[...] the savages they thought

We were ---

They being real savages. [...]

Those alien concepts

Of whi-teness, [...]

This weapon called

Civilization --- (qtd. in Gnanamony 219)

Mahasweta Devi and Lorraine Hansberry are new historicists. Through their works they revisit history taking into account the oral history of literary as well as non-literary texts to establish their beliefs and express their consciousness as social realists.

They impart a certain rebellious attitude in their characters and assign them roles to define and redefine the already established conventions and notions, paving way for a new thesis. They redefine and restructure the culture and tradition that exploits the innocent creatures through their commitment and they have made impossible, possible through their female characters. In those days women could not raise their voice and they suffocated under the clutches of the patriarchal society. Both Devi and Hansberry have brought forth into light their thesis through women characters, being women writers. They deconstruct the canonical versions i.e. myth, metanarrative and prototype using women characters to express their commitment. They use myth, prototypes and metanarratives of the mainstream to define and redefine the ideology that form the very being of them.
New Historicism offers unconditional freedom to visit and revisit history along with supportive documents of non-literary tradition. New historicism as defined by Peter Barry is:

A method based on the parallel reading of literary and non-literary texts, usually of the same historical period. That is to say, new historicism refuses… to ‘privilege’ the literary text: instead of a literary ‘foreground’ and historical ‘background’ it envisages and practices a mode of study in which literary and non-literary texts are given equal weight and constantly inform or interrogate each other.

(172)

The tribal have a rich heritage and culture, oral history and tradition. This theory has been well exploited by Devi and Hansberry. Influenced by Fredrick Jameson, Michael Foucault and Jean Francois Lyotard, Stephen Greenblatt has propounded a new theory. He questions the very historicity of a text and subverts the foundation of it. But he is not against history rather he creates a new history altogether with non literary texts either written or oral. Thus Greenblatt advocates the revision of history and has incorporated the novel idea of creating ruptures on the line of Foucault:

For Foucault history was not the working out of “universal” ideas: because we cannot know the governing ideas of the past or the present, we should not imagine that “we” even have a “center” for mapping the “real”. Furthermore, history itself is a form of social oppression, told in a series of ruptures with previous ages; it is more accurately described as discontinuous, riven by “fault lines” that must be
integrated into succeeding cultures by the *epistemes* of power and knowledge. (284)

Both Devi and Hansberry employ new historicist theory of revisioning in their oeuvre. They challenge patriarchal conventions and orthodox establishments and discourses and subvert their hierarchy, taking sides with the oppressed. In order to subvert, they employ myth, prototype and metanarratives. A myth may be defined as:

…a didactic story, attributing a sacred and supernatural origin to an individual or collective identity, practice or institution. It does so in order to perpetuate and perfect that identity, practice or institution into an ever-fuller realization and manifestation of its potency. It attempts to achieve this purpose through the narration of the story itself. It attains a measure of success because it works on the subjective identity of its hearers and readers. (Jesudhasan 1)

Employing myth and metanarrative the mainstream subjugates the ‘low’. The indigenous people have had a rich tradition and faith. But they are not authenticated because of their oral tradition. This is being exploited by the caste Bhramins otherwise Aryans. As per A.K. Chaturveydei:

The *Rigveda* is the first every literary text to depict a composite culture, a blend of exogenous, Aryan and non-Aryan indigenous aboriginal tribes called Adivasi or Adivasis’ people in Sanskrit literature. With their gradual advancement Aryans slowly assimilated culture modes of Adivasis’ superstructure. (14-15)

Further, myth inculcates an archetypal character as metanarrative inculcate prototypes. A metanarrative may be defined in critical theory and in postmodernism as “a narrative about narratives of historical meaning, experience or knowledge:
which offers a society legitimization through the anticipated completion of a master idea.” (www.wikipedia.com) In short it is a story within a story.

According to the Oxford Advanced Learner’s dictionary, A Prototype may be defined as, “The first design of something from which other forms are copied or develop”. Thus employing ‘Standard’ characters from ‘accepted’ conventions both these writers have subverted the foundations of their being.

Hansberry’s *A Raisin in the Sun* is a celebration of black liberation, in which Beneatha represents the author’s ideas. And she not only ridicules her brother Walter, but also the wealthy Negro George who suffers of colonial attitude. Her own search for her roots, Africa, is evident through her conversation with Asagai. She behaves as a woman of wit. Sometimes she is outraged. She takes up the racial issues and comes up with a serious condemnation for the conservative thought. When Linder the chairman of the Clybourne Park Welcoming Association approaches them she is furious. Though she practices the art of juggling, she listens to the conversation between Walter as well as Linder. Linder’s ‘decent speech’ turned her red. When Linder states: “You see – in the face of all things I have said, we are prepared to make your family a very generous offer…” (*ARS* 408).

Beneatha reacts vehemently and pounces upon Linder, “Thirty pieces and not a coin less!” (408). The allusion of thirty pieces of silver appears in metanarratives, the Holy Bible in three places. If a slave of a master is gored by an ox, thirty pieces of silver would be given as relief as revealed in Exodus 21:32. The same allusion appears in Zechariah 11:13. The praise paid for a slave’s accidental death is the same thirty pieces of silver. The employers went to insult Zechariah with this amount of money because the money was very less. So it is a symbol of ill-treatment. Again the allusion to thirty pieces of silver appears in Mathew 26:15. The Jewish leaders used
the thirty pieces of silver to pay to Judas who betrayed Christ. The greatest of the Jew was betrayed by his own disciple Judas, the Jew. So the Christians are of aversion towards ‘the money’ because it betrayed the Christ. This is the version of the mainstream. In literature, John Ervine used the same allusion in his one act play _Progress_. When Professor Henry Corrie, the British scientist is proud about getting a huge sum of money as royalty, her sister Mrs. Meldon, who has lost her son in war prevents him from revealing his invention of revolutionizing the concept of war, because his invention would betray human beings at large. So she utters the word “why not thirty pieces of silver?” (Ervin 110). Thus she ill-treats her brother who is to destroy the human kind. So the thirty pieces of silver is a symbol of ill-treatment of somebody. It is the mainstream version. So Hansberry employs the same weapon against the colonial masters. It was a moment when the racial prejudices were at the peak and any utterance of such would prove to be problematic. Being aware of the result, Hansberry willingly employs this metanarrative to attack the conservationist who is to promote colour consciousness. Thus she satirizes the dominant discourse in America. The play _The Drinking Gourd_ deals with slavery and its aftermath.

