an object to facilitate him and his upper caste men and when he fails to react to his orders, he complains to the authorities about Maghai and plans to kill him. The contradictory personality of Santosh is revealed further when he thinks of making Jiten and Maghai happy. He tells his servants:

SANTOSH. Maghai wanted to buy a palmyra stalk. Go and give him two of them for free.

1st SERVENT. Ok, sir.

SANTOSH. Carry two brimful baskets of the Prasad from the Shitala puja for Maghai and Jiten. (Water, Five Plays 160)

Unaware of the impending danger, Maghai and his men gather at the dam to offer puja to Manasa, the snake goddess:

The police enter with the men beating them mercilessly with the butts of their rifles. Maghai is not with them. Jiten, Dhura and some of the others try to hit back…Jiten snatches a policeman’s rifle from his hand and throws it away. A policeman brings down a crushing blow with the butt of his rifle on Jiten’s head. Jiten falls to the ground with a wail. (165)

A moment later, one can find Maghai on the stage “tottering, one hand on his bleeding chest” (165). Santosh and the officers set the police against the tribal, the leader of the tribal, Maghai and Jiten leading to a summit of confrontation. The physical confrontation ends in the death of Maghai and many others. The wounded Maghai is washed away by the river, mystifies his life and the lives of the tribal.

Above race, there is another universal discrimination viz., class. People in high positions discriminate certain people based on their economic status. Money
becomes the determining factor and with that they can buy anything. To quote Oliver Goldsmith’s lines here would be apt, “Laws grind the poor, and rich men rule the laws” (Goldsmith 476). Thus the poor are being subjugated by the upper class. Yet, there is another discrimination based on sex. Women are termed as ‘weaker sex’ and they are exploited and suppressed. Such kinds of discriminations are a bane to the society. People who are subjugated are termed ‘subaltern’. They no more want to remain passive but have started articulating their ‘discourses’ deconstructing the dominant ‘discourse’. In a way, the bulk of postcolonial New English literature being written across the globe since the last few decades, have been generally pre-occupied with the problems of the marginalized. In India, the focus naturally falls on women and backward classes who represent the case of the underdog in this still largely tradition-abiding society, among whom, again the untouchable epitomizes the worst form of marginalization. In this current phase, the Post-industrial phase, the world is under technocrats. The world society as a whole lies in the hands of technical bureaucracy of the techno-structure of large Corporations. So from time to time, the society is under or dominated by the people who occupy high positions. There are so many complex structures within a society. According to Jan Robertson “the number of statuses multiplies, population size increases, cities appear, new institutions emerge, social classes arise, political and economic inequality becomes inbuilt into the social structure and culture becomes much more diversified and heterogeneous” (www.sociologyguide.com). Though society is a group of communities living together, there are so many smaller structures.

Family is the smallest structure in a society. Since family includes individual members, the ‘discourse’ of the individual may dominate the entire family and thereby the society in which he lives. The individual who is at the central position
may have control over the society. When an individual’s idea is accepted, there will not be any problem. But opinions differ from a person to person and it is common that conflict will arise within any society. Each one will try to have an upper hand over society and each society would like to control the other enforcing its ‘discourse’. Generally, it occurs due to economical status otherwise, class.

‘Class’ refers to divisions in society. The word ‘Class’ is derived from the Latin *classis* (Plural Classes). According to Charlton Lewis and Charles Short, compilers of the Standard Latin Dictionary, this term is a “variant of Calare, meaning to call out, proclaim or summon a religious assembly” (Day 3). It had two main senses. The first referred to an armed gathering, either on land or water, while the second and most important, referred to the divisions of the Roman people according to their estates and age. The result of this division was the creation of two major groups in Roman society, the patricians or aristocrats and the plebeians or commoners. The plebeians were often in conflict with the patricians.

The Christian view of humanity underpinned the estates model of society, which dominated Europe from the middle ages to the ‘Enlightenment’. It consisted, in simple terms, of three layers – the nobles, the clergy and the common people, with each one being regarded as a necessary part of the whole, a conception expressed in the image of society as a body. There were, of course, divisions within each layers, and here the term ‘rank’ was important, particularly in respect of the nobility, but the word ‘station’ was the one more commonly employed to designate a person’s place in society. According to Peter Calved, the word ‘station’ referred “to a person’s employment as well as their specified location and it differed from ‘class’ in being ‘a concept essential to the individual rather than the collectivity’” (Day 5). However, the
more common word for referring to social divisions was ‘order’ which of course implied that any other form of social organization was a species of ‘disorder’.

