CHAPTER FOUR

TECHNIQUE AS DISCOVERY

Technique alone objectifies the materials of art; hence technique alone evaluates these materials. This is the axiom which demonstrates itself so devastatingly… (Schorer 464)

Drama is an ideological platform in which the dramatists voice forth their political standpoints and take sides with the oppressed, ‘problematizing’ the issues and confrontations in order to express their commitment for the people on the margin. The dramatists discover various tools to bring into lime light their plots. If plot is the soul of the tragedy as per Aristotle, techniques are the means through which the artists convert the plot in to life. It is thus the technique that transcends the audience towards catharsis, evoking ‘pity’ and ‘fear’ and cleanses the soul. Devi as well as Hansberry invent innovative dramatic tools to initiate, lead and empower the voiceless through their ground breaking versions. They choose, present and bring into life their ‘problems’ in a realistic mode challenging the established.

Devi and Hansberry have not written drama for entertainment; rather they try to exhibit the tyranny meted out to the weaker sections. Both of them have neglected the conventional techniques; that theatrics of the pompous rather they use simple theatrical tools and techniques, avoiding multi-level sets and paraphernalia of the mainstream theater. In a way they discover their theatre at their realistic portrayal. Their subjects are low and humble and their plots are real life incidents and situations. But the problems they address are serious social, political and economical issues.

Aristotle focuses on six focal elements of tragedy: the plot, character, thought, diction, songs, and spectacle. Techniques are the means through which the plot is
achieved. The artistic merit of drama lies in the execution, i.e. performance. Schorer is of the view that: “…(the) author held(s) an attitude towards technique and the technical scrutiny of subject matter which enabled him to order, within a single work and with superb coherence, the greatest amount of our experience” (471).

Devi and Hansberry employ various techniques and strategies to present a livelier image of their materials. They call in songs chorus, music, instruments, dance, tape, voice, mob, character, thought, diction, irony, sarcasm, satire, etc to depict their thesis. They exploit each and every means to inculcate transformation in the audience: “A printed play is only the recipe for a performance the play must be ‘cooked’ – that is produced before it gives the kind of satisfaction it was intended to give” (Boulton 20).

The process of cooking is multi-dimensional. The cook adds flavors, spices and many other ingredients and uses methods, cooks in a particular temperature and decorates it to make it palatable. Similarly, Devi as well as Hansberry, being propagandist playwrights initiates methods to make drama more dramatic and didactic.

ONE can sum up modern poetic technique by calling it the rediscovery of metaphor and the full commitment to metaphor. The poet can legitimately step out into the universal only by first going through the narrow door of the particular. (Brooks 473)

According to Brooks a poet should abide by the rules and regulations of poetry. His theme must arise from the particular to the whole and not that the whole must be restricted to the particular. And a poet must travel from the concrete to the
abstract and not from abstract to the concrete. As a kite requires a tail to fly, the poet
must use his poetic language to transcend his experiences.

Devi and Hansberry use narration as a powerful technique. There should be a
narrator in the oral tradition. In Sanskrit drama the narrator was the *sutra-dhara*, in
otherwise the ‘string holder’. Both these writers have typically followed the tribal
oral tradition of using songs and ballads to narrate their moods and life situations.

Aristotle views *melos* as an integral part of drama. In Greek tragedies the
chorus would appear in various positions in the beginning, during the course of drama
or at the end to augur what is likely to happen in the near future, helping the artists
travel towards a certain magnitude. In T.S. Eliot’s *Murder in the Cathedral*, the
chorus augurs what is likely to happen: the death of the ‘Arch Bishop’ of Canterbury.
Similarly music, songs are employed by the dramatist to heighten the purpose of
drama, creating a vivid effect. They are helpful in intensifying tensions, and conflicts;
social, political or economical and emotions-tender or passionate. It reduces the
‘intensified modes’, or helpful in reflecting the time, thoughts or feelings of the
character or the dramatists.

Devi and Hansberry achieve their artistic merit through their craftsmanship.
The innovative use of songs and music enhances their theme. Much of the problems
and passions of the individual characters and the author’s discourses are discovered
through *melos*. They initiate, invent and problematize the discourses through their
songs following the tribal oral tradition.

Devi’s proficiency lies in her narrative mode of employing songs. In *Aaji*,
Golak Kura’s ‘happiness’ is declared in the song. In order to conceptualize the plot,
the songs are efficiently employed by Mahasweta Devi: Paatan’s, sufferings, helplessness and thoughts are registered in the play through songs:

It began with the drought,
With the crops drying up in the fields,
and hundreds dying of hunger,
and all the rice and all the grain
piling up in Raavan Shunri’s granary,
till my forefather Golak Kura,
to save his life… (*Aajir, Five Plays* 45)

The play *Aajir* is typically set in rural Bengal. Creating a bond, the landlords keep a section of people as bonded labourers. In *Aajir*, Paatan is ambitious in life to be free from the bond. He is conscious about the bond that was written and signed by his ancestors. Devi uses songs to express the visions that Paatan has. But the society is quite antagonistic to the expectations of the bonded labourers. Using poetic language, Devi reiterates that there is no escape for an Aajir through a mob singing in chorus:

MOB. (they encircle Paatan, point at him and sign in malicious glee)

The world’s not for you.
The gipsy woman’s not for you.
As long as the aajir’s bond’s there.
You’re just a maimed beast,
And Maatang’s your God. (61)

In the poem, the word ‘no’ is used repetitively to create a psychological effect in the mind of the character, Paatan. He is in a horrible hell, with passions and
burning body with visions. Thus Devi has exploited the poetic technique to bring in transformation among the audience of the urban scenario:

   An aajir, you! An aajir, you!
   No escape for you! No escape for you!
   No life for you! No world for you!
   An aajir, you! No escape for you! *(Aajir, Five Plays 66)*

Devi’s characterization and thought are to the core. In *Aajir* Devi employs the technique of doubling, in which the same characters perform different roles; Paatan plays the role of his ancestor, Golak Kura and Maatang the owner plays the role of his ancestor Raavan Shunri and Maatang’s mistress plays the role of Golak’s wife. The same characters performing different roles in different times, might bring confusion in the mind of audience. The magnitude in which a play is expected to travel may be arrested. But Devi has handled the technique creatively. By making the same characters playing different roles, Devi wants to convey the message that nothing has changed the positions of the characters and the change in time has not brought anything new in the position of the characters. Modern dramatist employs the technique of *Doubling* to enhance their commitment. In Dattani’s *Final Solutions*, the character Daksha, a 15 year girl and Hardika, the grandmother are played by the same person:

   … Daksha, who is in fact the grandmother, also sometimes seen as a girl of fifteen. There are several instances when Hardika, the grandmother, and Daksha, the young bride, are on this level at the same time, although they are the same person. Hardika should be positioned and lit in such a way that the entire action of the play is seen through her eyes. *(165)*
Devi also breaks the conventional theatre, the rules and regulations laid by the canonical authors. She follows the Brechtian alienation technique in her plays. In this technique the audience do not identify themselves with the characters. This is evident through the address of Paatan, the Aajir to the audience: “Watch, gentleman, how a man becomes slave from birth. Please allow me to become my forefather Golak Kora” (*Aajir, Five Plays* 46).

The condition of Paatan and his ancestors are picturized through songs. Devi’s portrayal of Golak Kura is unique. The song details how Golak and his wife sold themselves and their progeny as bond labourers, jubilantly. The innocent folks are unaware of the trap, the bond – *gamacha*. The landlords exploit the ignorant folks in order to gain economy as well as to enjoy the privileges of imperialism and hegemony. The treacheries of the mainstream landlords are evident through:

MAATANG. You’ll have a son. (He wants to believe it himself. 

Shouts) It’ll all be useless otherwise. All this money, all that I filched from the government relief for which I ganged up with the schoolmaster-who’ll feed on that if I don’t have a son? It’ll all be a waste. (51)

Devi leads the folk from ignorance to light, a sense of freedom is attributed to the character of Paatan. While he is kindled by the passions aroused by her master’s mistress, he has visions for his life. Paatan aspires to marry. So Maatang punishes him for having thoughts of marriage. It is unthinkable for an Aajir. His destiny is couched in the *Gamacha*. When his mistress promised him of the bond, he thinks a free man. All his visions are expressed in the dialogue:

PAATAN. (rises to his feet, laughing aloud) The aajir’s bond! I’ll tear it to pieces and scatter them to the winds. Then? (He shouts in
exultation, and exits.) Then I’ll be a man. I’ll marry Bhumidasi.

