Chapter III

Socio-Economic Exploitation and Political Transformation

The advocates of Marxist ideology have propounded the theory that the rich and the aristocrats remain rich because they retain the excess of wealth. The rich are the parasites. They suck the blood of the labourers and workers and keep the profit of their labour with them. Wealth is the product of labour and it is amassed through the profit. The profit is nothing but the money turned out by labour. By exploiting the wages due to the labourers, the owners become rich. This is how they enjoy the luxuries of life and the labourers who toils hard to accrue wealth for the rich is deprived of the privileges and continues to live in abject poverty and misery.

Through the pages of history under the feudal system, the rich possessed all the accessories and the instruments used for production and farming. The labourers too become the property of rich. They were treated like slaves and the owners had even the right to buy and sell these slaves. The slaves were compelled to work for the feudal society. The members of the feudal society were the exploiters of these slaves and enjoyed the fruits of the slave’s labour by hoarding the excess of wealth. The exploiter become richer and richer and the exploited become poorer and poorer. The history of humanity gives a number of examples for this discrimination between the rich and the poor. Under colonization, the English expanded their territory all over the world under the pretext of expanding their business. In this perception, they plundered the wealth of the natives and also took the blacks in chains as slaves from Africa to toil in the plantations and in factories as there was no other labour force. The fruits of the black’s labour were enjoyed by the whites and the exploited blacks lived as the poorest of the poor. In fact it is this class issue, which is otherwise known as capitalism that speaks of the unequal distribution of the products of human labours:
This system divides society into classes, (section of people who get their living in the same way) one which carries out the actual process of production (slave, serf, wage-worker) while the other (slave owner, lord, capitalist employer) enjoys part of the products without having to work to produce it. (Burn 54)

In India too, the classifications given by Varna and afterwards by Manusmriti created the divisions among people based on their birth and their respective occupations. The Sudras were the last in the social ladder and they were made to perform menial tasks to all the other higher castes. The worst thing was that they were very marginalized and were called Harijans or untouchables. In other words, they become the oppressed and exploited people, who were denied even the basic rights in their lives. Even after India had achieved freedom from the Colonisers, we still hear of bonded labours and dalits working for the landlords in their farms in the most dehumanizing conditions. They still grope in darkness and look for some messiah to help them come out of the despicable pit they are in. The miserable living conditions of these oppressed castes were more or less the replica of the plight of the black in South Africa. The oppression of blacks by the whites and the exploitation of the dalits by the higher castes made them “broken” psychologically, physically, and economically. Therefore, the oppressors denied the basic necessities of life to the oppressed.

Bama and Miriam Tlali realistically portray the plight of the poor as against the luxurious and aristocratic life of the rich. The portrayal shows how racial oppression and oppression in the name of caste lead to the economic deprivation of the oppressed. In Bama’s novels the despicable conditions of the poverty-stricken dalits who work in the farms of the higher caste Nayikars and the way they are swindled and cheated by the upper caste traders are portrayed in a vivid manner. It is
a shame that the higher caste stoop so low to perpetrate such cruel exploitations on these poor dalits. The dalits are forced to work in the fields to eke out a living. They toil hard to earn their daily bread. They work from dawn to dusk and get the wages just to fill their stomachs. They do not enjoy any other comforts in their lives. The plight of the dalit women is still worse. They work along with their men folk and get a lesser pay because of the rampant gender discrimination. They are doubly oppressed because they work as domestics in the households of the higher caste besides working in the fields. They continue to work at home when they return from the fields, look after the children and their husband and finally give themselves away to satisfy the physical needs of their husbands too. There is a life of untold misery and not a day passes without such humiliation.

Most of the people in the dalit colony are agricultural labourers. They are all employed in the farms of the higher castes, when there is no work they go to the nearby forests and collect firewood and sell them to get some gruel for the night. The high caste people face no such problem as they have wells in their farm and electric motors to pump water. So they have work during all the seasons. And they need not suffer like the poor dalits. Throughout the year they live in comforts as these dalits are their disposal to work for them round the clock.

Nearly one third of the agricultural land in the village belongs to the Nayaikar families. In fact, each Paraya family is attached to a Nayaikar family as bond labourers. As far as Bama has seen, the Pallar and Parayar families work very hard in this way. The other Koravar or gypsies and Chakkiliyar generally sweep the dredges and clean the drains. They also weave winnowing trays, boxes and baskets and earn a very meager amount. The children, both boys and girls, live in utter poverty. They are seen wandering bare-bottomed. At the times they are seen wearing
torn rags that do not fit them properly. It is a pitiable sight to see them running towards the free-meal centre when the church bell is struck at twelve noon. The tiny tots too, wade through the streets, plates in their “manna” everyday.