The mobilization of Christian doctrine to legitimize the development of capitalism may have provided a critique of the divisions of feudalism but it was only to institute new ones based on ‘money’ rather than land. The question arises why, at this point in history, the term ‘Class’ should start to displace the more common ones of ‘order’ or ‘station’. One explanation is that the act of classification was becoming increasingly important to the natural sciences. Its success in ordering the variety of the plant and animal world promised a more comprehensive account of the social order. However, while in biology the word ‘Class’ assumed an equality between the different types of, say, flowers this was not how it operated in social description where, grafted on to existing divisions, ‘Class’ made people seem a law of nature rather than an accident of history. Another explanation for the entry of ‘Class’ is that mid seventeenth century was a decisive movement in the development of capitalism.

In short, the feudal economy was based on agriculture and characterized by a series of obligations between land lord and tenant, whereas capitalist economy was based on manufacture and characterised by a purely monetary relation between employers and employees.

The appearance of the word ‘class’, in other words, is linked to fundamental change in the economy and to their effect on social relations. In brief, the older vocabulary of ‘order’ and ‘station’ projected an essentially harmonious view of society whereas the new idiom of class was an expression of social conflict. Hansberry is conscious of the class hierarchy in America and the ‘politics’ of the classmen in exploiting all the machinery, especially the political machinery, since it is the source of controlling the economy as well as the objects of the society. She also
knew about the lack of political commitment and class conflicts within the American society. This theme is expressed in the play *The Sign in Sidney Brustein’s Window* (1965).

*The Sign in Sidney Brustein’s Window* concerns a small group of rather ordinary people, who face a variety of real problems in their life under classmen who exploit the political machinery. Lorraine Hansberry’s portrait of bewildered liberalism lies at the very centre of this play which is essentially concerned with the plight of the individual in a society in which commitment is considered passe. Lorraine Hansberry was acutely aware of the temper of the decade in which she was writing. The theatre of the fifties was dominated by the absurd to which social concern was at best irrelevant and at worst a symptom of man’s self destructive optimism. To quote Bigsby:

> The Sidney Brustein of the title is a liberal who fluctuates between the two poles of liberalism; Thoreauesque dissociation and enthusiastic political involvement. The play effectively spells out the inadequacies and ultimately the futility of both these extremes. In essence Sidney Brustein is but another of the American heroes in search of primal innocence, waging a holy war and deeply wounding those around him. *(SSBW 162)*

Sidney, a Jewish intellectual in his late thirties, lives with his wife Iris in a small Greenwich Village apartment. He is an unsuccessful night club houseman. Irish is a would-be actress with no talent. Sidney has recently owned a community newspaper which intends to be an “artsy–craftsy newspaper” (23). He wants his newspaper to stay clear of politics as he considers politics blight on the natural spirit of man and cancer of the soul for the age only experiences lack of committed
politicians. Sidney wants only to write about art and philosophy. His friends Alton Seals, a black and an ex-communist and Wally O’Hara, a liberal reformist, convince Sidney that he is suffering from the “great disease of the modern bourgeois intellectual Ostrichisim” which means “the great sad withdrawal from the affairs of men” (23). O’Hara, who runs for office on a reform ticket, asks Sidney for his newspapers’ endorsement. After some initial objections Sidney joins Wally’s campaign without knowing the hypocritical nature of Wally, to rid the neighbourhood of corruption. Once involved, he pursues the political activity wholeheartedly, to the extent of making his home as campaign headquarters with a large “vote Reform” (34) sign hanging on his window.

Sidney, skeptical of the chances of victory, is surprised and pleased when O’Hara wins the election. But the very energy of Sidney’s elation at victory turns against him when Sidney realizes the brutal reality which has secured Wally’s success. The opposition party, “the machine” owns him and has used his candidate to buy off the people. The turn-coat like Wally is not an exaggeration for the 60’s reflected the classmen indulging in the game of politics. They exploited all the means to attain power, were ready to pay any price for they were economically sound and were highly materialistic. Hansberry does not allow Sidney’s failure of the class of people at the periphery. Like the phoenix bird, Sidney rises from the heap of ashes to be a committed politician against all forms of confrontations.

Hansberry focuses not only on the conflicts between the upper class and the conflicts within the class. Sidney, though disillusioned, is not defeated but strengthens his conviction of fight back. At the end, he decides to keep up his newspaper “Sign” and bring O’Hara down with the rest of the corrupt politics. Sidney Brustein is concerned with the question of what it takes to change a liberal, an ordinary, relatively
comfortable, educated middle-class Jewish liberal into a radical. The play is about this kind of change as it happens to Sidney Brustein.