Hansberry is careful in her study of the play _The Drinking Gourd_. She satirizes the crude treatments meted out by the slaves. Attributing allusions, prototypes from metanarratives, she moves towards an optimistic world. Like the fourth world or fifth world, Hansberry creates a separate world for the slaves. She resists all sorts of oppressions of the people in hierarchy and their fallen ways. Hansberry employs Hannibal as a tool to create an upsurge among the Black Africans. The very name Hannibal is suggestive of the historical warrior. During 203 BC, the prototype Hannibal joins his father Hamilcar Barca fighting in the Punic war, leading the battalion across the Alphs. The prototype Hannibal is then brave and
commanding. Similarly, Hannibal in *The Drinking Gourd* is of rebellious nature. He knows very well that education is the only means to liberate him from ignorance. So he teaches his master’s son Tommy and learns from him the alphabets. With the education he amassed, Hannibal reads the Holy Bible. He is curious to know the Messiah. Not only Hannibal but the entire names of the slaves are from the Holy Bible. Sara in the play is devoted to Hannibal as in the Bible. The biblical Sara too is devoted to her husband Abraham. The name of Hannibal’s escaped brother Isaiah is the name of the prophet in the Bible which means God strengthens. In the Bible Joshua takes the Israelites towards the Promised Land. Similarly, as they hope, young Joshua in the play leads them towards the North.

Hiram, the master begins his work as a master with only four slaves. This is evident through the conversation between him and Rissa, “...Jes you and me and old Ezra and Zekial who run off and poor old Leo who died last year” (*DG* 256).

Hansberry willingly chooses these names to focus on the problems faced by the slaves. Their conversion to Christianity has not reduced their miseries. Rather it adds to their misery as the masters never respond to the call of the Christ “love thy neighbours”. The slaves accept the names of the prototypes thinking that it would reduce the pain inflicted upon them. Or the metaphorical meaning of their names may bring in happiness. But to everyone’s horror, their conditions get worsened. Everett increases the working hours and reduces the lunch time which is evident of his being as a crude master. The names of the White characters are ironical. They are called the Sweet family but they give little sweetness to their workers. The mistress of the house Maria is unlike the prototype Virgin Mary. Further, the name of Zeb Dudley is a biblical name of Zebediah, who is associated with the slaves. Hansberry uses sarcastic names like Dr. Bullett and Coffin, the driver to unveil the condition of
the slaves. The name Coffin suggests that it would hold dead bodies. Being the betrayer of his race Coffin is held in poor light. The name of Dr. Bullett too suggests death and violence. Though a doctor is expected to protect the life and welfare of the patient, he promotes slavery.

Hansberry brings in the Christian elements and allusions to prove the venomous plots of the whites. The whites always think them superior due to their colour consciousness. Though they preach Christian values, they never bother to follow those principles which are ironic. Rather they try to legitimize their statement. Through the conversation of Bullet, the doctor one shall perceive the racial discrimination and their true colour:

HIRAM. Macon – you own slaves.

BULLETT. Well, that’s not a sin. It was meant to be that way. That’s why He made men different colors. (DG 254)

Further, they feel proud of their hierarchy and nurture it over generations and maintain it as status quo.

HIRAM. …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!” Hah! What a cocky boy I was! … (258)

Thus, Hansberry unveils the colonial vengeance of the whites and the racial prejudices. Hansberry makes use of her women character boldly to escape destiny. In Drinking Gourd Rissa is meek and surrenders herself to his master and whenever Hannibal aspires to rebel, Rissa does not approve of it. Further, she pleads her master to employ Hannibal as a house servant to protect him.
She considers the mutilation of the eyes as a challenge and wows to rebel against the dominant system fighting against it. The mother in her is provoked by the master. Earlier, she has been duty conscious. But now she has taken decisions. She is too bold to rap out the cutting phrase to her master for the first time and takes up the ultimate decision of moving towards the North following the Big Dipper.

HIRAM. I – wanted to tell you, Rissa - I wanted to tell you and ask you to believe me, that I had nothing to do with this. I – some things do seem to be out of the power of my hands after all… Other men’s rules are a part of my life…

RISSA. (For the first time looking up at him) Why? Ain’t you Master? How can a man be marster of some men and not at all of others...

- ... (DG 305)

Rissa hands over the gun to Joshua and sends the couple Hannibal and Sarah towards North. Thus for the first time in life Rissa proves her as a warrior.

If, *The Drinking Gourd* deals with an optimistic hope of liberating themselves from the historical bond, *Les Blancs* celebrates the natives. Suffocating in the ghetto’s of America the blacks aspire to travel towards the North and their native land and obviously in a crisis of identity. They have to suffer to survive even in their own motherland.

The colonial masters in the process of ‘civilizing’, the ‘barbarous blacks’ loot their natural resources with imperialistic notion of thinking them as superior over the natives. This is recapitulated in *Les Blancs*.