The working conditions of the dalits are portrayed very realistically by Bama. In the Nayaikars farms the dalits work like animals who are muzzled in the threshing field. The animals are muzzled from eating the straw while threshing them. The same way, the dalit farmers are also muzzled invisibly because they should not raise voice against the upper caste and they have to accept whatever wages they offer for their hard labour. They are exploited cruelly and treated in an inhuman manner. The older women who cannot do the work in the fields live wretchedly working as domestics in the Nayaikars house and carry out the errands obediently. The grandmother of the protagonist too, looks after the chores in a Nayaikar’s house and she is given the left over as the daily wages:

As soon as dawn broke, she would go to the Nayaikar’s house, sweep out the cowshed, collect up the dung and dirt, and then bring home the left over rice and curry from the previous evening. And for some reason she would behave as if she had been handed the nectar of the gods. (K 14)

Right from her childhood, Bama has seen the people of her community working incessantly and surviving only on hard labour. She gives a detailed description of the works of various kinds undertaken by the dalits in her village. In the agricultural sector, they take up ploughing, manuring, watering, sowing the seeds, separating the seedlings and plating them and then weeding out, spraying fertilizers, reaping the grains, and working on the threshing floors, plating groundnuts, and selecting ripe coconuts. Apart from the work in these fields, they also work in construction sites,
daggering wells, carrying loads of earth, gravel and stone. When these works are not available, they go to the forests and the hills to gather firewood or they work with palm-leaves or at the kilns making bricks. By and large, these people have to work in order to spin some money out to fend for themselves. When the men folk are arrested and taken to custody during some communal riot or other, the women folk bear the double burden of working in the fields and face lots of hardships to carry food to those men who are in hiding fearing the police. They live in a miserable condition during these turbulent days.

Bama’s grandmother is shown as a sincere and obedient servant in a Nayaikar family. She is also employed to hire labours to work in their farms. She works all the days except on Sundays. Everyday, she gets up around three in the morning, finishes her own house chores and goes to the Nayaikar’s house to work till sunset. When she comes back at night, she prepares some gruel for her. Sometimes, they get some seasonal occupation in the fields. All the women and children go to the fields to pull up the groundnut crops and clean and separate the pods. They wake up early in the morning and leave for the fields carrying some gruel which they drink during the midday break. They work in the fields till evening. At the end of the day, they carry the pods to the granaries of the Nayaikar’s after all the day’s labour they get just five or six rupees as their wages. Sometimes, they are paid in kind and sell the groundnuts to the local traders and buy from them some rice or broken grains. The gruel made out of these grains emits a bad smell because of the poor quality of the rice. The trader generally cheats these poor labours and mints a lot of money. Once the season is over, they start working in breaking the groundnut pods. They have to do the job very carefully but very fast. No one is allowed to crack the nuts, and if they do so it entails serious punishment. They heap all sorts of abuses on those poor labours. The labourers
also use their teeth to break the groundnuts and in the process they get choked because of the dust. At the end of the day, once again, they get an eager wage of six rupees.

As stated earlier, when they have no other work, they go to the nearby forests and mountains to collect firewood. They sell the firewood and from the proceeds they get some cheap quality rice to prepare some gruel at home. Bama recounts how, one day, her mother after working labouriously the whole day in the mountains and forests comes home tired, carrying a big bundle of firewood. The moment she reaches the hut, she leans on the wall and starts vomiting gobs of blood. Describing this wretched condition, Bama says: “But it was only by toiling like this, without taking any account of their bodies as human flesh and blood that people of my community could even survive” (K 40).

Another deplorable scene in Karukku is that, during the harvest time, the women and children go to the streets and the path ways to sweep and gather the fallen grains from the sheaves taken to the threshing floors. They toil very hard to pick up these scattered grains and finally collect them in a basket to take it home. Then they sell the grains to the traders who take them in exchange for tapioca or some other goods swindling them in the barter. They also work in the cotton fields and collect cotton pods as wages. All the collected cotton bundles are taken by the traders for a very cheap price. Banking on these poor farmers’ innocence, the traders thrive in their business. Describing the hapless condition of these labourers, Bama writes:

Our hard work was exploited half the time by our Nayaikar employers. The rest of the time we were swindled by these tradesmen. So how was it possible for us to make any progress? It seems that it is only the swindlers who manage to advance themselves. But there is no way at all for the dalit who strikes to fair methods, and who toils hard all her life to make good. (K 46)
And at the end, Bama pathetically says that this is the community, which is born to work, and however hard they toil, they have to live on the same gruel every day: “Only at night do they take rest and they have to keep working until the moment of death. It is only in this way that they can even half fill their bellies” (K 47). Bama, after becoming a nun, is posted in a school to work as a teacher. There, she is pained to see her community people working in a despicable manner. They are given menial jobs like sweeping the premises, swabbing and washing the classrooms, and cleaning the lavatories. They never treated the poor people as human beings.