Although Sidney and Iris are very much in love, Sidney considers Iris as an object to show his existential frustration. She is the target of his criticism and cynicism. As a result, Iris has to see a psychiatrist frequently. She has to feed Sidney’s ego constantly and has no individuality of her own.

Sidney’s relationship with his wife, Iris, is strained because he refuses to recognize the reality of the world but chooses rather to remould it, and her as well to suit his personal vision. Iris is invested with complex motives and unattainable aspirations. Physically she is attractive, younger than her husband and has an appealing personality. For Sidney, Iris has been the personification of his dream of a free mountain world where he is able to withdraw from the realities of the corruption, pollution and materialism of the world and renew his faith in the future.

Though Iris longs to attain her self-identity, she has no confidence. She feels suffocated by the intensity of Sidney’s dilemmas and suffers along with him. She has subordinated her own needs to his and now wants to get out of the village and enjoy some of the luxuries of life. She recognizes his needs, but implores him to acknowledge her needs as well, “The main point is that I feel I want to do something else with my life. Other than…” (SSBW 72).

Sidney is countered by his wife Iris who does not serve merely as a spring board for Sidney’s philosophising but is genuinely developed. It is this character, evenly developed which distinguishes the play from many others. In the character of Iris, Hansberry makes it clear that many of the women’s problems stem from being mere reflections of men’s dreams. Iris exists on the periphery of Sidney’s life.
Caught in the maze of modern society, Sidney Brustein is a Broadway version of the modern Everyman, financially comfortable, idle, and intellectual, sometimes quietly hovering in corners, painfully strutting into false passages, and finally finding his way to the lighted exit. He seeks defensively the false security of drinking, glib philosophising, and ill-advised business deals. He stumbles into the treacherous world of politics, religion, and racial issues. But at the end of the play, all begin to understand the puzzle, where there is meaning – both in the outside world and in them.

It is important to note that a good part of his aggression manifests itself in his demeaning behavior toward his wife and that his patronising attitude ultimately functions to exclude her from decisions which concern them both. Thus she seeks a more exciting life with a group of individuals whom Sidney calls “Would bees” those who discuss their future successes but who lack the talent and integrity to make them happen. At the end, Iris is back in the apartment, full of grief over her sister Gloria’s death. At the conclusion of the play, Sidney is consoling Iris in her tears, “Let us both weep. That is the first thing to let ourselves feel again…. Then tomorrow, we shall make something strong of this sorrow” (SSBW 120).

In addition, Hansberry discusses the issues of the blacks through Alton. Hansberry is skilful in knitting plots within plots. Alton vehemently elaborates the cruel treatment meted out by his ancestors. Alton’s father, a rail road porter, was wiping up spit and semen of white men and his mother a maid, always bringing home white people’s left over; some jelly, a piece of ham, a broken lamp, a sweater etc., When he comes to know Gloria a whore, Alton almost screams, “I ain’t going to have the Whiteman’s leavings in my house, no mo’! I ain’t going to have his throw away…no mo’!” (102). It is the betrayal by the class whites that has made him feel
miserable and he is helpless but independent. Thus Hansberry brings the tale of the age-old problem to the fore.

To quote Brooks Atkinson,

In the Sign – Miss Hansberry developed a theme of less magnitude than Brecht’s dilemma or the abomination of the Cenci family….Miss Hansberry was a genuine dramatist with a good mind of solid knowledge of life and high ethical principles. Her characters leap out of the pages of this paperback book. (qtd. in Shyma 243)

Thus raising Sidney from the depth of hopelessness and confrontations of his class, Hansberry proves her commitment.

Apart from race and caste, there is yet another discrimination based on class. _Urvashi and Johnny_ is an attack on the helpless modernized society. The progress in Civilization has not developed the consciousness as human beings rather it has diversified the people in the face of individualism. Individual and selfish concerns have failed to protect the social consciousness and collective responsibility. Every one of us tries to escape in the pretext of one or the other. Devi has adequately given space for such type of Characters in the play. She creates a character in the play who like Paatan of _Aajir_, is trapped in an excruciating situation from which he struggles hard to come out with an unfaltering faith in human dignity. Johnny, the protagonist in the play, wishes to make every person happier with his tricks. Johnny, a committed artist is inflicted by cancer and suffers under the hands of fate. He considers his art as a source of happiness for the audience and a means of livelihood for him. But Johnny does not heed to the advice of the doctor and his patrons who warn him that he would become dumb out and out if he continues to gab.
A major part of Calcutta populace which the urban elite insists on calling ‘parasites’, have been confined to the pavements. They even appear to have been denied a right to live as equal citizens.