*Les Blancs* celebrates not only the culture of the natives rather it boldly resists the oppressions and creates an uprising in the native lands. Hansberry’s handling of
myth is exemplary. She analyzes the myth of the Native Africans, to revolutionize the native warriors and to give a better picture of the different aspects of colonialism and to depict their roles as masters of the African continent. Their superiority over their motherhood is unraveled through a series of incidents and constructs. In Africa people believed in the tale of Modingo, the wise hyena. Once there was a quarrel between the elephants and the hyenas. The elephants claimed more space for they were larger in size and the hyenas demanded more space, for they were the first to occupy the land and claimed their superiority over the land. So, they approached Modingo with their petition. But, the wise hyena, being aware of the forthcoming problems remained in silence. And the elephants exploited the atmosphere. They threw the native hyenas out of their land. Deprived of their lands, the hyenas suffered a lot. This myth is employed by Hansberry.

The archetypal story better expresses the natives. Peter obviously equates the elephant with the white man occupying the land. Basically a symbol of goodness, the elephant is also associated with men and murder. According to one myth, the elephant originated from the transformation of wicked people whom God destroyed. The elephant therefore is both the victim and the embodiment of evil men, and in Peter’s tale, white people in Africa are victimized by their own narrow prejudice and personify huge, selfish beasts crashing through the jungle. Hyenas, on the other hand, are sacred and holy, having evolved from dogs, which were used as sacrifices to God. The hyena, which is associated with the noble black man, represents God’s means of showing his intentions, but he also signifies God’s gift to men. Of course, Tshembe becomes Modingo, the wise hyena. Just as Modingo wishes to settle the dispute by reason, Tshembe like Jomo Kenyatta desperately hopes to solve the problems of his people with petitions, delegations, and discussion. But that time has passed. Like the
hyena, the black man was the first and was used to running free. When the white man, like the elephant, gathers his herds or armies, the hyenas must revolt or be destroyed. Thus, Hansberry redefines the African archetype and assigns tasks to fulfill “a dream deferred” \textit{(ARS 368)}.

Hansberry employs Ngago, the poet warrior’s speech as a liberal voice of the blacks. Like Mark Antony, Ngago makes a clarion call. First he presents the pathetic condition of the natives dying and stabbing under the colonial rule. Ngago thus epitomizes the condition:

\begin{quote}
\ldots{this young one was making her way for the embers of her village when the soldiers caught her. Five of them! Must I tell you of the crime!? (\textit{Gesturing again}) Rise up, old father! This old man came through the woods with his family and met the troops. (\textit{Screaming}) HE IS WITHOUT FAMILY NOW! \ldots People, first we asked only for more of the bad land they gave us when they took the fine fields of our country – the bad lands on which our cattle already starve \ldots. (\textit{LB 160-01})} \\
\end{quote}

So, Nango urges the natives to take decisions rather than being victims to the religion of the whites. A fierce speech is made by him which unravels the horrors of their lives. Penetrating deep into the wounds of sufferings, woes, and the roots causes problems, Nago warrants committed leaders rather than wise Modingos. Hansberry employs Ngago as an eye opener. He insists that the British power will destroy the very union of man and nature. According to the western mythology the humming bird may be one of the birds which formed a bridge between heaven and earth. And it is destroyed by death. Although the Kwi are basically peaceful, they must defend
themselves and their mother land against fire and invaders. Thus, Hansberry visualizes the strong bond between nature and the tribal, redefining the conventionally established tradition.

Hansberry is highly political in redefining the roles of the brothers of the same family. She creates an upsurge among the audience by assigning different roles to the brothers. Each one is a typical representative of their political ideology. Abioseh being conquered by the colonial ‘mission’, has turned into a Christian Reverend Paul. Augustus has accepted the Christian faith has and renounced his African tradition and he stands his culture as pagan. His brother Tshembe is seriously involved in the African tradition and he believes in his roots. His travel to Europe has not changed his very being. He wishes to continue his father’s legacy. Though Tshembe is submissive in the beginning, he regains his power once he is aware of what is going in the ‘Dark Continent’. Their brother Eric who is a mulato stands between the two. His birth is a shame in the African tradition. For her mother is seduced by the military officer Mr. Rice. He has to relay on someone for fulfilling his needs. He becomes an addict and uses the leftovers of the Whites. Tshembe’s question is valid, “you are half European. Which part of yourself will you drive into the sea!” (LB 144). But finally Eric is aware of his condition and he hopes that the White Masters are the reason for his shame. So he tries to take vengeance against the Whites. He is torn between choosing an ideology either to follow the White Supremacy or the African Tradition.

The continental problem becomes the problem of the family. The White influence has paved way for the intrigues within the family. While Abioseh tries to convince his brothers he forgoes his tradition. And this arouses the passion in Tshembe. Finally there is a rift between Abioseh as well as Tshembe and Aboiseh
declares “make you your brother’s keeper!” (149). This is yet another allusion employed by Hansberry.