Bama also gives vivid details about how the dalits get only very cheap variety of fish and other fish products. They cannot afford to go for better varieties like the higher caste people who feast on costly seafood like prawns. Another important thing in these poor labours’ life style is that only on occasions like Christmas, New Year, Easter and the Annual feast do they prepare some good at home. They are usually excited about these celebrations and they enjoy only on beef on these occasions. Otherwise, they usually live on rice and curry and that too only in the evening. Often they have gruel along with some raw onions, green chillies or some stale ground nuts. When they have money, they buy small packets of pickles sold by the vendors. She also portrays clearly the difficulties and struggles that all poor dalits experience. Whether it is the scorching heat or the incessant rains, the dalits are forced to toil painfully and continue to live in their huts with gruel and water. She concludes:

Life is difficult if you happen to be poor, even though you are born into the upper-castes. When this is the case, the conditions of those who are born into the paraya community, as the poorest of the poor, struggling for daily survival, doesn’t need spelling out. (K 68)

In Sangai, Bama renders a graphic account of the poverty-stricken people in her village, who live in distress, hoping against hope for a better life. The
protagonists’ grandfather joins a group of people who leave for Sri Lanka to work in the tea estates. The Kankani (supervisor) or the agent who lures them into this work under the promise of good wages recruits them. But their plight in the work under the promise of good wages recruits them. But their plight in the tea-estate is no better. They are completely exploited and some of them return home thoroughly cheated. Her grandfather never returns. Her grandmother has a long wait and endures passively all the sufferings of taking care of her two children. She works in the field and also as a midwife. But during the famine, she becomes completely broken and parts with even her Thali to take care of the children. She is driven to such poverty that she is ready to forego her Thali thinking her husband will never turn up.

Some of the women in the village go to work in fields even in their advanced state of pregnancy. One such woman goes to the woods to gather grass for her cattle. In the hot sun, she delivers her child in the forest and in the evening she walks back all the way home carrying the child with a bundle of grass on her head. Remaining at home during this period means total starvation of their children and cattle. So they venture out into the field to work in order to support their families. Even the protagonist’s mother in her advanced state of pregnancy works in the paddy field planting the seedlings. When she comes back, she delivers her child. They cannot even dream of any assistance from anyone except the assistance from the local midwife. Just for a brief spell they take rest and resume their daily work.

When her grandmother takes Mariamma to a nearby missionary hospital in the town for a check-up, she happens to see the fat white pigs raised there by the white nuns in the convent nearby. They are fed with boiled wheat, milk powder, and biscuits. When she sees this, she is shocked and deplorably thinks of her people’s fate. When she comes back home she reports this to the neighboring women. Madatti, one
of the women, after listening to this story, says pathetically that the people in her village toil hard throughout the day and get some wheat and milk powder as wages from the local parish priest. The dalits starve whereas these pigs are fortunate to get this nutritious food and to be taken care of by the white missionaries. The dalit women’s anguish is so much overtly unspoken that one understands how these poor people yearn to get some good food.

Usually, the high caste people have extravagant celebrations when their girls attain puberty. Mariamma remains at home in a secluded place, when she attains puberty, as she has no one to fall upon to have any celebrations. Her mother has died at an early age and her drunken father is very indifferent. Even the poor families have some sort of celebration to mark this event but the care takers of Mariamma do not bother about this. As usual, she goes to work after the eighth day. That too she goes as a helper in a well-digging project. At such a tender age, she is forced to do hard labour and she opts for this hard labour in the hope of getting a better pay. But ironically she ends up in the hospital. She falls into the well when she carries up a basketful of stones. She is completely bruised with injuries and fractures. The people cover her in a mat and remove her in a bullock – cart to a local government hospital. After eight months or so she is discharged from the hospital just to resume her hard work but this time she takes her younger sister Annamma too along with her. There is no other alternative and no one will feed them if they do not work everyday. When there is no work, they go to father firewood and prepare some gruel at night to feed them.

Another pathetic sight unfolded by Bama is that of women and children who work in the groundnut farms. During the sowing season these people leave their house early in the morning after having some gruel. The higher caste farmers usually keep the groundnut seeds in store after spraying insecticide. Not knowing this, some children eat this groundnut because they live in such abject poverty. Bama shows
many instances in her novel where these children after eating these poisonous groundnuts die at the hospital without responding to so-modern medical treatment. The poor people cannot afford to go to good hospitals to have a better treatment.

In her community, marriages are conducted during a particular season. People wait eagerly for this season because only on those occasions do they get a sumptuous meal made of rice and curry. The poor people collect the paddy over the season and save them for the marriage celebration. It is to be noted that, when the protagonist’s mother got married, only millet gruel was served. At least now people get some rice and they even take this rice home to be eaten the next day. Eating rice and curry is a rare phenomenon and most of the times, they have the gruel as the main course of diet. The protagonist herself asks her mother one day why she prepares gruel every day and adds why they cannot have rice and curry. They poor mother answer her saying that the gruel is the only food available to them, and it is not that easy to get rice and curry everyday as they do not have the wherewithal to buy them.