Bhumidasi! I’ll be an aajir no longer. (*Aajir, Five Plays 55-56*)

Fate plays a major role in the life of Paatan. He becomes furious when the mistress could not produce the bond from the *gamacha*. The Aajir murders his mistress, out of obsession of tortures. He puts her to death. Once he is aware of the news that the bond has gone into dust, he is unaware of his tortures. He finds him a free man, from the bond of chains. Devi substitutes songs as the audio medium combining with the visual action, the fusion creating an impact in the mind of the audience as well as the readers of the play. The landlords punish the Aajir during their escapes and leave an imprint in the minds of the Aajir. Using the repetition no, no, no, a psychic trauma is aroused in the minds of the Aajir. The scene shifts are made using glow light and dark stage and the red light and mob are employed to heighten the tension. The voices, the sound of storm, rain and the roaring wind intensifies the mood of the play. Thus, Devi adapts various techniques to execute her plot and action.

Though Paatan is a victim he does not yield to circumstances. Even he is ready to die in order to escape the clutches of the master for he is a bonded labourer who is supposed not to have any aspirations. Thus, Devi unveils the trauma and worst condition of bonded labourers through her thought provoking play *Aajir*.

If *Aajir* is about bonded labourers, *Bayen* addresses a very serious social evil i.e. stratifications based on caste. *Bayen* is about the celebration of the martyr mother. Devi, in all her plays, brings in transformation in the audience by brining into focus the different phases of life of the tribal. Chandidasi as a pleasing wife is evident through flash back technique and the song:

MALINDAR. Why don’t you slip out for a while, child? Your father and mother will meet now, fall in love, get married and then
you’ll be born. (Shoves him out.) You shouldn’t be watching
this…. Let me dance… Chandidasi, also drunk, enters dancing.

CHANDI. (Singing) It’s black I love. (Bayen, Five Plays 104)

Both Chandidasi and Malindar melt in love and indulge in poetic exaltation.
Their love can be compared to the metaphysical love. They enjoy their love jubilantly
singing. And it proves the aesthetic sensibility of Devi.

During their early married life they were happy to the core. Chandidasi
continued her ancestral job ascribed by the mainstream. Till she becomes a mother
she could perform her duties well. Once she is a mother Chandidasi could not
perform her duties. She is completely obsessed in love for her son. She sings lullabies
in the reminiscence of her son even after she becomes a witch:

BAYEN (sings, off). Come, sleep, come to my bed of rages,
My child god sleeps in my lap,
The elephants and horses at the palace gates,
The dog Jhumra in the ashheap. (97)

Chandidasi feels in heart, an ache when she is forced to do the job of burying
children. The motherhood in her prevents her from continuing her job. On the other
hand, the voice of the ancestors threatens her. But it is her psychic struggle. When she
wants to rebel, the voice of the landlords and upper caste framed ‘values’ threaten her
and the struggle within starts to defy her profession. The shift in the character is
made by attributing a rebellious sensibility in the mother in Chandidasi.

In “Annihilation of Caste” B.R. Ambedkar views:

… the stratification of occupation which is the result of the caste
system is positively pernicious…. Without such freedom to adjust
himself to changing circumstances, it would be impossible for him to
gain his livelihood. Now the caste system will not allow Hindus to take
to occupations where they are wanted if they do not belong to them by
heredity. If a Hindu is seen to starve rather than take to new
occupations not assigned to his Caste, the reason is to be found in the
Caste System. By not permitting the readjustment of occupations,
caste becomes a direct cause… (of all social evils). (www.mea.gov.in)

Chandidasi refuses to accept such a kind of readjustment in her occupation.
she is being blamed by the villagers for her concern towards the child Tukni. Her
relatives humiliate her with harsh remarks. And the tender mother in her, is offended.
Chandidasi is heart-broken. There is a struggle within her between convention and
her own aspirations. Though, her husband comes to her rescue it could not reduce the
burning pain within:

MALINDAR. (mad with rage) So? It seems Shashi has an adviser now
in Gourdas! When neighbour’s house is on fire, would you pour
kerosene over the fire instead of water?

GOURDAS. Malindar, you fight with me in vain. I’m here only to
stand by Shashi and take Chandi away…

MALINDAR. My wife won’t go with you.

GOURDAS. What?

SHASHI. She…won’t…go?

CHANDIDASI. (Weeping in grief and from a sense of injustice) No,
no, no. Find somebody else to do it for you (Bayen, Five Plays
93-94)
But Chandidasi accepts her role and performs the burial of Tukni. Though she performed her duty she is punished for having notions of rebellious attitude. Her own weakness as a mother is used as a weapon to trap Chandidasi. It is Chandidasi’s excessive love that betrays her. And she becomes a victim by living in seclusion. She could not continue her married life which is pathetic. Despite being a victim Chandidasi becomes a martyr by throwing away her life in order to rescue the villagers of robbery. Thus, Chandidasi proves to be a brave mother.

Devi’s handling up of lullabies, light effect, especially the red light to increase the tension and her characterization of antagonistic groups are evident of her craftsmanship. The use of voices off stage and on stage heightens the mood of drama. The discovery of motherhood in Chandidasi is the discovery of the play. Through her realistic portrayal of the mother, choosing a real life incident is iconoclast.

*Bayen* as well as *Water* deal with discriminations based on caste hierarchy. *Water* reflects one of the contemporary issues of the problem of water – artificial famine and the problem of the indigenous people. The play *Water* talks about the real incidents and life situations. The mainstream, in order to maintain supremacy over the ignorant folks have always prevented them from getting what is due to them. In Mulkraj Anand’s *Untouchable* one can see the helplessness of Bhakka and Sahini in poor light. What is guaranteed in the constitution is being violated by the lords of the feudal system, the government officials who are to maintain law and order are at beck and call of the landlords. Both the landlords as well as the officials join hands together and loot the downtrodden. The irony is that, nothing is being registered in the form of complaints and if it happens so, action is not taken against the violations. It reminds us of the poem of Goldsmith: Each wanton judge new penal statutes draw, / Laws grind the poor and rich men rule the law: (832)
In *Water*, Devi employs chorus, songs, irony, lightings, cyclorama, characters and diction to portray the condition in the post independent era against the feudal setup and creates an upsurge in the minds of the individuals as well as the tribal on the whole.

It is the duty of the government to see to it the people are getting food, dress and safety. But the tribals are suffering in hunger without any relief. The highest humiliation is that the very basic need of water “the elixir of life” is prevented for the entire community. An artificial famine is being created by the landlords. There is plenty of water in their wells as clear as the crow’s eye and even their cattle are being washed and allowed to drink whereas the tribal aren’t. Devi raises the voice of the tribals demanding water to the landlord, Santosh Pujari, a Brahmin by caste. The demands of the tribal are in the form of songs and choruses. They plead to Santosh Pujari:

WOMEN (Singing). Give us water!

Water, water, water!
The sky drips with molten fire.
The land gasps for water.
Where, O, where’s water?
Life wrinkles up,
With all the water held captive by Santhosh like a pack of whores.
There’s none to care for us,
for our hearts bleeding.
Give us water!

Water, water, water! *(Water, Five Plays 119)*
But Santosh refuses the appeal made by the tribals to dig a well stating that Harchand Thakur, a landlord has already given an application. So all the women and the men plead to the river Charsa, the co wife. The repetition used by Devi give give give and water water water raises the spirit of revolutionary mood in the tribal. It gives not only a rhetorical effect but it discusses the sad pathetic condition of the underprivileged.

**CHORUS.** Give us water, give us water.

Give us water give us water.