And the indifference of the urban rich to the suffering humanity is incarnated in the lifeless mass of buildings matched only by the conventions or trappings of civilization that is social ethos, political awareness and spiritual apathy. This aspect is reinforced further by Calcutta being the capital city and representing the consciousness of the Bengalis which rode several movements, reforms, rebellions and revolutionary struggles. As the play progresses, it reveals to us many hard facts of life in the urban world. Johnny says to the One-Eyed one:

Everyone seeks happiness. Even when they don’t afford to go to the movies they watch the queue at the counter and draw happiness out of the sight. Before a sweetmeats shop, beggars…maimed in their arms and legs roll along the hot pitch begging for their masters and money-lenders, and find happiness in watching smart things. I showed the play of Johnny and Urvashi. (Urvashi, Five Plays 75)

Alienated from the mainstream life, they are forced to live a dog’s life. Interestingly, a glimpse of a true picture of the life of beggars in Calcutta can be seen, when Ramanna, the leper and the childhood companion of Johnny, reveals:

No, tonight the lame one’s gang will fight with Magandas’ gang for their rights over the litter heap. We’re in bad days, Johnny. When you see the beggars betraying their faith, that’s a sign that the times have come to a monstrous state. The city belongs to the beggars. It’s been all divided up. The lame one will pick up all the litter in the heap on
the right and Magandas has the right to the heap on the left. But trust Magandas the bastard, he sneaks into the lame one’s territory every day. He hasn’t had a taste of the lame one’s guts. Tonight the lame one will fight for the rights. *(Urvashi, Five Plays 66)*

Johnny, in spite of being aware of his insecure social status, is committed to the cause of the suffering and struggling masses. He wants the people to realize that “happiness is the greatest jewel one can find in life” (75). Unlike those disillusioned young men, who have confronted with established institutions which are bent on depriving the poor and needy of their due, Johnny aims at enlightening the masses by inculcating in them the spirit of freedom.

Unlike Asif Currimbhoy’s *The Hungry Ones*, which deals with only an aspect of the life of beggars in riot-torn and famine-stricken Bengal, Mahasweta Devi’s *Urvashi and Johnny* is a play solely about beggars and their joys and sorrows.

In spite of being warned, Johnny renews his commitment to Urvashi. He sticks to the guns to the end.

Johnny’s pains and predicaments are not merely individualistic, his marionette being an artistic escape route or a surrogate of poverty. His cancer is not merely his, it is also the cancer of every one belonging to the exploitative world.

Much of the play is set in the compound of African mission which was founded forty years earlier by Reverend Nielson and his blind wife Madame Nielson. The mission compound is a symbol and a brought up of colonialists. In the process of civilizing the barbaric Africans, the white masters have used religion as a tool to subvert the constructs of the natives. As part of the mission, the natives are provided with medical and other reliefs by Reverend Nielson, Dr. Marta Gotterling, a
handsome woman in her mid thirties and Dr. Willy Dekoven. There is also Mr. Charlie Morries, who calls himself a liberal journalist and Major Rice, a typical colonial officer in his fifties who blusters these white colonialists are entered in the operation of civilizing the “Savage” race and try to enforce their way of living there by maintaining hierarchy. If Reverend Nielson and team treat in a tender manner, Major Rice cruelly employs his official machinery. But the end of both means is to maintain superiority over the black folk, in a way it is a joint venture.

The most vehement condemnation of Christianity was issued by Malcolm, who argued in his Autobiography that:

> The Christian church returned to Africa under the banner of the Cross – conquering, killing, exploiting, pillaging, raping, bullying, beating – and teaching white supremacy…The black man needs to reflect that he has been America’s most fervent Christian – and where has it gotten him? (www.genius.com)

Frustrated by the inefficacy of one-sided conversation with representatives of the dominant ideology, both the Africans within the play and African Americans in Hansberry’s society were being provoked to action. Hansberry held strong beliefs about the means by which African Americans should attain their civil rights, and these beliefs surface in the situations and characters depicted in *Les Blancs*. The play’s setting, the fictitious African nation of Zatembe, provided Hansberry a safe distance from which she could critique American civil rights leaders’ strategies and philosophies and allowed her a way to express her belief.