From the portrayal of the rural folks by Bama, these peoples have shameful living conditions. They have no land to till nor can they follow any profession. If they own lands they are exploited by the higher caste bosses and most of them are forced to do the menial work order by the higher caste bosses and most of them are forced to do the menial work ordered by the higher castes. They are treated like animals and forced to accept leftovers from the higher caste houses in return for their endless toil. While commenting on their wretched life Dangle says: “they live a life of poverty, starvation, ignorance, insults, injustice, atrocities, and practices totally against humanity. The only thing available to them in plenty is their wretchedness…” (236) In Bama’s works, the poor dalit peasants are portrayed as having a miserable life at the hands of the higher caste. They are exploited, cruelly ill-treated and driven to a marginalized life. Though racism and casteism show their ugly heads in keeping the
blacks and dalits eternally as bonded labourers, these two evils have yet another effect on the womenfolk of the blacks and the dalits.

Racial oppression makes blacks lead to the economical deprivation of the oppressed. Unlike Bama, Tlali is very lesser account of blacks’ economical exploitation that has pervaded in her works rather cited much of awareness on it to her readers. Almost all the works of Bama are influenced with the rural areas and her portraying protagonists are directly affected in economical exploitation by their landlords. But Tlali has completely compiled her whole experiences from the urban areas. In the industrialism, the subjugated and low-cost labours are exploited in indirect way. So Tlali has concentrated on the awareness rather than portraying the pathetic condition of blacks’ economical exploitation. Eventhough they are differentiated in receiving their readers, they are at same in their goal of political transformation, they are resigned their job on the occasion of excluding their rights.

In *Muriel at Metropolitan*, Tlali is boldly pervades some of the ambiguity and ironical passages which are indicating the economical exploitation beside racial bias. But these passages are excluded by both the Ravan and the Longman presses. The life spheres of black and white women at this time did not have many interfaces, the editors, blinded by the sentimentality of these verses, and are not alerted to their function in the text, their ambiguity, and the irony they evoke. The following verse heads the first chapter of the typescript:

A Message for You

Put all you know in the job you’re paid for –

And then with a conscience that’s clear –

Turn your attention to things deep and wonderful.

Open the eye and ear. (1959)
In the context of Muriel’s view, the irony of this verse is obvious: although Muriel has put all her skills into her job, she is not fairly compensated for her work. As a black worker in apartheid South Africa, she has received a far lower salary than her white counterparts. What is more, forced to exploit her own people, she can never have a “conscience that’s clear,” and were she to turn her attention finally to things “deep and wonderful” her eye would only meet degradation, and her ears only the political naivety of her white co-workers. The other verse by Patience Strong, “written on that Pitco Tips Tea Card,” Muriel says, “which Johan unconcernedly deposited on the desk before me,” heads the last chapter “I Quit”: “Even though the day holds out no hope of happiness, Don’t despise it or despair for you can never guess –What it may unfold before the sunset dies away. Greet with glad thanksgiving the beginning of each Day” (MM 91). When each day entailed waking up to the same hopelessly oppressive political situation, any black in South Africa during the 1960s and the 1970s would have realised the irony intended by this verse. In addition, on this day in the narrative, Muriel has decided to resign her post at Metropolitan Radio. It seems unlikely that a woman, having to give up the relative independence that her work position and her income have given her, with no welfare network to rely on, would “greet with glad thanksgiving the beginning” of such a day.

Tlali has not only dealt with her works and focuses on how the blacks are affected by the deprivative condition of their poverty, but also how they are fully imposed in economical exploitation and cheap labourism. In the course of imposition, Tlali’s Amandla reveals that Betty’s recollection of how her brother, Buti, and his wife were humiliated by one of the pillars of the atrocious apartheid laws known as influx control, informs the inner jubilation and a momentary sense of relief and control by the people as they watch all the buildings in which all these and other
restricting laws were enforced go down in flames. Buti and his wife represent the multitudes of black families all over the country who have to answer to the despotic authorities at odd hours of the night for their “illegal” presence in designated “white” areas. Unpleasant experiences are often accompanied by indefinite prison detentions and possible evictions from the urban areas to dry, unproductive and faraway rural areas, or what are called Native Reserves or homelands, created specifically for African occupancy after conquest. Steadily, these reserves become undisputed reservoirs of cheap labor, while the industrial areas are reserved for exclusive white residence and industrial development. Mgubane says of the reserve system that it is meant to “effectively arrest the African's development, while at the same time allowing for whites to draw on Africans for exploitation in urban industries” (A 69).

In Muriel at Metropolitan, Muriel is a modern working woman, well educated with a good command of English, economics and bookkeeping; moreover, she is politically aware, knowledgeable about trade unions and the laws of the country. She values her own rationality and the condition she shares with all humanity. Asked outright ‘what’ she is? Muriel answers: “What do you mean what am I? I’m a human being, of course” (MM 68). Muriel thus resists being defined in stereotypical terms of race or gender; rejecting any label others want to pin on her she first and foremost regards herself as a person worthy of respect. Furthermore, Muriel also mostly depicts others in a non-stereotypical fashion. The characters who run the most risk of becoming figures of ridicule are the Jewish boss, Mr Bloch, his sister Mrs. Kuhn, and the “die-hard Afrikaner” woman, Mrs. Stein. While at times characterised as exploitative, racist Herrenvolk, they are also assigned positive human characteristics such as patience, humour, maternal or paternal warmth, an ability to forgive, and a basic concern for the black workers’ well-being. For example, towards the end of the novel, the narrator reflects on Mr. Bloch’s egalitarian attitude for him:
The colour of our skins did not come into it—there was work to be done, and the boss had equal confidence in all of us. When there was an error in the office records, he did not care what colour the hand was that made the error, only whose handwriting it was. When a radio or motor was damaged in the workshop, it did not matter if the mechanic responsible was white or black. (MM 163)