The Holy Bible speaks of both blood related brothers and Christian brothers who are united through the blood of Christ. The phrase my brother’s keeper occurs in the story of Cain and Abel in Genesis 4:1-9. After the Lord’s expulsion of Adam and Eve from Eden for their disobedience, Cain kills his brother out of jealousy that God finds Abel’s sacrifice acceptable and rejects Cain’s sacrifice as unacceptable. After the murder, God asks Cain about Abel. Cain replies that he does not know. Further, he questions, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” Hansberry increases the tension between the brothers which is reflected in the increase in tension among the Whites as well as the Africans. By calling Tshembe as Ishmael, Abioseh has challenged him. The Bible states that Ishmael is the eldest son of Abraham, born to Hagar, the hand maid of Sara. He is not promised by God’s word. But the promise of God is Isaac, who is born of Sara. There is a rift between the blood brothers, between the promised and the unpledged. This rift continues as a battle between the two races. This metanarrative is being employed by Hansberry in her play to build up the rift between the brothers of the same family. In the end, Tshembe has to kill his brother Abioseh who is a symbol of the colonial supremacy. Further, Hansberry ridicules the mission of Christianity and the hegemony of the military rule in Africa. Through the Military Officer Major Rice, Hansberry makes a sarcastic remark, “please inform the Reverend that if there are no military operations there will be no Mission” (135), which is quite ironic to the Christian vision and mission and the commandment expressed in the New Testament. Thus, through a series of rifts she unravels the African experience and the black suppression. Hansberry deals with the rift not only between the blacks and the whites but also within the white community. Her Sign is a cosmopolitan
drama in which each of the characters stands typical representing the world of macrocosm.

*The Sign in Sidney Brustein’s Window* is a matured play. Hansberry’s commitment is expressed through her plot and characterization. Her own use of the prototypes, myths and allusions from metanarrative are ephemeral. The characterization of Sidney as a Jew in an American play is not a coincidence but it is out of Hansberry’s commitment for the neglected. Suffering is the crux in the lives of the Jews. The history of the Jews clearly states the ethnic problems of the Jews under the yoke of the Egyptians. From slavery to the Promised Land and even after that, struggle and suffering of them are inevitable. The Christ, as a Jew has suffered a lot to redeem the human kind, from the long miseries and sufferings in the crucifix accepting martyrdom. Sidney, who is an ordinary Jew, oscillates in his life between the evils of the world and in goodness. But life for him becomes painful. Because of his failure in his nightclub, Sidney is worn out. Totally withdrawn, he seeks haven in his art-newspaper. But circumstances force him to act as a politically committed comrade; for his rational outlook and for his good intention of fighting against corruption. Thus he reflects his prototype, the Christ and his race the Jew. In a sense, the suffering of the Jews has become ‘a metaphor’ for the word suffering.

Sidney, soon, is a victim of the corrupted machinery. He groans in pain out of treachery which is identical to that of the Christ in the last hours. Finally, Sidney rises from his ashes as phoenix. The death of Gloria, the prostitute brings in Sidney’s life, a change. The name of Gloria and her characterization are antagonistic in nature. Actually, Gloria is a hymn which is being sung in glory to the Christ. Making use of the name Gloria, Hansberry deconstructs the metanarrative. Her attribution of the hymn to a prostitute is ironic. But, Sidney learns a lesson from the death of the
prostitute whereas the Christ has taught a lesson to the common, when a whore is brought to Him. Unlike his prototype, Sidney has weakness as a common man. But, later he decides to take up the challenges of the political treachery and his life as a man of commitment.

Hansberry, on the other hand knits the plot in such a way that Sidney’s suffering is not only in the face of his public life, but also in the face of his private life and in his secret life. Hansberry weaves the culture of Jews as well as the Greeks, through a marriage, between Sidney as well as Iris. Tying together both, Hansberry creates her thesis. The relation of the three sisters and their father, the Parodus family in a way, is symbol of their Greek tradition. According to Greek mythology, Iris is a sororal twin along with Arke. Though, her twin sister betrays by rebelling against the Olympians and joins with the Titans, Iris is not. She is committed.

Iris is the “personification of the rainbow and messenger of the gods” (www.wikipedia.com). She is also the goddess of the sea and sky. But in The Sign in Sidney Brustein’s Window, Iris is a rebel. She rebels against Sidney. As in mythology, she is beautiful with her long hair. With her Appalachian dance, Iris pleases Sidney. But she is not meek as in the myth rather Iris comes up with sharp criticism on Sidney. Further she horrifies him by willing to take up her profession as a journalist for a television programme and by refusing to accept to perform the Appalachian dance with the long hair. Iris deserts her only to inculcate a change in Sidney’s behavior but she accompanies him when he is exhausted. Thus, Hansberry has redefined the roles of Iris, antagonistic to the role in Greek mythology.

Hansberry has exploited yet another character, David, the absurd dramatist. The prototype David appears in the Holy Bible. In the metanarrative, David has risen
in eminence as a vice king from the life of a shepherd. Similarly, in the play, David Ragin succeeds in his life as an absurd dramatist in opposition to the set theory of absurd dramatists. Unlike his prototype, who is passionate after his colonel’s wife, David protects his integrity as an absurd dramatist by not permitting the privileges requested by Sidney, though David is amoral indulged in homosexuality.

David’s fall in the metanarrative is due to his abduction of another man’s wife as focused in many other metanarratives. But, David in The Sign in Sidney Brustein’s Window is successful despite his weakness as a homosexual. He thrives with a rational outlook. Thus, David’s outlook supports Sidney in coming out of his failures, expressing his commitment to fight against corruption. Thus, Hansberry redefines the role of her characters breaking traditional norms.

Hansberry not only deals with the black liberation but also she deals with universal issues and challenges levied against the human race against chaos. She fights against the predicament of human beings and builds up positive attitude towards approaching fate and destiny, challenging the world of absurdist.