The result is the story of Tshembe Matoseh, a young African who returns home from his comfortable life in Europe to bury his father only to find that tensions
between native Africans and European settlers in his homeland are explosive. His elder brother Abioseh, a catholic priest turned African, who admires the culture of the whites and Eric, a mulatto who oscillates between the two and is childish. Thus, the setting augurs that there is hullabaloo everywhere and a warlike state presume. When Tshembe hands him his native African dress, a symbol of pagan worship, Abioseh reveals the fact that he will take his final vows for the Catholic priesthood in the spring and there arises a religious argument. Hansberry is quite clear in presenting her theme and the then prevailing conflict state through these three brothers.

Tshembe resists attempts to enlist him in the fight against European rule. He has adopted existentialistic views in Europe, dismisses the kwi religion and finds Catholicism, indeed Christianity another cult. Perhaps, his childhood memories of the Reverend Neilson surface and he suddenly flings his brother’s crucifix across the room. This desecration sends the novice Abioseh to his knees whereas Tshembe pays tribute to his father wearing the African ceremonial.

On the other hand, Charlie pesters Dr. Marta about the African land and the parentage of Eric, the mulatto but for which she does not answer. Not only is the mother Africa raped but so many mothers. Hansberry uses Eric to trace the problems of the mulatto, being neither white nor black. While the Whites justify their arrival in the play that they have arrived to civilize the savage Africans, how would they call the savagery of the rape of the mother of Eric, an outcome of sexual harassment. The epitaph of Les Blancs echoes Fredric Douglass: “If there is no struggle there is no progress” (LB 49). Major Rice arrives with the news of another white family, “the Duchesnes” (86) being murdered. From this incident one can discern the tension between the two races. Further, he warns the people in the mission compound that no black should be believed and urges that they must be armed.
At this juncture, Charlie begins his argument with Tshembe that lasts throughout their uneasy association. They become Black versus White, African versus Europe and tired cynic versus eager neophyte. Tshembe constantly places barriers between himself and the journalist as Mr. Matoseh and Mr. Morris. As Tshembe knows that nothing could be changed by the American journalist’s report except but would heighten the image of the Whites to a peak, he tries to shatter Charlie’s idealism and calls Kumalo, an African freedom fighter as a scholar, a dreamer and a crazy old man. The African in him is slowly aroused and the feeling of patriotism dominates him. However, he resists personal involvement. Tshembe Matoseh, in response to questions from Charlie Morris, wonders at the “marvelous nonsense” of Americans who think that “for a handshake, a grin, a cigarette and half a glass of whiskey…three hundred years (will) disappear – and in five minutes” (LB 97). Later, Tshembe and Morris debate the usefulness of the concept of racism as a means of explanation for the events in Africa. Tshembe contends that:

Racism is a device that, of itself, explains nothing…but it also has consequences…you and I may recognize the fraudulence of the device, but the fact remains that a man…who is shot in Zatembe or Mississippi because he is black is suffering the utter reality of the device. And it is pointless to pretend that it doesn’t exist – merely because it is a lie! (121-22)

In an attempt to deflate Morris’s sense of superiority, Tshembe parallels the natives’ experience in Zatembe with the black experience in America, demonstrating that the “device” of racism, so useful in the subjugation of racism, so useful in the subjugation of blacks in a white power structure, is hardly unique to Africa.
After Charlie leaves, Peter, the porter at the mission compound, brings Tshembe a strip of bark and reveals his African identity Natali. The subservient Peter has taken the sacred oath. He recounts a folk tale about the land of elephants and hyenas and tells that they have waited a thousand seasons for these ‘guests’ to leave. He compels Tshembe to join the rebels (fighters) but Tshembe again resists personal involvement praising Kumalo.

Hansberry is keen in exposing the ‘double faced’ colonialist attitude through the military. The military arrests Dr. Amos Kumalo for plotting insurrection, though he has been called on to have talks with them. This moves Tshembe and he becomes furious. Furthermore, it is revealed by Dr. Dekoven that Major Rice, the colonial military officer is the father of Eric and Aqua the wife of the Old Abioseh had been seduced by him. This shows the nature of the colonial masters. Their aim is not only to rape the country but also the people. Even Reverend Nielson has warned Madame, his wife not to save the life of Aqua, for the child is the symbol of the two races and it would bring them trouble. Such is the state of Africans. The so called religious philanthropists as well as the crude military officer corrupt through their joint venture and hegemonize the mother Africa.