For this reason, the final lines of the novel, Muriel looks into Mr Bloch’s eyes and says, “thanks for everything” (MM 190), are to my mind totally devoid of irony. Alongside outright political ‘preaching,’ Muriel, with didactic scrupulousness, depicts incidents likely to awaken the reader’s awareness of the political situation, or to gently provoke identification with the protagonist’s dilemma. Her observations promote rational thought and caution rather than emotional reaction and violence. Similarly, the portrayal of Muriel’s gradual development towards awareness of her predicament also resists the convention of the “spectacular.” Unlike the flashy action, sudden reversals of fortune, and violence found in the Drum stories, Muriel is portrayed with psychological subtlety: step by step she realises how companies such as Metropolitan further the cruelty of apartheid, and how her position there is gradually making her complicit with this policy. Initially, she is pleased to have landed a new job and has “nothing to complain about except that it was too noisy” (MM 12), and still, after some time at Metropolitan, she likes Mrs Kuhn for being “so friendly and kind” (MM 14). But when she eventually begins to realise what her work entails, a more negative tone is heard:

I had seen apartheid applied in many spheres in the Republic but never before had I seen it applied to ledger or record cards! At Metropolitan Radio we kept the European cards in one section separated from the
non-European cards. It was all very confusing for a person who did not
know the different Coloured townships because that was the only clue
to where the card should be filed or found. (MM 15-16)

Then gradually, she is introduced to the tragic consequences of the credit system. The
head African salesman William No. 1 is the first to explain to her that he is not happy
about the high interest rates at this place:

It’s killing our people. Every time I introduce a person here, I know
he’ll pay and pay and pay. It makes me feel guilty, like I’ve brought
him to be slaughtered.

How are the other shops? Don’t they also charge interest?

They do. But not as high as here. You’ll see. (MM 17)

The above information leaves Muriel “trembling” with “uneasiness and
loneliness,” and a feeling of hopelessness, which slowly grows into a strong
conviction. In this state, a black customer’s reaction serves as an eye-opener to her:

“She looked at me as if I were a traitor, and went away without saying goodbye
[Emphasis added]” (MM 100). Muriel’s newly found insight finally forces her to act,
making her confide in Douglas that she feels as if she is sitting “between two fires”
(MM 81). Finally, in the last paragraph, she admits that she can “not continue to be
part of the web that has been woven to entangle a people whom I love and am part of”
(MM 190).

In addition, in place of male writers’ refusal to engage in political matters, she
posits a serious political discussion revolving around the powerlessness of the black
people. At the time, the narrative explicitly points out that, due to laws implemented
by the apartheid regime, blacks had no right to vote, could not own property, and were
not allowed to go on strike. Tlali’s didactic sections are often dialogic, that is, they
take the form of a discussion, where the characters are allowed to voice their opinions, but the reader is left to be the judge. For example, when the white mechanic Douglas complains about his low wages, Muriel takes the opportunity to comment on the different working conditions for blacks and whites and finds it apt to explain to Douglas how the white unions protect the interests of the white workers. On the other hand, she says, the “non-white workers were unorganised, and it was difficult to get them more organised” as it was “illegal for non-whites to strike” (MM 80). However, she does not try to persuade him to change his mind but lets him carry on grumbling. At other times she is more forceful, as for example in a heated discussion with the two white ladies in the chapter One Human Heart for Another. Further, the white ladies interrogate:

But Muriel, what do you think would happen if the Europeans left and went back to Europe? The black people would massacre one another, wouldn’t they?

Mrs Kuhn, who had been quiet for some time, came to life.

Yes. Look at what happened in the Congo!

It was always raised as an example of the inability of the Africans to govern themselves. I sighed.

Why did the Belgians keep all doors closed to the Africans for all those years until the eleventh hour? Why did they not train the Africans in local administration first and give them responsible positions gradually, why did they wait until the people demanded rights? If they had been given adequate education and prepared, they would have been able to take over without disastrous results. (MM 180)
Here, Tlali is venting both sides of the argument, giving the reader a chance to form her own opinion. In an interview with her, when asked to justify her political didacticism, Tlali says that there were very few channels of information open to people living in Soweto at the time. Therefore, a lack of information and knowledge about political developments often caused confusion in the black community. In Muriel, Tlali depicts a protagonist whose political awareness served as an eye-opener to her fellow Sowetans at the time, and to her readers in general. This concern with the ordinary lives of people and the serious political discussion pursued dialogically in Muriel forms a critical contrast to the escapist mode of black male writing. By implication it thereby resists this mode of patriarchal attitudes of disrespect for the life spheres of women and instead acclaims their longing to be taken seriously politically.