The Oxford Advanced Learner’s dictionary defines a hermit as “a person who, usually for religious reasons, lives a very simple life alone and does not meet or talk to other people”. Similarly, the Hermit in What Use are Flowers is a hermit in seclusion. Almost all the canonical versions define a hermit in such light. But there persist, a kind of hermits like Henry Thoreau. As V.K. Chari states:

Thoreau sought throughout his life to live a life of meaning – a life in which he would understand the truths of his own nature, his relationship with other men and his relationship with Nature and with the Universe. (10)
But at times he is indecipherable. Thoreau is a man with unmatchable difference:

This Henry Thoreau is not an easy man or writer to understand. His writing style is paradoxical, as were his interests and his nature. He used the stars to know his native river. He used the wisdom of Asia to know what to do with his morning hours. He had a scientific interest, but with a difference, a philosophical interest, but with a difference; a theological interest, but with a vast and puzzling difference. (34)

Thus, Thoreau becomes the prototype of the American hermit. Similarly, the Hermit in What Use are Flowers is a man of difference. Tired of seclusion, the hermit returns to habitations. But he is quite opposite to his views, “… monsters will be kind enough to give me directions to the city, I shall make myself absent from your admirable company” (330). Though the hermit desires to learn the children’s company, he wishes to visit the town, “what is the nearest town?” I no longer recall these points, apparently, and have got myself utterly lost…” (330).

The hermit has not lost himself not in his philosophical search or in the process of attaining transcendentalism but his usage for the ordinary and common provokes him. And the hermit is true to his senses which are unexpected of the prototype, hermit:

…but do you know the very first thing absolutely had a compulsion to know once I got into the forest? I wanted to know what time it was. Clearly I had no appointments to keep – but I longed to know the hour of the day! There is, of course, no such things as an hour, it is merely something that men have labeled so – but I longed to have the label at my command again. (WUAF 331)
Which means that the hermit wishes to revisit his past. He moves from the state of nothingness to a phase of meaningful life. His curiosity to know the external world is antagonistic to his position as a hermit. When he finds the children as pre-lingual he identifies the master in him. He names them. This incident is evident of his hierarchy over the little children. He employs the divide and rule policy. He creates a Christian as well as a pagan world by naming the children as John, Thomas, Clarence, Robert, William, Charlie, and Horace and Alexander. Further, he names the girl as Lilly, evident of his patriarchal approach towards a girl. He becomes the master of the unknown world and aspires to rule the world of children which is quite evident of his hierarchical needs. The hermit is of the view that, “perpetuation of the human race could possibly be his responsibility” (366). The prototype of a hermit does not expect anything but this hermit is in search of disciplinary traits and the progress of civilization. By inculcating expectations in the hermit, Hansberry fights against the world of chaos and absurdism. Thus, by arousing the passions and the hierarchical need in the hermit, Hansberry tries to deconstruct the myth of hermit and its prototype.

Like Hansberry, Mahasweta Devi is also a committed activist. If Hansberry is concerned about the Black Americans and Africans in European continent, Devi is concerned about the lives of the indigenous people in the Indian subcontinent. She presents through her plays, a series of humiliations and violations charged against the ordinary human beings. Devi’s portrayal of the real life situations calls in one’s resentment:

But surely, surely, when a wrong thing has been done, and you feel it, to suppress you resentment and to stifle protest is to let evil grow
unchecked. Civilization and humanity call for the free expression of one’s resentment. (Rajagopalachari 12)

In *Water*, Devi unveils the problem of the doms under the yoke of the caste Brahmin Santhosh Pujari. She strikes a parallel note of the myth of Bhagirath in Hindu mythology. The king of Sagar dynasty brings water from the heaven to the earth after his penance of six thousand years on the advice of his guru Trithala, to gain the release of his sixty thousand uncles from the curse of saint Kapila (www.wikepedia.com). Devi makes use of this myth and has redefined the myth to witness the savage act of discrimination of the tribal doms. Devi equates Maghai with Bhagirath. The legendary Bhagirath could enjoy the privileges from lord Shiva whereas Maghai could not. Though a follower of Bhagirath, Santhosh is unable to till out water. Because of his association with nature, Maghai could do it. His sincerity and meditation helps him achieve his goals as a water diviner:

MAGHAI. (in a thunderous voice) No. Don’t dare spit upon your fate, son. The work we were born to may not provide us with food, but was left to us by our ancestors, my grandfather, his father, his father, for ages it has been our work. When the King Bhagirath brought the holy Ganga down from the heavens, Basumati, the mother Earth, asked Ganga: Give me a little bit of it, sister, to keep hidden in my bowels.

DHURA. (torn between belief and disbelief) No!

MAGHAI. Ganga told Basumati, Hold the nether Ganga in your bowels.

DHURA. Then?
MAGHAI. (raises to his feet, to enact the drama of how it all happened). So the nether Ganga flowed into the secret depths of the mother Earth. My earliest ancestor had come all prepared to offer *puja* to the holy river at her advent. …waters, spoke: You’re my chosen priest. I’m the goddess, the nether Ganga, whenever men will dig for a well or pond, you’ll gather the offerings, pray for water, and go around and round looking for where the water lies hidden till I tell you where to dig. (*Water, Five Plays* 124-25)

Though water divining is of divine origin the outcaste is able to harvest water. But the irony is that he or his ethnic group could not use it. It is not the conditions laid down by the divine being but by the manipulations of the mainstream in misinterpreting the metanarratives. Discrimination becomes the ultimate goal of the mainstream in order to enjoy the privileges required. The caste brahmin inculcates ‘culture’ and ‘tradition’ to betray and hegemonize the indigenous people. Devi creates a tension and builds up the play through her woman character Phulmani. To everyone’s horror, water is made into a commodity and possession. While the mainstream posses the natural resource the doms could not. Thus the act of discrimination acts against the tribal. It is Phulmani who raises her voice against the caste Bhramin Santosh. Further she groups together the tribal as a whole to represent their issue over the subsidy. Even they are ready to die rather than remain without water, since water is the elixir of life. Moreover, Devi calls in the myth of Yama from Hindu mythology:

PHULMANI. The drought and the famine take their toll of thousand.

I’d be happy if Yama, the god of death, snatches me away.