Give us water, give us water. (120)

Though they are quite aware of the exploitation of the caste Brahmins and officials they are in a helpless situation. This space is being exploited by the upper caste men. So Devi brings in an educated teacher, Jiten who is a Gandhian to uplift the society from their innocence. It is through the educated Mahashia that Devi unites the tribal as a whole and bring into the folk a sense of wisdom echoing the Gandhian principle, ‘self help is the best help’. It is through him the tribals erect a big dam to store water and to escape from their ‘eternal problem’. On the other hand, Devi’s portrayal of the character Maghai is typical. He has accepted all the humiliation of the mainstream and surrenders himself to the hands of Santosh Pujari who is a representative of the caste Brahmins. Santosh has tuned his mind in such a way that Maghai, the diviner, is unaware of his strength and his relationship with nature the *Nether Ganga*. The conditions prescribed in Manu limit his freedom of enjoying the privileges identified by him. He moves to a translike state, more extremely to the state of possessed when he thinks of *Nether Ganga*.

**MAGHAI.** Look at her! (He shakes his head, as Jiten enters and stands watching him, unnoticed by Maghai.) Dhura’s mother is right.
You’re a whore, a fallen woman. In the summer months when I scrape at your breasts, how you flirt with me! You’re You sing to me:

The water won’t be easy to get,

…and then you flirt with me, you whore!

JITEN. With whom were you talking?

MAGHAI. With the river, sir. (Water, Five Plays 141)

Maghai becomes a poet calling the river charsa as his co-wife, he flirts with it and indicts it for the suffering of the tribal.

Devi unveils harsh realities. The true nature of Santosh is revealed to us when his mission of water digging fails. The geologists from the government office could not identify water that lies deep under the earth. And so, Santosh, shamelessly demands hel from Maghai. Earlier, he had hired labour form nearby villages and deprived the opportunities of the locals, despite governments orders to employ local people. But, Devi exploits the situation. She employs Dhura, the son of Maghai to rebel against the system. Dhura indulges in verbal confrontation with Santosh. They have made not only the living conditions of the tribal worse but also humiliate them by setting dogs for taking water from the government well. Though Dhura is active Maghai is passive to the core and surrenders him.

Further, Maghai oscillates between fact and fantasy. When the geologist from the town could not identify water, Santosh shamelessly seeks the support of Maghai stating that he is of divine origin which is an irony. Though he is of divine origin, he could not touch the water in the well.

SANTOSH. … I told them, the government may have sent you, you may blast away all the rocks you have a mind to, but you’ll never be able to divine the water. It’s only Maghai who can do that.
DHURA. My father? Again?

SANTOSH. He’s the Bhagirath of the era of the Kali. Come, Bhagirath, let’s go.

MAGHAI. Why, thakur?

SANTOSH. You’ve to locate for me the source of water….

SANTOSH. So you’re not coming?

MAGHAI. I’ll come. How can I refuse to come for a job that’s been handed down to me by my ancestors, a job that I owe to my caste? (Water, Five Plays 129-130)

The same kind of humiliation has been expressed by K.A. Gunasekaran in his thought provoking play Touch. It unveils the problems of untouchability and the diverse nature of the ‘Indian panorama’:

   Touch a goat.
   Touch a cow.
   Touch a dog.
   Why, touch even a pig.
   But can you touch another human? (168)

Devi’s characterization is skilfully done. Though Maghai is insensitive to all the humiliations and treachery, his son Dhura is not. Dhura tries to question the exploitation. He as well as his mother Phulmani resists the oppression. Thus Devi imparts a sense of revolution through the next generation. She contrasts between the submissive Maghai and the rebel Dhura to transform the society for the better. Keeping this in mind she ought to have created the character Dhura. The effort that Devi takes is evident in Jiten. It is Jiten who plans for them, talks to the officials,
even talks to Santosh Pujari and to the tribal for their cause. Thus he empowers individualism in each of the characters. The pains that they take to build the dam and the author to build tension are the same. Thus Devi fights for the cause of the oppressed.

The songs and chorus in Water narrate the problem of the tribals. The sound of the train, rain, lightings, dance and rituals are efficiently handled by Devi to reflect the contemporary issue. Devi is keen not only in addressing problems in the rural set up but also she is aware of the problems of the city life, especially the slums of Calcutta and the failed artist.

Devi’s portrayal of *Urvashi and Johnny* is an artistic success as a drama but it is the tale of the failed artist Johnny. Johnny is a typical representative of the thousands of people who live in the city slums of Calcutta. The urban set up has failed to protect the lives of so many individuals. So in the art of achieving success, Johnny learns the art of ventriloquism. Time has perfected his art. He becomes a successful artist satisfying the pleasures and moods of so many audiences who search in streets for recreation. The different moods of the characters employed in the play are evident through the proper use of lighting at different times. Further, the lighting helps the audience understand the moods of the characters. Devi links dialogue with gestures to make meaning. The play is divided into scenes avoiding the English convention of using acts.

Johnny knows nothing but the art of ventriloquism. He depends completely on his art. He cannot shine in any other profession. Thus he becomes a slave to the profession. The world of the beggars and lepers are very well portrayed by Devi. Devi employs songs from the contemporary cinema to impress her audience. She is
not only aesthetic but also is committed to her profession as a dramatist. The introduction of Johnny explains his position as an artist though the song:

   JOHNNY. (addressing the audience, in English) Sirs and Madams…(in pidgin Hindi) Johnny pays his salaam to you. This is Johnny (He makes a low ceremonial bow, and dances a jig. Sings to the tune of the popular Hindi film song…)

   My shoes from the side walk,
   My phantaloons from the sidewalk,
   My vest and hankies stolen,
   My cap I made myself!

   (In prose) But who am I? (Goes close to Urvashi.)

   URVASHI. (in a long drawl) My slave.

   JOHNNY. (runs up down stage) Yes sir, I am her slave. Have been a slave for ages – her slave.. (Urvashi, Five Plays 61)

   Devi employs the Brechtian concept of alienation technique. She breaks the traditional mode of theatrical illusion through the direct address of Johnny to the audience.

   Johnny is similar to the character of Maghai in Water. He moves into a transtate when he is with Urvashi. And he is obsessed with Urvashi. His sense of attachment to Urvashi brings him sorrow and finally death. His condition is pathetic. At the same time he is not ready to decline his commitment. When he encounters with the doctor, he breaks:

   DOCTOR. Enough of that. Come to the facts.
JOHNNY. Dr Hossain gave me a scare.

DOCTOR. What did he say?

JOHNNY. Said, you’ll go all dumb, Johnny. Your Urvashi won’t laugh, sing, talk any more.

DOCTOR. (gravely) What’s wrong?

JOHNNY. Don’t know what’s wrong?

DOCTOR. It’s cancer of the throat, Johnny…

JOHNNY. (cries, a contorted face) They told me. That’s what they told me. Take pity on me, Doctor. I’ll starve if Urvashi doesn’t sing or laugh anymore. *(Urvashi, Five Plays 73)*

Devi brings into light the sad tale of Johnny and the world of the beggars through songs. She also handles hilarious comedy to reduce the pathetic condition of Johnny.

In Scene three, one can find Johnny, Ramanna and the lame one, a beggar lord, together dancing and singing to the tune of another popular song from Laila Majnu:

O Ruler of the skies, why does your world put me in a fix?

Why does all the moonlight of the world turn to clouds for Johnny?

Hey master, why expose Johnny to the masquerade?

O Ruler of the skies, why does your world put me in a fix? (81)

When Urvashi refused to sing Johnny cried in agony. He is puzzled how life would go on further. This is the position of many downtrodden artists who are committed:

JOHNNY. What’s to do then? Where else should I go? (sings and dances to a song from the 1962 film Shaadi, ‘Yeh dil kahan le jaun?’, Where do I take this heart of mine?’ –
Where do it take this heart of mine? (81-82)

Ramanna came with the alternate to substitute Urvashi that is the one eyed one.

Moved by Johnny’s helpless condition, Ramanna, a minor character in the play, sings to the tune of *Chalte Chalte Mere Yah Geet Yad Rakhna / Kabhi Alvida na Kahna*:

Cancer in the throat,

Never heard a thing like that,

Don’t give me cancer, my man,

Don’t give me cancer, my man…

If it’s cancer,

It gives the stink of the rotting corpse,

It’s the stink that tells,

Don’t give me cancer, my man. (64-65)

Though Johnny pleads to Urvashi, the one eyed one and the lame one he is helpless. Urvashi has trapped him and his life comes to a close like Kafka’s *The Hunger Artist*. Using contemporary songs from contemporary cinema and its reflections on the society are discovered effectively by Devi:

It is part of Mahasweta’s narrative method to rise from time to time from the clinical/documentary accumulation of facts in objective sequence to a passionate lyrical life, as in this particular case; the cry no longer a mere cry, but a charged gesture of ‘blood, protest, grief’ (Mahasweta’s words are ‘smelt of’, conveying the charge in even more
sensuous terms) tat tears away from – even as it tears down – the neatly structured grid of time, defined so elaborately in so many different ways, from the series of references to dates and specific moments in time. *(Mother, Introduction x)*

Devi not only deals with the world of the deprived but also she deals with the impact, it creates upon the upper class men. Her *Mother of 1084* is an evidence, which deals with the reflections on the city life.