A dominant theme in dalit writing is a protest against those social and government institutions as well as the subjugated dalits. In addition, dalit writings explore the deliberating effects on their psyche to resist against various forms of oppression – social, political and economic marginalization. However, it has also been enriched by diverse voices within the community, such as those of dalit women who are doubly oppressed because of their caste and their gender. Dalit literature first received national recognition as a literary movement with the formation of the Dalit Panthers in Maharashtra in 1972, but developed more slowly as a body of literature in other parts of India. It was only in the late 1980s that Dalit literature in Tamil began to emerge as a literary field, and Karukku, by a dalit woman in Tamil.

Karukku examines the life of its author, Bama, and the Paraya community - the Dalit sub caste she belongs to - in relation to the Roman Catholic Church. The majority converted to Catholicism because they were promised free education, and above all they thought that it was an opportunity to escape from the economic and
social marginalization. But this autobiography reveals that the Catholicism is also continuouslying the cruel practices of caste discrimination from Hinduism in India – specifically in Tamil Nadu. It also captures how the narrator takes advantage of the educational opportunities that Catholic institutions provide her. Despite the discrimination at her locate, she also faces such cruelties in Christian school because of her caste. She decides to become a nun in order to serve the children of her community, but leaves the convent after she is continuously prevented from helping Dalit children and the poor.

When *Karukku* was published in 1992, it offended the upper caste, middle class sensibilities of the Tamil literary establishment since Bama wrote in the colloquial language of the *Paraya* community. Furthermore, its harsh critique of the caste practices within the Catholic Church also upset the respective religious authorities. Though it initially upset the *Paraya* community of her village, as she exposed their life to the public eye, it became extremely popular within the Tamil dalit community, especially her writing coincided with the growing political and social consciousness of dalits in Tamil Nadu.

Bama’s *Sangati* is rooted in the perspectives of dalit women who are triply marginalised because of their lower caste status, and by both upper caste and Dalit patriarchy. Like *Karukku*, it is written in the dialect of the *Paraya* community, but it is considered a more radical work because the rhetoric is more powerful, and it breaks down any notion of plot. While Bama’s autobiography is non-linear with each chapter exploring a specific aspect of the life of the community and that of the narrator, such as work, recreation, religious festivals, and so on, there is still a semblance of an overarching story of the narrator from a child who becomes aware of caste discrimination, to an adult who is socially and mentally vulnerable after she is
disillusioned by life in the convent. In Sangati there is no semblance of a plot; chapters are grouped around individual issues that concern dalit women, though on occasions they do overlap and intersect. Each chapter consists of a number of stories that dalit women tell each other which are then discussed by the narrator and her mother or grandmother, and the narrator then provides lengthy commentaries on these conversations and stories. While the two texts are structurally different and conceive of different solutions to the problems posed, both use rationality to interrogate the structures of caste, patriarchy, and religious authority.

The growing political consciousness of dalits and the development of dalit literature in the 1980s and 1990s have coincided with two important social and cultural movements in India and in the metro pole. Since 1980s, there has been an increasing demand within India for Indian literature being translated into English, and various publication houses, such as Macmillan, Katha, Oxford University Press, and Penguin India, to name a few, have begun systematically translating Indian literature into English. There has also been a simultaneous though limited interest in the metro pole, specifically literature departments, in translated texts. Therefore, Karukku reached a national and international audience after it was translated into English in 2000 by Lakshmi Holmstrom and won the Crossword Book Award for Indian Language Fiction Translation in 2001. Sangati was translated by Holmstrom in 2005, and both English translations have been taught in Universities in the metro pole.

This chapter, therefore, examines Bama’s texts within the larger context of the social and political debates taking place in Tamil Nadu dalit politics, and Christianity. Bama’s deployment of rationality in Karukku and Sangati is reminiscent of the way Periyar, an important social and political activist in South India, used reason to challenge caste oppression and the discrimination against women. In Sangati, the
series of chapters explore the suppression, the resistance, and the celebration of dalit women and a rational critique is deployed throughout to question patriarchy. However, the text provides no clear cut resolution to the problems that face dalit women, but simply presents temporary moments of solidarity. By contrast, in *Karukku*, Bama uses reason to challenge the forms of religious oppression, but merges this with a reinterpretation of religion that reveals the influence of dalit liberation theology which in turn has been inspired by Latin American liberation theology. This argument, therefore, begins with a brief discussion of Periyar’s use of reason to challenge oppressive structures, and then explores how Bama creatively uses reason in very distinct and unique ways to interrogate the different means through which the dalit community has been exploited.