(Goes to a corner, stands on her toes to take a look outside). It
was early dawn when he went out to work, and still no sign of him. It looks like the son’s following the father’s footsteps. Doesn’t it look like that, folks? (draws a deep breath.) Anyway, what can you do about it? Why do I whine to you? Must be going crazy, my son’s a real man. I’d like to get him married, and have his wife following me, helping me with the chores, we’d go to the market together, mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. All dreams, not for me. (*Water, Five Plays* 133-34)

Thus Devi redefines the case of the tribal.

Devi is creative to the core and she exploits myths as well as metanarratives to redefine and define her commitment as a writer. In the *Ramayana*, Rama wages a war against Ravan to bring Sita back. In that process he builds a bridge to Lanka with the help of *Vanara* and Hanuman. Thus, for a mighty cause they build a huge bridge. This act is equated with building up the boulders of a river bank in *Water*. The doms build the dam with such a kind of spirit in them. For them building the boulder is as sovereign as that of Rama. With the motto of achieving such greatness they build the dam along with the help of Jiten, the Mahishya:

Hei Lanka, Hei Lanka,

We’re on the way to Lanka,

A boulder on our backs,

A boulder on the ground,

We’re building the bridge to Lanka.

Hei Lanka, Hei Lanka. (*Water, Five Plays* 153)
The tribal praise, admire and adore water. They are in the belief that they would get water for sure and celebrate in jubilant mood and in a transtate they become real poets:

DHURA. (Singing) you are my mother, dear,
You are my Tushu queen,
You are my Bhadu queen,
Dance, mother dear, dance!
Chorus (singing). You are my mother dear,
You are my Tushu queen, …
Chorus (singing). Dance, mother dear, dance! (*Water, Five Plays* 158-59)

Once, they build the dam, they dream that their life would be a happier one. And their generations shall not wither away shedding tears without water. So they perform various rituals to their folk Gods. Devi deals with the faith, custom and belief of the tribal people. Following tradition they offer milk to the snake goddess, their protector:

CHORUS. (singing) O Manasa, there’s milk and bananas for you.
O Manasa, watch our homes.
How pretty you nose-ring is!
It’s market day in the town today,
with the shops all decked up fine.
We’ll buy you a nylon sari
for you to dance with the snakes.
We’ll offer you cream and rice.
Have mercy for us, Manasa mother. (163-64)
The tribal mission and vision ends in misery. Though they work hard their hard work ends in vein. The bhramin Santosh as well as the officials could not bear the self sustaining capacity of the tribal. Hence, they selfishly blast the dam and Magai and many others are washed by the water. They become one with their mother, Nature. Thus, employing various myths, legends and metanarratives, Devi brings forth the sufferings of the tribal.

Devi has not only revolutionized the tribal against the mainstream, but also she builds up the same kind of spirit in the urban setup and especially in the heart and hearts of the upper caste people.

Devi has questioned the ‘myth or motherhood’ and the prototype of the mother in many of her works and especially in *Mother of 1084*. The conventional frame work of a mother and motherhood are questioned. At the initial level, Sujata has broken the chain of burden by taking up a profession of her own. And the economical independence has given her the space required to think and introspect herself; though Sujata is silent, she is no more an ‘Angel in the House’ as described in *Professions for Women*:

… the Angel in the House. I will describe her shortly as I can. She was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was intensely unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily. If there was chicken, she took the leg; if there was a draught she sat in it – in short she was so constituted that she never had a mind or a wish of her own, but preferred to sympathize always with the minds and wishes of others. ... Her purity was supposed to be her chief beauty – her blushes, her great grace. (Woolf 47)
She is neither Gandhari of Mahabarata, who took part in her husband’s misery nor Sita of Ramayana to remain in ‘virtue’ expected of women; rather she is of a rare phenomenon. Unlike others, Sujata is in search of her dear son Brati’s identity. In the process of search for identity Sujata suffers from identity crisis. She is aware of the hypocrisies. So, she takes up a stand point. Once she is aware of the strange world, Sujata takes up a rational outlook. Her own conscience makes her burst upon the evil society. Revisiting the past, Sujata moves towards transformation. She is never static mute, accepting the traditional norms and conditions rather she mystifies the myth of motherhood and the mother. Thus, Devi makes use of Sujata as a weapon to bring in a change in the upper stratum.

The author’s treatment of women characters and her proficiency in assigning roles to women empowers not only their position as women, moving towards feminism but also makes the audience furious against injustices, paving way for movements. In her collection of Breast Stories, Dopdhi in “Draupadhi” counters the entire army:

Similarly, Nandhini in Mother of 1084 boldly accepts the sufferings inflicted on her by the official machinery:

Whereas men like Anindaya betrayed the clans, Dibayanath and Jyothi hushed up the matter of the encounter of Brati and Neepa’s husband, the invalid poet – addicted to liquor are typically cowards to face the situation with conscience. But, it is Nandhini who like Brati stands apart, challenging the ‘machinery’. Thus, Devi has redefined the voices of woman from submissive phase to rebel phase defying traditional roles. Thus Devi has expressed her utmost commitment as a dramatist.
The play *Aajir* is not only a satire on bonded labour system but it is a trenchant attack on metanarratives. The setting of the play unveils the condition of the subaltern during ‘ideal rulers’ in the ancient India. Devi through her ground breaking deconstruction of the metanarratives brings out the sufferings of the common and the victim. In the *Ramayana*, the prototype Rama is focused as an ideal husband as well as an ideal administrator, even in *Ramayana* one can find a majestic description of the kingdom of Ayodhya. The term Ayodhya means a place where there is no war (www.wordpress.com). The kingdom of Ayodhya is being celebrated as a place of peace, prosperity and safety, etc. in various canonical texts as well as in Hindu mythology. Even Mahatma Gandhi calls in for the execution of Ramraj and Rama is being worshiped as the ideal God. By choosing this background as her setting, Devi depicts the historical struggle of the victims under the clutches of landlords and kings.