In *Mother of 1084*, Devi chooses the backdrop of the peasant revolt of Bengal, the Bengal famine, the *naxalbari* movement and the repercussions during and in the post 1970’s. The post independent era had not brought any change in the lives of the rural peasant Bengal rather it nurtured perpetual inequality, worsening the conditions of the meak and many become victims under the state. So the frustrated section of people pledged “for a cause” (22) believing that they “were brining in a new era” (23). Devi uses this tension, the backdrop and attributes a sense of revolution and ideology among the common severing relationships:

*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 crime to allow this to persist. It’s an obligation these days to know one’s son. *(Mother, Five Plays 28)*

Devi integrates the diverse sections, through ideology, irrespective of class, caste and race:

*NANDINI.* So where do we reach? Brati came from a household of a certain kind, he hated his father. Sanchayan, Dipu, and Smaran
came from a smug high middle class. Somu, Laltu and Bijit belonged to apolitical, poor refugee homes. Mani and Kushal had parents involved in leftwing politics. But they all shared one common feature: the children and the parents were strangers to one another. (29)

Thus, Devi exploits the environment for exhibiting the sad tale of the oppression. The artists attach a sense of a particular mood not only among the victims but the same kind of feeling is aroused in the minds of the audience. It is this ideology i.e. dominates in Brati, Sanchayan, Dipu and Samaran in *Mother of 1084*, irrespective of their environment. Though they belong to the urban area they are part of the revolution. The happenings in the rural areas have its effect on the areas of the urban too. Devi tries to build a new era to break the class boundaries and ‘normative policies’ to from a classless society, bringing in a change.

Characterization is yet another tool. Devi speaks through the characters, the political statements and empowers her standpoints. Focusing women characters, Nandhini, Sujata, Somu’s mother and Neepa, Devi satirizes the state machinery and the hypocrisies of the upper strata.

In *Mother of 1084* Devi chooses the urban setup as her setting. The exploitation of the peasants end in great revolt against the establishment and it had also its repercussions on the urban setup. Youth with ideological base could not bear the humiliations turned into rebels. Devi has chosen the Bengal Chatterjees for her business. By bringing in a change in the Chatterjee’s family, she wishes to support the underprivileged. The time chosen to execute the play is ironic. 17th January is a day of happiness, during which the peasants of Bengal celebrate *Magarasankaranthi* or the harvest festival. Unfortunately the peasants are in danger, their lives are in
trouble. By fixing the time as 17th January Devi exploits both the space and time. Using the choice of time she discovers the problems of the peasants. Much of the play is discovered through the character Sujatha. Sujatha makes efforts to discover the ways of her murdered son Brati. In the process of discovering past life of Bratti, Sujatha discovers the problems of the naxalites, the rebels and the position of the underprivileged. The entire play is depicted through Sujata’s tape. The tape is a quintessential technique employed by Devi to achieve her goal.

Everything happens in time and space; without time and space nothing could happen. When a child is born it is born in a particular time and in a particular place. So, no action can escape time and space. Any living or non living object therefore occupies a space. What can one do with time? One can either utilize it or waste it. It is subjective and upto the individual but time is not static. It is dynamic and it moves forward. But, can it move backwards is a tricky question. Human memory has made it possible. Time cannot move backwards but one can move backwards in time with the help of one’s memory. But it is impossible to go into a future time. Time can be utilized for creative activity as well as for destruction. But beyond time and space there are some other factors, viz; the political, social and economical environment. They are not independent of time and space. Devi exploits both the time and the given space through a series of conversations.

In *Mother of 1084*, Sujata’s helplessness is revealed through the tape:

SUJATA. (off) I went to Somu’s mother in the afternoon. One can now visit the colony. There’s no disturbance any more, no fears, no sirens, no gunshots, no screaming young men-no! (pause.) it was the second time I visited Somu’s mother. (Pause.) I didn’t
know Brati well enough, Somu’s mother knew him better. When I visit her, I find Brati. *(Mother, Five Plays 10)*

Sujata wants herself to be associated with the persons whoever were close to Brati. She identifies herself being with Brati if she visits them. Her meetings with Nandhini as well as Somu’s mother are of such sort. But her visits to such places have created a trouble for Somu’s mother: this unveils the condition of the discrimination based on class. Being close to the officials, the system and economical independence Sujata escapes the ordeals whereas Somu’s mother becomes a victim of her position and economical status.

SUJATA. I have gone on with my job.

SOMU’S MOTHER. That’s because you’re rich. There’s no comparison between you and us. (20)

The stratification based on class is very well expressed in the conversation between Somu’s mother and Sujata. The economical positions have made people suffer a lot. The poor starves without food. In Babani Bhattacharya’s novels also the position of the Bengal peasants can be very well seen. The peasants starve without food and capital punishments were given for stealing food which is a pathetic state. The dominant class threatens the security of their life. This is evident through the conversation of Somu’s mother:

SOMU’S MOTHER. (diffident) They threaten my daughter for your coming here.

SUJATA. Somu’s elder sister? Who are there to threaten her?

SOMU’S MOTHER. Those who killed Somu and his friends. Who else?
SUJATA. The same crowd?

SOMU’S MOTHER. They tell her, why does she come to your house?

Forbid her. It’ll be dangerous otherwise. *(Mother, Five Plays 20)*

Further, Devi unveils the colonial tendency, their attitude to execute their ‘plots’ and their means to achieve success. She also satirizes the colonial machinery and the betrayal of the colonial legacy. The failure of the system to acknowledge those who fight for ‘cause’ is depicted well. It betrays ‘their caste’ for their political or economical gain. The diminishing values and lack of legitimacy and credibility are expressed in Nandini’s voice. The prison walls have been built higher. And no political party or press would talk about it. So many youth are dying in prisons without proper food and hygiene. They are murdered and there is no one to care about the whole generation of rebels “being wiped out between sixteen and forty” *(Mother, Five Plays 28)*.

Devikindles the passions of youths through a series of conversations. On the other hand, Devi uses voices and mob to increase the tension of the play. In *Julius Ceaser*, when Antony addresses the mob, the mob is infuriated. Similarly, in Mahesh Dattani’s *Final Solution*, one can find to his horror the tension between the Hindu Muslim conflicts. In order to intensify the moods and passions of the respective sides, the dramatist has employed mob, which heightens and increases the tension like a catalyst. In *Mother of 1084* the supports of the land, the landlords group together to catch hold of the ‘rebels’. Thus, the author discovers the world of the underprivileged and their pathetic conditions through their realistic portrayal. Both on stage and off stage are creatively used by Devi. The red glow light increases the mood and arouses the ‘passion’ in everyone. This is better expressed in the director’s script:
(Chorus of threats from the stage and from off stage, on the tape, like a collective slogan.)

MOB. Come out. Come out.

SOMU’S FATHER. It’s no use, son. They’re on all sides….(20)

Across the history of the theater, mob has always served as a supplement for enhancing the author’s script along with voices. Voices are the guiding factors. They guide the audience to know the temperament prevailing at the execution of the play and also the character’s bewilderment: “THE CRYING VOICE. Bring him back to me. Let me hold him close to my breast for once, and I’ll weep no more. My Somu…” (5).

Though Devi uses naked theatre as her tool, she uses light effects creatively. Modern dramatists use spot lights, colourful lights in both off stage and on stage. But Devi has used this craft innovatively to make scene shifts. In Mother of 1084 each scene shift is being made by the glow light and the dark stage. Thus, Devi not only proves her commitment as an ideologist but also as an expert of theatrical techniques. Not only the scene shifts are being made at the end of scenes but also the place shifts. The place shifts are made using light properties. The diction employed by Devi is the language of the common man like Wordsworth’s. But she has never compromised to use the dialects of the upper caste, even if the situations demand it:

BRATI. (moves closer to the door, and shouts defiantly) Don’t shout.