Hansberry exploits the white Dr. Dekoven, to bring her thesis. Unlike Charlie, he understands the paternalism that has stifled almost smothered Africa:

The mission could have a modern hospital, electric lines could be laid in weeks and a road built in three months. The money exists. All over the world people donate… the struggle here has not been to push the African to the Twentieth Century – but at all cost to keep him away from it! (LB 151-152)
Even the saintly Reverend Nielson has been paternalistic when old Abioseh brought a petition that Africans be allowed to govern themselves. He advised them to go home to their huts.

As the cruelties are heightened, the tension in the play is also heightened. Eric reveals the fact that Peter has given him the name Ngedi, not knowing that Abioseh is present. Abioseh betrays Peter to death and Rice shoots him down. At last Reverend Nielson has also been put to death and the entire mission compound mourns.

The confrontation comes, and Tshembe must choose from among the conflicting options open: he can return to London and his family, turning his back on his African family: he can join his brother in becoming a part of the establishment; or he can join the terrorists in setting up an African nation. Tshembe discusses his options with Madame Neilsen, now widow of the founder of the hospital:

TSHSEMBE. What will I do? Madame, I know what I’d like to do. I’d like to become an expert at diapering my son… and then hold my wife in my arms and bury my face in her hair and hear I want to go home. It seems your mountains have become mine, Madame.

MADAME. Have they, Tshembe?

TSHSEMBE. I think so. I thought so. I no longer know. I am one man, Madame. Whether I go or stay, I cannot break open the prison doors which hold Kumalo. I cannot bring Peter back from the dead. I cannot…(He breaks off) I am lying, Madame. To myself. And to you. I know what I must do…

MADAME. Then do it, Tshembe. (LB 168-69)
In a touching scene, Madame and Tshembe talk for the last time. She speaks of Reverend, of Aquah (Tshembe’s mother and her friend) whom Nielson allowed to die in child birth, because the child was a product of the races. She asks Tshembe “Do you hate us terribly?” (168). To the older lady and her culture, Tshembe is all forgiving, all loving, the heavens can afford a galaxy Madame’s. But he breaks off. The wise old woman replies that she should prepare to face death.

Several hours later in the darkness the mission is washed with moonlight, a hyena laughs and the sounds of night surround Madame at the coffin. Coming to pay his respects Abioseh tells Madame, of the commitment of the Reverend for the Africans. Warriors glide in quietly and Eric is among them. As Abioseh sees Tshembe he moves backward. Knowing intuitively what his brother must do, they stand facing each other. Tshembe shoots his brother dead. As the warriors open fire, Madame stands erect fatally wounded. Eric throws a grenade into the mission which explodes into flames. Holding Madame in his arms Tshembe stands alone. Gently setting her down, Tshembe throws back his head and an animal- like cry of grief rises from his very being. He involves himself in the war for freedom, because he does not want another African like Abioseh to betray his own race and for the massacre of his own race. The development of the character of Tshembe is also the development of drama, because Hansberry speaks through his eyes.

Hansberry always has had a vision and an optimistic approach towards life. In all her works she has expressed commitment. In “A Critical Background” to the play, Robert Nemiroff notes that although the setting of What Use Are Flowers? bears a closer resemblance to William Golding’s Lord of the Flies, which Hansberry read for the first time a year after writing her play, the true inspiration for it was Beckett’s Waiting for Godot “which had deeply affected and provoked her” (WUAF 381). Even
though the superficial differences between Hansberry’s play and Beckett’s are great enough to raise doubts about this judgment, a closer examination reveals the accuracy of Nemiroff’s view. Hansberry’s play in its entirety, engages Beckett’s on the most profound level, posing image against image, feeling against feeling, and vision against vision.

The confrontation between Beckett and Hansberry begins, inevitably, with their differing responses to absurdity. As Martin Esslin, the most reliable interpreter of the theater of the absurd has observed, the underlying attitude of this approach to drama, “the attitude most genuinely representative of our own time….is its sense that the certitudes and unshakable basic assumptions of former ages have been swept away, that they have been tested and found wanting, that they have been discredited as cheap and somewhat childish illusions” (23). In support of this view, he quotes Ionesco’s definition of the absurd, a definition that would serve equally well for Beckett: “Absurd is that which is devoid of purpose….Cut off from his religious, metaphysical, and transcendental roots, man is lost; all his actions become senseless, absurd, useless” (23).

Mahasweta Devi’s Bayen deals with a mother who is branded as a witch and separated from her family and society.