In *Aajir*, Golak Kura and Gairabai Dasi sell themselves during the regime of Rama of Ayodhya suffering in the drought: “There’ll be drought every year/ There’ll be famine every year/ I’ve bound my descendants’ fate for them!” (*Aajir*, Five Plays 49).

From Golak’s statement, it is evident that famine reigns every year. Thus it is a satire on the ideal state Ayodhya and its ruler Rama. Even if an artificial famine is necessitated through the plot of landlords, it is a failure on the part of governance. The whiplashes, screams and even forbidding him from the dreams of marrying, having a family of an Aajir’s own are evidences of the colonial attitude of the monarch and landlords. Thus, Devi breaks the mythical belief of the mainstream and questions the rule of the ‘idealized society’. The Aajir’s bond is a proof of the age old problem.

The landlord Raavan Shunri, is as evil as Raavan in the *Ramayana*. In the metanarrative Rama helps the victims, the oppressed and especially his wife Sita from
the clutches of Raavan, the King of Lanka. But the age old problem of the bonded labourers continuing forever is a failure on the part of Rama as an ‘ideal ruler’ of Ayodhya which is without peace. The bond of slavery being documented which is clear evidence of humiliation is an utter failure on the part of governance and it is a shame to the rulers: “Dated the eleventh day of Kartik of the Bengali era 1101, corresponding to 1072 of the Hijri era” (Aajir, Five Plays 48).

Secondly, the whore offering prayer for rain is sarcastic. Generally, in myth lord Indra frequently employs Ramba, Menaka or Urvashi to tempt Rishis, Gandharva and Asuras. But here human beings tempting lord Indra, the God of rain with Punnashaashi, the whore is a satire. Usually, a prayer is performed by a person who remains ‘chastity’ but here the feudal system calling the whore for performing a prayer is a kind irreverence to the system.

PUNNASHASHI. …Give us water, king Ind, give us water. The soil’s parched in the dreadful drought. Let us have the frog couple married and let us sow the seeds. Give us water, king Ind, save our lives … why do you all inflict your-Selves on me when you know it’s only a whore? Eh? Why? Why do you draw the dust from my court – yard for your puja? The famine and the drought come again and again. And the whore has to strip naked and call for the water to bring the rain down on you. (She raises the hamper up to the sky) Sweep everything away, Lord, in a wild rush of water. Let the world be swept away. (Aajir, Five Plays 59-60)

Devi discovers the world of underprivileged through her efficient narratology. She refutes the conditions of the mainstream through the voiceless. Hence, Punnashi
ridicules the system and divulges her unlikely situation. Thus, Devi questions the metanarratives by paying disrepute to the canonically established texts challenging the historicity.

In *Mahabaratha*, Nala, the king of Nishadha kingdom and the son of Veerasena gambles away his wealth and the kingdom to his brother Pushkara, for the demon Kali wants to test Nala’s righteousness and virtue. After much struggle he is redeemed after his visit to Ayodhya. Finally, Nala overcomes the influence of Kali, regains his kingdom and receives a boon from Kali. In *Aajir* the state of Golak can be associated with the state of Nala in *Mahabaratha*. He has sold himself and his wife for a meager amount of paddy, oil and a sum of three rupees. Neither his habitation Ayodhya nor Kali rescues him. On the contrary, Golak as well as his descents have to severely suffer under the feudal system without any remedy. Thus, the entire tribal community has to suffer under the yoke of ‘landlordism’. Devi employs metanarratives for bringing the sad tales of the oppressed by redefining myth. Her remarks on governance, ideal ruler and the system are highly sarcastic.

Devi is always sympathetic towards the tribal. Her inner being, consciously strives for the uplift of the ‘voiceless’. If *Aajir* exposes the savage act of perpetual slavery, her *Bayen* divulges the evil system of inheriting one’s profession through ancestry.

*Bayen* is a satire on feudal dominant society of associating the profession of one’s own pertaining to his ancestry. The *Manu* legitimizes the profession ascribed to one’s own caste. But the age old custom has been taken into account by Devi in her play *Bayen*. In this play, Devi has employed the myth of Harishchandra, the descendent of Rama. According to *Markandeya Purana*, king Harishchandra faces many troubles and hardships in life created by Vighnaraja, the lord of obstacles.
Vighnaraja disturbs the Tapasya of the sage Vishwamitra and he enters the king’s body and starts abusing Vishwamitra. So he has to pay Vishwamitra dakshina for his Rajasuya Yajna. The king has to pay as dakshina everything other than his wife and child. Finally, he has to sell his wife to an elderly man along with his son. When the sage again demands for dakshina, he has to sell himself to an outcaste chandala, who is actually the deity of Dharma in the disguise. Harishchandra encounters many troubles in the cremation ground. Finally, Harishchandra proves his wisdom as a king and ascends the throne again and offers gifts, gold, etc. to all except the chandala. So the chandala demands for his share to which king Harishchandra promises all the cremation grounds to the dom. This is depicted through the statement of Malindar:

MALINDAR. When Harishchandra became king again, he had gifts for all and sundry. Then it was Kalu Dom who shouted at him, Hey King, you have things to give to all those who never cared for you when you were in misery. I gave you food then, I gave you clothes. What have you for me? Eh? We are the Gangaputtas. What are you going to give to our clan? This is how he shouted…

VOICE. All the cremation grounds of the world are yours. All the cremation grounds of the world are yours. All the cremation grounds of the world are yours, yours, yours.