Wait a bit, we’re coming out.

(Brati is the only one who speaks in standard Bengali, the language of Calcutta and West Bengal, the rest in the dialect of Eastern Bengal, and the contrast is striking.)
MOB. (hootling, jeering, laughing, triumphant at having trapped yet another prey). The bastards have got a new one. Come out, you son of Calcutta! (Mother, Five Plays 21)

Thus, Devi visualizes the problems of the underprivileged through a series of conversations, discussions, address, women characters, tape voices, mob, chorus and lights to enhance her execution of her ideology. Not only Sujata discovers her past but everyone of the audience discovers their belief and ideology with utmost commitment. In all Devi’s plays, commitment is an inevitable one and it is recurring. If Devi fights for the indigenous people in India, Hansberry voices forth the problems of the Black Americans and the Africans as a committed writer. All her works create an upsurge and positive approach towards life.

Hansberry’s The Drinking Gourd is a metaphorical name of the Big Dipper along with its seven stars. The Big Dipper occupies the North Pole. For a slave it gives hope to escape to the north from the south. Much of the Africans are hired as bonded labourers and suffering in the southern plantations. The slave pact had not altered their lives. They were treated as animals and they worked nearly for fifteen to sixteen hours and they living closed unhygienic cabins. Further, they were refused education and their basic needs. So they aspired to move to the north. They addressed God in hope that one day He would redeem them. In order to rejuvenate themselves, they sing songs residing at the slave quarters:

Steal away, steal away,
Steal away to Jesus.

Steal away, steal away home ---
I ain’t got long to stay here.

My Lord he calls me,
He calls me by the thunder.
The trumpet sounds
Within-a my soul---
I ain’t got long to stay here. (*DG* 224)

As described in the post script of the drama, *The Drinking Gourd*, this song is based on the activities of an Underground Railroad “conductor” by the name of “Peg Leg Joe.” Joe was a white sailor who wore a wooden peg in place of his right foot which had been lost in some seafaring mishap.

Peg Leg Joe would travel from plantation to plantation in the South, offering to hire out as a painter or carpenter or handyman. Once hired, Joe would quickly strike up an acquaintance with many of the young Negro men on the plantation and, in a relatively short period of time, the sailor and the slaves would be singing this strange, seemingly meaningless song. After a few weeks, Joe would hobble on and the same scene would be enacted at another plantation. Once the sailor had departed, he was never heard of again.

But the following spring, when “the sun come back and the first quail calls,” scores of young Negro men from every plantation where Peg Leg Joe had stopped would disappear into the woods. Once away from the hounds and the posses, the escaping slaves would follow a carefully blazed trail – a trail marked by the symbol of a human left foot and a round spot in place of the right foot. Traveling only at night, the fleeing man would “follow the drinking gourd,” the long handle of the Big Dipper in the sky pointing steadfastly to the North Star – and freedom. Following the river bank, which “makes a mighty good road,” the slave would eventually come to the place “where the great big river meets the little river” – the Ohio River. There, “the old man was awaiting” – and Peg Leg Joe or some other agent of the Underground
Railroad was ready to speed the escapee on his way to Canada. This song is used as an allusion to discover the problems of the slaves.

Hansberry uses song as the best medium to convey to the audience the thrust of the Negro slaves. Their position bothers them a lot, even the soul longs for freedom as in Devi’s Aajir. The song narrates the pain sufferings of many slaves. Hannibal’s, passions are stated in the song.

For the old man is a-waitin’

For to carry you to freedom

If you follow the Drinking Gourd.

Follow – follow – follow…

If you follow the Drinking Gourd… (DG 234)

For a slave to escape from the master’s hand is unthinkable. When Master Everett comes to know of Hannibal’s efficiency to read and write, he goes to the extent of mutilating the eyes. While there prevailed such a kind of tension, Hansberry makes use of her work to revolutionize the slaves. The atmosphere is exploited well. During the dinner, the slaves return after their field work they form a circle around to sing and perform, in order to raise a Ruckus:

Come along, little children, come along!

Come where the moon is shining bright!

Get along, little children, get along ---

We gona raise a ruckus tonight! (DG 274)

The ‘ruckus’ is to raise the spirit towards a physical salvation. In order to attain the metaphorical salvation they must enjoy physical salvation. So Hansberry employs songs as a tool to transform the slave society to a better state.
Further, the landlords gullibly cheat the slaves that soon they will be set free.

Hansberry’s portrayals of the promises of the Masters are sarcastic:

My old marster promise me
Mmm Mmm Mmm
That when he died he gona set me free
Mmm Mmm Mmm
Well, he live so long ’til his head got bald
Mmm Mmm Mmm
Then he gave up the notion of dying at all! (DG 275)

Hansberry’s efficiency lies in her proficiency of using different dialects reflecting the strata of the character and her employment of imagery is iconoclast. The use of language is appalling in Hansberry. Her deft use of language is exemplified through the discussion between the Preacher, Zeb, Hiram, Rissa and Driver. The dramatists use dialects to colour the play with ethos. The four kinds of dialects pertaining to their respective classes are depicted through their conversation:

PREACHER: Now, that’s better. Nothin’ to bring temper down off a man like a little coolin’ water.
ZEB: I’m clearin’, Preacher.
PREACHER: Clearin’ where, son?
ZEB: Don’t know. The West, mebbe.
PREACHER: Oh, the West?
ZEB: (Defensively) Well, a lotta folks been pullin’ out goin’ West lately. (267)

Generally dramatist use abandons of wit, diction, human probability individual idiom in the speech given to different characters, vocabulary and descriptions to make
a play effective: “A play is its dialogue. In a Greek play or a French classical play, in which the audience sees none of the action whatever, there is nothing but dialogue” (Boulton, 97).

Hansberry portrays the language of ordinary characters, true to its types. An important aspect of dialogue is the differentiation of the speech of individuals. Every speech, at least ideally, is characteristic of the speaker. The words spoken by Rissa in the conversation are certainly befitting and down to earth a reference to her strata:

HIRAM: But we need all the hands in the fields we’ve got and Maria says there is absolutely nothing for another house servant to do around here.

As he is saying this, MARIA has reentered with a single pill and a glass of water. She stands where she is and watches the two of them.

RISSA: He kin do a little bit of everything. He kin help me in the kitchen and Harry some in the house. He’s getting’ so unruly, master Hiram. And you promised me – (DG 259)

DRIVER: Jes that here people ain’t used to them kinda hours, suh. Thas a powful long set. …

ZEB: You gonna be surprised to find out how fast these people kin learn to change their ways. And any and who don’t learn fast enough will learn it fast enough when I get through with ‘em.

(DG 287)

Hansberry uses the exterior and the interior locales to bring in her thesis. Since it is a television play, the use of camera must be efficient. Hansberry pans the
camera down and up to a closer and longer short to heighten the successive scenes. Further she uses a narrator, as in National Geography or in BBC, in order to inform the audience well:

Pan down a great length of coast until a definitive mood is established. Presently the lone figure of a man emerges from the distance. He is tall and narrow-hipped, suggesting a certain idealized American generality… His imposed generality is to be a symbolic American specificity. He is the narrator. We come down close in his face as he turns to the sea and speaks. (DG 223)

The description of the narrator is useful for the audience along with the camera. Both the visual as well as the audio medium helps the audience in understanding the background details and the message:

Beyond the manor house – cotton fields, rows and rows of cotton fields. And, finally, as the narrator walks on, rows of little white-painted cabins, the slave quarters.

The quarters are, at the moment, starkly deserted as though he has come upon this place in a dream only. (225)

Hansberry has depicted the worst condition of the slaves in southern plantation using tools and techniques. Further, she moves to the next phase, that is the lives of the ordinary Black Americans from unthinkable bonded labourers. She focuses on the harsh realities of their *ghetto* lives. *A Raisin in the Sun* is a play of such type. The play describes the ambitious Lorraine Hansberry who attributes a sense of modest optimism in her meek characters.
A Raisin in the Sun focuses on the ambitious Younger family. It unveils the racial prejudices of the white Americans through a series of dialogues. Initially, the subjugated Blacks having a dream parallel to the American dream is a ground breaking strategy that is on a par with the mainstream. The opening song in the play contemplates on the dreams that the four adults have in the play. What began as a question ends in an ideological challenge. This mood is best expressed in the following poem of Langston Hughes:

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up

Like a raisin in the sun?