The phenomenon of caste as a status marker has probably been the most affective feature of Indian society. The origin of the notion of caste is so obscure and its manifestation in social life is so complicated that it is almost impossible to think of it as a ‘system’ with ‘rules’ that can be articulated and reasoned out. Questions, such as can any one change one’s caste? Is the caste hierarchy defined in any absolute terms? and Does a given caste originate in a given social function? can be answered both in the negative and in the affirmative. While caste identities have continued to
deepen, there is also at work a process called ‘Sanskritization’ in Indian Society which permits caste groups to evade their identity and achieve an upward social mobility.

It permitted self legitimization employing myth and interprets the language as a divine language and the people as divine personalities, which furthers discrimination. While it is true that one’s caste continues to stick to one’s identity, throughout one’s life, there also occurs a continuous fragmentation of a larger caste group into numerous sub-caste groups, creating in the process a hierarchic stratification within what had been a single caste. All in all, ‘caste’ is a lived social experience in India more than a prescribed mode of social classification. As its source has been serious of scriptural sanction (Varna system), unfortunately, read without their original metaphysical context on the other hand, at the tapering end of the concept of caste is its ability to get with the notion of economic class, which allows it to come off at the edges and permits individuals to gradually acquire a new caste identity. Yet it cannot be denied that for a variety of very complex reasons, Indian Society has kept the caste-convention alive; and despite the massive changes brought in by industrialization, urbanization and migrations, the caste-convention is showing no signs of decline or slackening. The policy of positive discrimination enshrined in the Indian constitution has led to a further crystallization of caste identities even if the goal of that policy was to eliminate inequality arising out of the marginalization of certain castes.

The social stratification and injustice arising out of the concept of caste attached to the accident of birth have been faced and questioned repeatedly by thinkers and social reformers throughout the history of India. In the Indian tradition, all functions involving labour, leaving aside the function of governing, learning and
trading, were reserved for the shudras. The menial nature of the work, the exclusion from the forms and institutions of learning, the perverse notion of pollution attached to the occupations in which the shudras were engaged, and the perpetual economical inequality, all of which continued to exist for centuries, made the life of the shudras a relentless story of suffering and injustice. The deprivation of the shudras continued endlessly since the economic motives received a religious sanction from the Brahmin class that had been entrusted with the upkeep of the scriptures. It was natural, therefore, that every attempt at rescuing the sanctity of the scriptures also became an attempt at challenging the Varna system. During medieval times, in every part of India, such attempts were made by social reformers and spiritual leaders. However, given the eclectic and retentive nature of Indian Culture, their efforts at challenging the Varnas resulted in adding to the fold many new sects without replacing the Varnas together. In the course of time, the more powerful among the sects acquired the form of a new religion such as Sikhism, but in most cases, such newly founded sects absorbed the characteristics of the old Varnas and came to be recognized as many new castes.

Devi, being a woman celebrates motherhood and mother. Her mothers are not submissive to the core. Forgoing their traditional roles, Women claim their rights. In Bayen, the protagonist Chandidasi is sensitive to the core. All the while, the mother in her is aroused. Since she is a mother, she always bothers her child. So, her breasts burst with milk. This is misinterpreted by the villagers. Her neighbours betray her. They could not withstand the up gradation of Chandidasi. Every one of them ill-treats Chandidasi saying, she has an evil eye. She is accused of killing small babies and further charged of raising the evil spirits. And finally, they brand her as Bayen, humiliating her to the core.
Though, Chandidasi is an illiterate, She never hides her opinions and desire. Being a mother, Chandidasi desires to forgo the tradition of burying dead children. Even people within the tribal section could not remain in Virtue. In contrary Chandidasi is exploited and is forced to live in seclusion. The life of seclusion tortures her and haunts her psychologically. She becomes a person of psychic disorder. Out of pain, Chandidasi refuses to take up her profession as a grave digger:

> It hurts to do the job these days, the job handed down to me by my ancestors, my hands rebel…Why can’t you see it, Gangaputta, why I think throwing up the job again and again? When I guard the graves through the night, my breasts bursting with milk for my Bhagirath, back home, all by myself. I can’t, stay from him. (Bayen, Five Plays 91-92)

Chandidasi aspires to live in peace along with her son and husband. But fate plays a major role in the life of Chandidasi and she becomes a victim of the society. Her husband who was supportive at the initial period: “That’s one thing you have to harp on …The job you do is a useful one, but the bastards won’t recognize that” (94). Later, he sides with the villagers to her horror. Everywhere envy, lust, power, money and others arouses the passions and reduces human beings to a level of animals. Thus Chandidasi is in confrontation with the mainstream, her husband and the villagers respectively. Out of confrontation, Chandidasi becomes helpless. Her mind is tuned in such a way that she must prove that she is committed to the core. So she becomes a martyr, throwing away her life.