MALINDAR. … The Brahmans, the sadhus, the sanyasis get cattle, land and gold, and we get all the cremation grounds of the world. All the cremation grounds of the world for us, for us, for us only... (Bayen, Five Plays 102-03)
Being a high caste Kshatriya, he ascribes the profession of cremating the dead bodies to the dom, which is against natural justice. Unaware of the perpetual trap, the Kalu dom accepts the job as a privilege. Devi views this incident as humiliation done to the subaltern.

This incident forms the thesis of the play. Revisiting history, she has revolutionized the concept of acquiring one’s job. Devi challenges the age old ‘orthodox statute’ through a woman, Chandidasi. Chandidasi tries to evade from the clutches of Manu. She uses her motherhood to escape the job ascribed to one’s birth:

CHANDIDASI. Why can’t you see it, Ganaputta, why I think of throwing up the job again and again? When I guard the graves through the night, my breasts bursting with milk ache for my Bhagirath back home, all by himself. I can’t, can’t stay away from him. (Bayen, Five Plays 108)

It was such a time that even a man cannot think of evading himself from the prescribed norms of the Manu. But Devi daringly has employed Chandidasi as a tool to liberate the thousands of dom from inequity. Even after her upsurge as a revolutionist, Chandidasi could not come out of her problem of her bondage. The voice of her ancestors threatens her:

CHANDIDASI. I can’t get over the scare. Whenever I seem to have made up my mind that I won’t go back to the job ever, I seem to hear my father’s voice roaring like thunder, If you opt out, it’ll be my beat again, is that what you desire? Would you like me back on the job guarding the graves from the predatory jackals? I can almost hear him chasing the jackals away, thundering all the while, Hoi! Hoi! Hoia! (Bayen, Five Plays 108-09)
Because of her passion to liberate herself from her ancestral job Chandidasi oscillates from within. This inner struggle is exploited by the patrilineal society to put an end to all her ‘ambitions’. Though she becomes a victim of conventions, Chandi throws away her life as a martyr in order to save the lives of a number of villages travelling in a train. Finally, her family claims her identity as Chandidasi and not as Bayen. The village accepts the rebel as a martyr and her call for liberation as valid. Thus, Devi enhances her plot through allusions from myths and prototypes.

In *Urvashi and Johnny*, Devi links the fact with fiction; she has portrayed the real problems of the artist Johnny and the underprivileged who live amidst dense population in Calcutta. According to Hindu mythology ‘Ur’ means heart ‘vash’ means to control. So Urvashi means controlling one’s heart. Urvashi being an *apsara* breaks the penance of Vibhandaka Rishi by enticing him. Just before her return to heaven, she is abducted by a demon and Pururuva, the descendent of *Chandra* dynasty rescues Urvashi. The king falls in love with Urvashi. But Urvashi had conditions, at first she hands over him two sheep and he has to safeguard. Secondly, Pururuva’s nakedness must only be revealed to Urvashi. Breaking the two conditions shall end in their separation. Because of the plot of Indra, the conditions are broken and Urvashi leaves king Pururuva in a desolate condition.

Devi has employed this myth of Urvashi to depict the conditions of the urban dwellers. Like Pururuva, Johnny, the artist falls in love with Urvashi the marionette. In his excessive love for Urvashi Johnny professionalizes the art of ventriloquism. In a way, he is in obsession with Urvashi. Johnny interprets his being with Urvashi as a state of ecstasy. Johnny becomes a successful thriving artist in the company of Urvashi. He holds as many as shows exhilarating a heavenly life to the public. Indeed his performance raises the spirit of audience to reach the elysium. One cannot
find any fault with Johnny. Even Johnny forbids his love for the one eyed, who is passionate after Johnny. Though he is true to Urvashi, Urvashi betrays him. In the myth of Pururuva, Lord Indra plots against him but here Urvashi herself has betrayed him:

URVASHI.… *(Urvashi breaks off, coughing violently...)*

PUBLIC. How did you hurt your voices?

URVASHI. *(faintly)* With all my boyfriends at me.

PUBLIC. Urvashi? What would you do if you had a thousand rupees?

URVASHI. *(Straining with every single word)* I’d have fun with Johnny.

PUBLIC. If you had a hundred thousand?

URVASHI. I’d have fun with all of you…

PUBLIC. A Million?

URVASHI. I’ll catch the birds of happiness *(pauses, pants)*, and *(whispers)* leave them with you.

PUBLIC. Then?

*Urvashi remains silent.*

PUBLIC. What’s the matter? Why did you fall silent?...

URVASHI. …I’ll never laugh again, never sing again, never talk again – the Urvashi who’d catch the birds of happiness and bring them to you is not happy any more… *(Urvashi, Five Plays 93-94)*

Like Pururuva, the prototype Johnny loses his happiness as an artist. He accuses the one eyed one which ends in vain. Johnny thinks that he might have been struck with an unseen arrow. In the legend, it was lord Indra but in Johnny’s case it is Urvashi herself. She has failed to respond to the passionate artist in Johnny. Like,
Vibhandaka and Pururuva, Johnny is added to list of victims. Neither the public nor
Urvashi has concern for Johnny and his passionate life comes to an end. Thus, Devi
exploits the myth of Urvashi to consider the pathetic condition of Johnny by
redefining the myth.

Thus, Devi as well as Hansberry, being new historicists, has defined and
redefined, myths, prototypes and metanarratives by visiting and revisiting history to
unveil the humiliation experienced by the downtrodden and through their ideological
commitment have prepared a ground for enhancing the lives of the voiceless.

Dramatists might employ techniques to enhance their theme, more aesthetic, to
make it more reachable for the audience and might utilize the process itself to bring
their theses. In such ventures, the dramatists may discover something but Devi and
Hansberry have skillfully discovered ‘a new world’ which forms the nucleus of the
next chapter.