Or fester like a sore-

And then run?...

Like a heavy load.

Or does it explode? (ARS 368)

Hansberry depicts the condition of the millions of ambitious Black Americans and their dreams challenging the axiom of the White Americans. Hansberry’s commitment towards the oppressed is evident throughout the play. Her purpose of using art as a portfolio is evident in the lines of Downer: “Art for truth’s sake is serious. Its highest purpose has ever been to perpetuate the life of its time. The higher the form of expression to the greater the art” (2).

The entire family waits for the insurance money that the big Walter has earned. Each of the adults in the family has a dream. For Lena, the mother, she must have a comfortable house for the family. For Walter the son it is to attain a social status by investing in a liquor shop. And for Beneatha to pursue her medical course. And for Ruth, the daughter in law to have a place for the forthcoming child. Thus the
play begins with much expectations in each of the characters. Hansberry has planned her setting to present the position of the younger family. She takes us to the *ghetto* of the south Chicago, where the working class people live in dense population in poor unhygienic conditions.

The *ghetto* life is a horrible one. The apartments are full of cockroaches, pests and rats. In the cracks of the wall one can find to his or her aversion, filthier insects. Because of the dense population, diseases frequently visit. So to live in a *ghetto* is painful, a punishment, a hell. It is from this hell that this family wants to escape. Ruth’s statement about the *ghetto* life is: “Well, for God’s sake – if the moving men are here- LET’S GET THE HELL OUT OF HERE!” *(*ARS* 422).*

Lena, the mother wishes to have a garden, to breathe the fresh air, which is lacking in the *ghetto*. The fresh air is symbolic of freedom. Thus by building suspense in each of the characters, Hansberry builds up tension in the play which is of paramount importance. When Bobo confesses of the treachery made by Willy, Mama is horror stricken, she is hopeless: “Just aimed too high all the time” (418).

For a moment there is darkness everywhere. She is frustrated, for she has seen Walter the senior work hard till his eyes become red. He has rigorously worked to become old even before forty years of old, and he has killed himself for the uplift of the family. Further, she prays God for further strength.

Hansberry attributes a sense of optimism in her characters and the characters resurrect from the ashes. With a sense of positive note, Mama comes up with her decision in supporting Walter. She plunges into action.

MAMA. (into action) Ain’t it the truth. Look at all this here mess.

Ruth, put Travis’ good jacket on him… Walter Lee, fix your tie and
tuck your shirt in, you look just like somebody’s hoodlum. Lord have mercy, where is my plant? (She flies to get it amid the general bustling of the family, who are deliberately trying to ignore the nobility of the past moment). You all start on down… Travis child, don’t go empty-handed. (ARS 422)

Thus Hansberry proves herself as a social realist in taking sides with the oppressed. She brings in transformation in each of the characters especially in Walter. Walter suffocates to pursue living as a chauffeur. When Mama confesses that she has bought a house, Walter is unhappy because he is thinking of investing the money in business. So he doesn’t turn up for the job for more than three days. And when Mama enquires him, he breaks in frustration:

WALTER. Mama – you don’t know all the things a man what got leisure can find to do in this city… What’s this – Friday night? Well – Wednesday I borrowed Willy Harris’ car and I went for a drive… just me and myself and I drove and drove … way out… way past South Chicago, and I parked the car and I sat and looked at the steel mills all day long. I just sat in the car and looked at them … I just sat down on the curb at Thirty-ninth and South Parkway and I just sat there and watched the Negroes so by… (402-3)

His expectation is that he would become a thriving businessman. This is evident from his conversation with Travis his son: “You wouldn’t understand yet, son, but your daddy’s gonna make a transaction… a business transaction that’s going to change our lives” (404)
To everybody’s horror Walter invests the entire amount in the liquor business and when he comes to know of the news of Willy’s escape, he shouts in agony:

WALTER. … Man … I trusted you… Man, I put my life in your hands…. (He starts to crumple down on the floor as RUTH just covers her face in horror. MAMA opens the door and comes into the room, with BENEATHA behind her) Man… (He starts to pound the floor with his fists, sobbing wildly) That money is made out of my father’s flesh… (ARS 413)

Hansberry uses irony as a tool to conceptualize her ideology. The conversation between Karl Linder, the chairman from Clybourne Park Welcoming Association and Walter is full of irony. The white man projects himself as a humanitarian. When he addresses his special community problem, his racial prejudice is out of the bag:

LINDER. Yes - that’s the way we feel out in Clybourne Park. And that’s why I was elected to come here this afternoon and talk to you people. Friendly like, you know, the way people should talk to each other… But you’ve got to admit that a man, right or wrong, has the right to want to have the neighborhood he lives in a certain kind of way. And at the moment the overwhelming majority of our people out there feel that people get along better, take more of common interest in the life of the community, when they share a common background.

(ARS 408)

The irony attains the summit when Linder utters the word. Even after his satirical speech, he talks to them as if nothing has happened. His concept is to prevent them
from entering into the white colony for he thinks that the blacks are always
dangerous. But quite antagonistic to his thought Linder says that he had a friendly
conversation mocking the very concept of friend and friendship: “Well, now we’ve
been having fine conversation. I hope you’ll hear me all the way through” (ARS 408).

Hansberry pays back the white colonial racist ‘ideologist’. She vindicates
Linder, the chairman of the Clybourne Park welcoming association through Walter’s
counter in an ironical tone. The art of justification is achieved through the sense of
optimistic presentation of Walter.

LINDER. Yes – …

WALTER. (Starting to cry and facing the man eye to eye) What I am
telling you is that we called you over here to tell you that we are
very proud and that this is – this is my son, who makes the sixth
generation of our family in this country, and that we have all
thought about your offer and we have decided to move into our
house because my father – my father – he earned it… That’s all
we got to say… We don’t want your money. (421-22)

By engaging Walter, Hansberry has satirized the follies of the racist society
and its ways. Learning the art of retaliation through honey tinged words, the author
repays the representative of the white society. Thus Hansberry’s characterization and
her handling up of dialogue are of high merit.

The slave pact signed by Abraham Lincoln has not altered the lives of the
black. Hence Beneatha, the daughter of Mama is of the opinion to migrate to her
ancestral home which is Africa. She is in search of her roots. She feels happy in the
Nigerian dress and the culture and customs of Africa. She regains power through a
song, the African mode of welcoming:

BENEATHA. [With the record]

*Alundi, alundi*

*Alundi alunya*

*Jop pu a jeepua*

*Ang gu soooooooo*

*Ai yai yae...*

*Ayehaye-alundi... (ARS 393)*

Her encounter with Asagai brings in her life an understanding about the
natives. The inspiration of Asagai paves way for the development of the character
Beneatha. Earlier she is fascinated towards George the sophisticated Negro, later she
thinks George as a baby and a fool. This is evident through her conversation with
Mama:

BNEATHA. Mama, George is a fool – honest. (she rises)

MAMA. .... Is he, baby?

BENEATHA. Yes.

MAMA. Well – … better not waste your time with no fools. (ARS 402)

Hansberry’s efficiency of character and thought is of first hand:

The artist of today is the medium for the expression of the art of today,
fertilized by race memories of past ages of art – more perfect by reason
of the struggles, the failures, the inferiority, and the sublimity of ages
of art… the race is the mother of the artist. (8-9)
Before a man can impart truth he must himself be of truth and before he receives a truth he must have the consciousness of truth within his self. Hansberry has such a vision in her and that’s why she chooses her character and situations to bringing her concept and commitment. In *Raisin in the Sun*, Hansberry employs this tool as a technique to liberate the cause of victims and attribute a sense of identity in them travelling towards the past – the long past – their ancestral.

Beneatha is a mouthpiece of the author, they feel the pangs of being in the caged life ‘ghetto’.

BENEATHA. Mama, Asagai – asked me to marry him today and go to Africa – … (Girlishly and unreasonably trying to pursue the conversation) To go to Africa, Mama – be a doctor in Africa …

MAMA. (Distracted) Yes, baby –

WALTER. Africa! What he want you to go to Africa for?