It is interesting to note that Gourdas, the clever manipulator, taking advantage of the ignorance of the village folk, attempts to eliminate Chandidasi for he finds in her a threat to his existence as the defender of feudal virtues. In refusing to do the job,
she has broken with precedent. Therefore, she has to pay a price for her defiance of
the age old conventions. To achieve his goal, Gourdas incites Shashi, who is mad with
grief, against Chandi. The tactics he uses here invariably remind us of the divide and
rule principle of the colonial rulers.

However, Chandidasi, with an unaltering faith in human values, does not
easily give in. And what follows next in the play is fraught with irony. Frightened as
he is by the unusual turn of events, Gourdas pretends repentance only to deceive her
into the trap. He pleads:

   How can you say that? (In control over himself…) Have you forgotten
whose daughter you are? Your ancestry? If you do not bury them, their
souls remain hovering far from their destination…You are their
destination, you embody the mother Ganga…denied your service, the
dead child hangs for ever over the mother. Have mercy on us, mother,
forge us our transgressions. (Bayen, Five Plays 94)

Condemned to lead a solitary life, Chandidasi is deprived of the right to motherhood.
And her son, Bhagirath, is forbidden to enjoy the motherly affection. Interestingly,
however much she is separated from the humanity, she is not devoid of human
qualities. Her banishment serves as a catalyst which accelerates realization of the
greater human values that are quite often ignored. Her heart is full of love for her little
son.

   In fact, in a male-dominated society, woman is generally considered inferior to
man. She has lost all her freedom. She must either conform to the existing morals or
become mad and marginalized. As Patricia Waugh has justly pointed out: “if women
speak outside (the symbolic) order, they will either not to be heard or be heard as
insane.” She, thus, becomes helpless. All the forces seem to have intrigued against her to deprive her of the status of a human being. Her cry for mercy has fallen on deaf ears. In the beginning of Scene 1, a moving spectacle of the woman condemned by the superstitious people is brilliantly evoked, as the direction reads: “She looks utterly exhausted and despondent, at the end of her tether, dragging her reluctant feet like some condemned ghost debarred entry into human society…she wears a filthy red sari without the customary edge line, her hair disheveled” (Bayen, Five Plays 83).

Surprisingly, Chandidasi, who bravely moves among the graves, driving the jackals away from the dead bodies, fails to protect herself from being victimized by the people whose humanity has been made over to superstition, a form of domination of the vested interests. Towards the end of Scene 3, we find Malindar alone on the stage. He rearranges his dhoti too back to the earlier manner” (98) and beckons Bhagirath, who is supposed to have been witnessing, all the time, the enactment of inhuman separation of mother from a child to acquaint him with the present condition of his mother.

As in Aajir and Bayen, Mahasweta Devi deliberately deals in Water with the rural life and exposes powerfully man’s inhumanity to man, as she is aware that the persecution of the innocent folk continues unabated in the rural areas with an implicit acquiescence of the ruling class. The play, thus, represents Mahasweta Devi’s more powerful indictment of the existing social values and her unfailing commitment and passion for the underdog.

Even after five decades of freedom and establishment of the so-called welfare society and its avowed commitment to the cause of the downtrodden, still experiences the trauma of inhuman subjugation at the hands of the feudal lords who really rule the roost in the villages.
Hansberry’s plays emphasize much on characters. Although she presents her characters as victims of economic and racial inequality, she does not use them to indicate social reform. Hansberry has presented the characters as distinctive personalities, each one possessing individual personal motives.

Mahasweta Devi’s plays in the early seventies confronted Indian Mainstream Theatre while Hansberry’s the White American Theatre with a challenge, the challenge of an experience revealed – that the theatre failed to take up. Though discouraged by professional theatre, their plays were performed by Dalits and Tribals and Blacks in plenty, and are still being used as a tool in their fight against human rights violations.

Mahasweta Devi and Lorraine Hansberry have struggled a lot through their oeuvre and through their activism as well. From their committed writings, analyzed above, it is clear that the mainstream is always in confrontation with the people at the periphery. This theme is the leitmotif in all their works not because they want to exaggerate but it is what the reality is. But both these writers have taken it as a challenge to empower the voiceless with utmost commitment.

Further, they redefine the roles of their characters from new historicist perspective, employing allusions from myth, prototypes and metanarratives in order to reconstruct the future of the oppressed which forms the basis for the next chapter Redefining myth – Prototype – Metanarrative.