BENEATHA. To practice there… *(ARS 422-23)*

The dramatist uses theatre and performance to express public voices and in some other cases they try to transcend the audience towards a social cause with utmost concern. The artist utilizes the spaces that are found in the social, economical and political conditions. Hansberry dominates the mainstream theatre through her voice of commitment using the racial prejudice of the masters and the poor conditions of the blacks. Hansberry not only deals with the American problem but also the African problem.

The problems of the Native Africans are dealt with in naked eye of Hansberry in her *Les Blancs*. Through various characters and their conversations, she unveils many of the darker worlds of the Africans. The initiation of *Les Blancs* is highly
provocative: The sound of drums, a crescendo, the leather costumes of the woman
dances: “suspended in the sky in a characteristic African dance pose, …. Cheeks
painted for war, … a spear” (LB 53). are certainly confessing the war. It augurs the
prevailing tensions between the Native Africans and the White European Masters.

Hansberry’s use of Frederic Douglass’ liberal voice is evident that Hansberry
is moving towards struggle. She revolutionizes the concept of lives of the oppressed.
This initiation is towards a better world:

If there is not struggle there is no progress. Those who profess to favor
freedom and yet deprecate agitation, are men who want crops without
plowing up the ground, they want rain without thunder and lightning.
…We must do that by labor, by suffering, by sacrifice, and if needs be,
by our lives and the lives of others. (49)

The sound of crickets, frogs, and bush-babies and the gray-green glow of light,
visualizes the African twilight. But, the immediate transformation of the cyclorama
into deep blue-black with an occasional star portrays the Dark Continent in all its
aesthetic beauty. The action of the entire play is couched in the dialogue between
doctor Dekoven and Charlie, the American journalist, the conversation between
Charlie and Tshembe and between Tshembe and Abioseh.

The entire play is set in the mission compound of Africa. Hansberry portrays
the microcosm of the liberal humanist in the play. The spiritual ministry is taken care
of by Reverend Neilsen and the health and healing ministry is taken care of by Dr.
Dekoven and Dr. Marta.

Though reformation takes place at one side, on another side they exploit the
mother earth of the natives. And their life situations are altered. In the name of
searches, maintaining peace, the military officer Major Rice rules the roost. A number of native people are pathetically killed. They became captives in their own native land:

DEKOVEN. (With great acuteness and irony) Mr. Morris, the struggle here has not been to push the African into the Twentieth Century – but at all costs to keep him away from it! We do not look down on the black because he is wise enough to resent working for us…

DEKOVEN. (Smiling) Morris, this Mission has been here forty years. It takes perhaps twenty-five to educate a generation. If you look around you will find not one African doctor. (Shrugs) Until they govern themselves it will be no different. (*LB 152-53*)

Through a series of conversation between Dekoven and Charlie, Hansberry unveils the problems of the blacks in entirety. Dekoven narrates to Charlie the inhuman treatment meted out by the entire tribe lead by old Abioseh to sit in the legislature in proportion to the number of Whites. Further, the tension is built through the conversation between Charlie and Tshembe. The exploitation of the non renewable resources in the motherland provoked Tshembe:

TSHEMBE. (Sincerely) Mr. Morris, I am touched, truly. But tell me, did you just happen to come by way of Zatembe? Then you must have seen the hills there and the scars in them? (CHARLIE stares at him uncomprehendingly) The great gashes from whence came the silver, gold, diamonds, cobalt, tungsten? Tell me, Mr. Morris,
are there scars in the hills of Twin Forks Junction – cut by strangers? (101)

When Major Rice, the entire mission compound and the American journalist Charlie have strengthened the philosophical of Joseph Conrod. It is Deckoven who acts as the conscience of ‘the real’ missionary of the White folk. Though Tshembe is influenced by the European style of life, his own arrival to Africa itself is of the call of Mother Africa. The arrest of Kumalo, the leader of the tribe infuriates his submissive notion of freedom. And the treachery provoked him, his own elder brother Abioseh conversation into a priest almost smothered him. Further, Peter, otherwise Natali, is killed as a captive and he has the urge to liberate Mother Africa. And he enlists himself in the war of freedom. Tshembe’s acceptance of the spear from the African woman, per se, is a symbol of war.

Hansberry not only deals with the hypocrisies of the racial prejudices of the mainstream against the downtrodden but also she focuses on the problems within the mainstream which is captured lively in The Sign in Sidney Burstein’s Window.

The Sign in Sidney Burstein’s Window is yet another successful play of Hansberry. The setting of the play is highly of artistic merit. It focuses on the importance of life amidst the forward thinking community. Many changes, course of actions and revolts have taken play in Greenwich Village. Many of the critical thinkers have modeled their work on this locale to portray the intrigues in their life. O. Henry, yet another American writer, has chosen the same locale for writing short stories:

…to quaint old Greenwich Village the art people soon came prowling, hunting for north windows and eighteenth-century gables and Dutch
attics and low rents. Then they imported some pewter mugs and a chafing dish or two from Sixth Avenue, and became a “colony”. (57)

Since the play is set in Greenwich Village, there is no scarcity for clashes of ideas. The entire play is set in Sidney’s apartment. Further, Hansberry’s selection of characters are of paramount importance; Alton Scales, the black man, Parodus sisters Irish, whose name suggest a flower of delicacy, Mavish, for imagination and Gloria, suggest religious overtone and David Ragin, the absurd playwright, and Max, a creative artist are part of the microcosm of the macro world.

Sidney, the failed Jewish artist, is highly a liberal humanist. He has just closed his silver dagger, his failed night club and has purchased a newspaper. Discomfited by the ‘political treachery’, he withdrew his commitment to politics and has sought solace in the art newspaper. He is very much clear in his decision of his commitment to the newspaper that it would be free from politics and there would be no editorial. This is his final haven. Soon he becomes popular for his passion for art. His sign in the window attracted many and has kindled the curiosity as well as the passions in many art groups.

But Sidney’s past proves him as a committed politician, though now he is in seclusion. Sidney frequently oscillates between the past and present, Which is ordinary of a human being.

SIDNEY. (In kind) Look, I’m not a neophyte. You wanna see my scrapbooks? Since I was eighteen I’ve belonged to every committee. To Save, To Abolish, Prohibit, Preserve, Reserve and Conserve that ever was. …the mere thought of a “movement” to do anything chills my bones. I simply can no longer bear the
spectacle of hatchery of power-driven insurgents trying at all costs to gain control – (The coup de grace) of the refreshment committee! (SSBW 23)

But Wally urges him to take ‘plainer’ and ‘modest’ view of politics to which Sidney refuses:

WALLY… That’s the trick, Sid. Don’t think about the ailing world for the time being, just think about your own little ailing neighborhood, that’s the point.

SIDNEY. (Wandering away from him) That’s very impressive. (Hands the poster back to WALLY) But the truth of the matter is, dear friends, I am afraid that I have experienced the death of the exclamation point. (SSBW 23)

Forced by the circumstances and Wally’s honey tinged words Sidney approves of publishing an editorial in favour of Wally. His sign in the window holds the card:

CLEAN UP COMMUNITY POLITICS
Wipe Out Bossism
VOTE REFORM (34)

Max as well as Alton and many others support Sidney’s cause. Since Sidney is against the conservative politics he too supports Wally O’Hara. Not only the sign in Sidney’s window supports O’Hara but the campaign they are continuously indulged in brings victory. The vote for reform song in the traditional African style:

THE WALLY O’HARA CAMPAIGN SONG
Sing out the old, sing in the new,
It’s you ballot and it’s got a lot of work to do;
Sing out the old, sing in the new,
Wally O’Hara is the man for you!
CHORUS Wally O’Hara, Wally O’Hara
       Wally O’Hara, is the man – for – you!...
Vote out the old, vote in the new,
It’s your ballot and it’s got a lot of work to do;
Vote out the old, vote in the new,
Wally O’Hara is the man for you!
CHORUS (Repeat) (SSBW 79)

They bring about a change in politics. This song reminds of Tennyson’s “In Memoriam”

Ring out the old, and ring in the new,
Ring, happy bells, across the snow:
The year is going, let him go;
Ring out the false, ring in the true. (94)

The efforts of the campaign backs Wally O’Hara a huge victory. Soon everything happens in topsy-turvy and Wally joins the opposite camp. Sidney finds Wally a hypocrite. A struggle between Sidney as well as Wally urges Sidney to take a plainer view of politics, compels him to indulge in power politics and to yield to circumstances. But Sidney is bold and committed. Wally is aware and he is certain about the righteousness of Sidney, so he leaves off the place.

Further Sidney is depicted as a man of problems in the play. The problem is both internal and external. He is torn between the real and the dream, between commitment and hypocrisy. He oscillates between good and evil as in Doctor Faustus, who oscillates between good angel and bad angel. Further, Sidney oscillates
between his family life as well as the public life. This is evident through his conversation with Irish:

IRISH. I just called you a sadistic, self-satisfying, cruel son of a bitch to your face instead of just thinking it….

SIDNEY. Look, Irish three years ago you practically tore up our marriage looking for a sex problem, because one fine day you decided we had to have one…

IRISH. (Darkly. Sitting beside him on couch and teasing) I happen to know some things about you in bed that you don’t know. (SSBW 14-15)

In order to satisfy Irish of her madness, ‘the undefined problems’ Sidney flees to David, his gay friend, the successful absurd playwright to write about Irish in his forthcoming play. But David thrashes him through a series of conversation:

DAVID. You solve your marriage problems any way you have to Sidney. I won’t judge you, but don’t bring them to me…

DAVID. Just in case you don’t understand me at all, Sidney, I’ll tell you something. Prostitutes interest me clinically; I’ve not the least intention for becoming one…

SIDNEY. (In profound humiliation) Don’t feel so holy about it, David. I asked and you refused. Let’s forget it. It was such a little – such a tiny little act on the part of a slightly desperate man.

DAVID. Such a tiny little corruption. Not three people in the whole world would ever really care whether or not my little insignificant play did or did not have its unities stretched to just
happen to include a part for your wife in trade for a patch of glowing praise in your paper…. (SSBW 92-93)

Hansberry’s efficiency lies in heated exchanges and arguments. Further she develops her thesis through this conversation and through her characterization. This play is evident of her artistic merit and excellence. She focuses on how each character is torn between its passions and real world. She has made this play a platform for several distinct individuals. If Irish talks about her problems boldly, especially the issues of sex, Alton, the black pounces upon Sidney, the White man of his passive reaction to his sincere love. When he comes to know of Gloria’s ‘profession’ as a high prostitute he groans in pain:

ALTON. Would you marry her?...

ALTON. A commodity! (Looking up at SIDNEY) Don’t you understand, Sidney? (Rubbing his head) Man, like I am spawned from commodities… and their purchasers. Don’t you know this? I am running from being a commodity. How do you think I got the color I am, Sidney? Haven’t you ever thought about it? I got this color from my grandmother being used as a commodity, man. The buying and the selling in this country beggar, with me. Jesus, help me. (100-01)

After the death of Gloria, Sidney has taken a very bold decision. Torn by all the relationships; the wife, the friends, Alton and David, and finally by Wally O’Hara, for whom he did campaign he owes:

SIDNEY. That I am going to fight you, Wally. That you have forced me to take a position. Finally – the one thing I never wanted to
do. Just not being for you is not enough. Since that girl died –

(To IRISH) I’m sorry, honey, but I have to – since that girl died –

I have been forced to learn I have to be against you. And, Wally,

I am against you – I swear it to you – and your machine. And

what you have to worry about is the fact that some of us will be

back out in those streets today. Only this time – thanks to you –

we shall be more seasoned, more cynical, tougher, harder to fool

- and therefore, less likely to quit...

SIDNEY. This would! Therefore, to live, to breathe – I shall have to

fight it! (SSBW 141)

Thus, Sidney proves his commitment as a humanist fighting the evils of
corruption. Though he is a victim, he rises from his ashes and he is a robust optimist.
This is the spirit of Hansberry’s protagonist; even at the verge of failure they are
committed for their cause. This is the crux of Hansberry’s drama.

Hansberry is always committed and her characters are bold and positive. They
are robust optimists in the world of chaos. In What Use Are Flowers? she boldly takes
up the issue of absurd philosophy and comes out with answers to the questions raised
by the absurd playwright Samuel Beckett.

What Use Are Flowers? begins with the epitaph from Bertolt Brecht’s Mother
Courage and Her Children:

Lullaby baby

What’s rustling there?

Neighbor’s child’s in Poland

Mine’s who knows where. (325)
As stated in the critical background of the play by Robert Nemiroff it is an answer to Brecht: “The play was in effect her answer to the questions of life and death, survival and absurdity which Beckett had posed in such novel, compelling terms” (318).

When so many playwrights infected the world with their absurd theory, dramatists like Hansberry, Galsworthy and Mahasweta Devi are collectively against them. Hansberry’s execution of her setting is extraordinary in the play. The unknown plain in the world and darkness and wind in the play symbolizes chaos in the world. These confusions are unraveled by her in this play. Already she has created David, the absurd playwright in Sign as a happier man. Through happiness and success, David achieves a summit. Hansberry has inbuilt in David, a kind of positive attitude which is antagonistic to absurdism. In What Use of Flowers she employs the same principles. By creating a curiosity in the mind of the professor of English Charles Lewis Lawson, the Hermit, Hansberry travels in an optimistic way. She inculcates a sense of belonging in the absurd character of the Hermit. His return to the inhabitation from the woods is an evidence of his sense of belonging:

HERMIT. … I was fifty-eight when I went into the woods. And now I am either seventy-eight or perhaps more than eighty years old. That is why I have come out of the woods. I am afraid men invent timepieces, they do not invent time. We may give time its dimensions and meaning, we may make it worthless or important or absurd or crucial. But ultimately I am afraid it has a value of its own. It is time for me to die. And I have come out to see what men have been doing. And now that I am back, more than
anything else just now, you see, I should very much like to know – what time it is. (WUAF 332)

Life is not merely waiting, or simply sitting as expressed in Waiting for Godot but it is full of expectation and survival. It is this philosophy that has influenced the Hermit to redo his past, the role of a teacher. He finds the children as savages and wants to liberate them from their clumsy awkward position. He names them and teaches them through songs and music and through gestures:

HERMIT. … Dear God! Calluses. You really don’t understand a word I am saying, do you?

(Experimentally, but swiftly, expecting nothing) “Mother”.


The Hermit teaches them niceties and nuances of life and life situations and every craft work to create a civilization and they are successful in learning the knack to form a meaningful society:

HERMIT (Shouting): Joy, thou source of light immortal!

CHILDREN: Joy, thou source of light immortal!

HERMIT: Daughter of Elysium!

CHILDREN: Daughter of Elysium!

ALL:

Touched with fire, to the portal
Of thy radiant shrine we come.
Thy pure magic frees all others
Held in Custom’s rings;
Men throughout the world are brothers
In the haven of they wings... (*WUAF* 352)

The art of learning has improved their knowledge. Some of the questions could not be answered by the Hermit especially in the case of immorality. There are differences of opinion after the demise of the teacher and for a certain movement they are in confusion but finally they manage to come out of their problems. The end of the play ends in a positive note, that death is not an end of all things but it is just a beginning:

**HERMIT.** ...Why did she leave you here to torment me in my last absurd hours! It’s all finished with you, the lot of you! Our little adventure among the stars is over! *Finis!* The brief and stupid episode will end no! The universe will have peace now...

(He falls back, spent. **CHARLIE** stands and holds out the lily
The old man lifts his head)

Use... What use? Charlie, the uses of flowers were infinite....

(He lies still. **CHARLIE** gently places the flower by his face and after a moment crosses out to join the **CHILDREN** who, unaware that the old man has left them, are now clustered intently about the wreck of the wheel which **THOMAS**, squatting in the dirt, is patiently reconstructing. (369-70)

Thus, Hansberry patiently reconstructs her dramatic world attributing optimism through her works.
Thus, through a series of songs, mob, sound, character, dialogue etc. both these writers have discovered the world of the oppressed. Their realistic portrayal is indeed their strength.

The next chapter titled Conclusion, sums up the earlier chapters and offers conclusive remarks and suggestions for further researchers.