The Self-Respect Movement started by Periyar towards a rational critique of Religion, was believed to be the of dalit consciousness and dalit literature in Tamil Nadu must be seen as a continuation of the anti-caste struggles in the Tamil Nadu that coalesced around Periyar and the Self-Respect Movement between the 1920s to the 1940s. E.V. Ramasami (1879-1973), better known as Periyar (which means “the great leader”), belonged to an upper-caste family in the Tamil country; in 1919 he joined the Indian National Congress, enthusiastically participating in Gandhi’s campaign to reform Indian society, and improve the condition of dalits. However, in 1925, he left the Congress, disillusioned by the bias towards the Brahmans within the party. By 1927 he became a vociferous critic of Gandhi when the latter acknowledged his faith in Varnashrama dharma. Periyar had founded the Self-Respect Movement in the early 1920s hoping to create an egalitarian society in India where caste would be abolished, and where men and women would have equal rights. Therefore Periyar could not accept Gandhi’s support for the caste system, even if the latter claimed that the caste
system was simply a division of labor, and not a social hierarchy. Through articles in newspapers and public meetings, the Self-Respect Movement criticized the national movement on the grounds that while it claimed to represent all Indians, in reality it represented the interests of the Brahmins, and wished to impose a North Indian Aryan culture upon a South Indian Dravidian people. Within the popular imagination in the Tamil country, the Aryans from North India were responsible for introducing caste into an egalitarian Dravidian culture. Periyar and the Self-Respect Movement harkened back to this imagined Dravidian past, and wished to create an egalitarian community among Indians, where caste would be abolished, where there would be economic equality, and where men and women would be treated as equals. According to V. Geetha and V. Rajadurai, the Self-Respect movement was believed that:

In place of affective bonds of kinship and a shared faith and community, new kinds of bonds of horizontal nature, implying comradeship in the widest sense of the term, were sought to be woven; such that men and women in their workaday roles and functions may interact on the basis of mutuality and self-respect. (303)

With the desire to reform Indian society, the Self-Respect Movement advocated and carried out inter-caste marriages and widow remarriages, demanded that women be given the same rights and privileges as men, and also agitated for the rights of the lower-castes (Shudras and dalits). In propagating this radical agenda, Periyar and the Self-Respecters attacked religion, specifically Hinduism, as being responsible for deceiving people into accepting the caste system and the inferiority of women. To a lesser degree the Movement also critiqued Christianity and Islam; it criticized the practice of polygamy in Islam, and Periyar fought for the dalit Catholics when they were exploited by the Church.
According to Periyar, religion is a social phenomenon that structures hierarchal relationships between people, and so has material - social and economic - consequences in the way people interact. Yet, because religion is seen as “God given” it obfuscates these unequal relationships. “Religion is the cause of injustices in the World,” Periyar emphasizes the necessity of embarking on an atheistic “humanising project and evolving principles which people can easily practice” so that men and women can develop their basic human qualities and create an egalitarian community (22). Ritual that undermines the clarity of thought must be replaced by a set of practical moral principles which speak to the current needs of people who are flexible and open to change.

To comprehend the sophistication of Karukku, it is necessary to make note of two seemingly contradictory influences on Bama’s work. The introduction on Periyar and the Self-Respect Movement in Tamil Nadu above paid a specific attention to their use of rationalism and atheism to challenge rituals and superstitions that are found in religion. This is a specific influence on Karukku a little later. The second important influence on Karukku is Dalit liberation theology in India which was heavily influenced by Latin American liberation theology; both draw upon the experiences of the oppressed to construct their reinterpretation of Christianity. Though Holmstrom in her “Introduction” to the English edition of Karukku has suggested that the autobiography has “to do with the arc of the narrator’s spiritual development both through the nurturing of her belief as a Catholic, and her gradual realization of herself as a dalit” (viii), full length studies of Karukku have only paid attention to the dalit elements in the autobiography, giving token representation to the different aspects of Christianity and the use of reason. As discussed above, both Nayar and Pandian emphasize the formal elements of dalit literature in the autobiography, and so fail to
recognize the significant intervention that Bama makes by reinterpreting Christianity from a dalit perspective. Though Sivanarayanan critiques the translation and Bama for not interrogating those moments in the text that problematize an essential dalit identity and politics, she fails to recognize Bama’s nuanced exploration and creative engagement with Christianity.

*Karukku* is equally invested in two narratives: the social institutions of caste and religion that exploit the *Parayas* community, and Bama’s individual story, one in which she challenges and overcomes the oppression that she faces from both these institutions. Furthermore, the narrative structure of the autobiography is non-linear, and is divided into nine chapters, each examining different aspects of community life, such as the village structure, work, recreation, inter-caste conflicts, religion, etc. Bama’s story is interwoven into this framework. These contexts reinterpret Christianity from a dalit perspective with the aim of allowing the dalit community to become socially independent, and affirm their own cultural identity, something that has been undermined by the upper-castes and the Church. *Sangai* focuses on both narratives: the meaningless rituals propagated by the Catholic Church and the unreflective way in which the *Parayas* community participates in rituals and festivals, and highlights Bama’s reinterpretation of Christianity from a dalit perspective. Bama’s criticism explores how the nuns at the convents where she worked humiliate dalit children and refuse to let Bama help them. Chapter two concludes:

We who are asleep must open our eyes and look about us. We must not accept the injustice of our enslavement by telling ourselves it is our fate, as if we have not true feelings; we must dare to stand up for change. We must crush all these institutions that use caste to bully us into submission, and demonstrate that among human beings there are
none who are high or low. Those who have found their happiness by exploiting us are not going to let us go easily. It is we who have to place them where they belong and bring about a changed and just society where all are equal. (K 25)

This makes a similar claim, but one that is inflected by religion:

But Dalits have also understood that God is not like this, has not spoken like this. They have become aware that they too were created in the likeness of God. There is a new strength within them, urging them to reclaim that likeness which has been so far repressed, ruined, obliterated; and to begin to live again with honour, self-respect and with a love towards all humankind. To my mind, this alone is true devotion. (K 94)

These lines need to be understood as a powerful invocation for change, and they reflect the merging of the two social movements that influence Bama’s autobiography: the Self-Respect Movement and Dalit Liberation Theology. Later the researcher examines the significance of this chapter in the autobiography as a whole; the point that the research attempts to make is that here is that a critical analysis of Karukku needs to engage Bama’s reinterpretation of Christianity.

In the context of dalit feminism, Bama in Sangati explores how Parayas women engage patriarchy; this occurs between the narrator and paatti, or her mother, and occasionally turns into a conversation as another woman joins them. Dialogue serves a number of purposes. Structurally, dialogue facilitates the author’s commentary on the different cultural aspects of the Parayas community. In response to the narrator’s questions, Paatti reveals that she “gave …away” Perimma (the narrator’s mother’s elder sister) as soon as she achieved puberty. She goes on to state
that *Perimma's* husband physically abused her as she refused to have sex with him because she was exhausted after laboring both field and home. *Paatti* laments that she “reared a parrot and then handed it over to be mauled by a cat. Your *Periappan* (*Perimma’s* husband) actually beat her to death. … He killed her so outrageously, the bastard” (S 10). When the narrator criticizes *Paatti* for not preventing the violence, the latter states that she was helpless because she was a woman, and that *Perimma* did not have a male relative to protect her (S 10-11). Commenting on the reasons for domestic abuse, the narrator suggests that:

> Even though they are male, because they are dalits, they have to be like dogs with their tails rolled up when they are in the fields, and dealing with their landlords. There is no way they can show their strength in those circumstances. So they show it at home on their wives and children. But then, is it the fate of our women to be tormented both outside their houses and within? (S 65)

The narrator implies that caste and patriarchy are closely related to one another here. From her perspective, dalit masculinity which is a consequence of discrete patriarchal norms, and is consolidated in the domestic sphere, is undermined in the work place through the physical exploitation and psychological humiliation imposed by the hierarchy of the caste structure. However, while the narrator sympathizes with the dalit men and rationalizes the violence they inflict on the women, she does not justify this behavior. Towards the end of the commentary, the narrator explores how caste and gender oppression affects women. Whereas the narrator initially thought that women quarreled with each other in the evening and morning because they were busy working during the day, she “gradually … came to understand the real reason” (S 67). She views that women are triply oppressed. Like men, they are physically exploited
and socially humiliated in the work place, but are also solely responsible for labor within the domestic sphere, and are also sexually and physically abused by their husbands. Not being able to rest at home or at work, and being physically and sexually abused in both spheres, they take out their frustration on each other. However, the language that the women use legitimizes discrete patriarchy. For instance, she points out that though women will “raise hell” if their husbands have mistresses, when they quarrel with one another they often describe each other as “my husband’s whore.” For the narrator, this subordination of women by women, especially in sexual terms, legitimizes patriarchal norms. She states:

We too have accepted what they want us to believe - that this is actually the right way, that our happiness lies in being enslaved to men. But if only we were to realize that we too have our self-worth, honour, and self-respect, we could manage our own lives in our own way. (S 68)

Therefore, the narrator rationalizes this violence as a means for women to release their frustration from the economic, social, and physical exploitation that they suffer, at the hands of the upper castes, and the men of their community.

In a dialogue between the narrator and her mother, the latter defends this oddity by pointing out that dalit women can be easily possessed because they move about in the public sphere by themselves, and more vulnerable when they are menstruating or when they are scared. However, upper-caste women are never alone, and “men don’t carry the same fear in their hearts. And they won’t catch women either, if they dare to walk past without fear” (S 58). Then the narrator begins a lengthy commentary pointing out:

I wondered why peys were frightened of men. I asked myself whether in that case, any and every creature was afraid of men, too? ....
Once a girl comes of age she has no more freedom. They tell us all stories, take away our freedom, and control our movements. And we too become frightened. (S 58-59)

Thus, Bama’s works are by contextualizing it within the larger cultural and political debates within and without Tamil Nadu. The fundamental mode of analysis undergirding Karukku and Sangati is the use of reason to interrogate those social structures - religious institutions, the caste system, and patriarchy - that have oppressed dalits. This particular form of reasoning that Bama deploys in her novels has been influenced by Periyar and his Self-Respect Movement that had a deep influence on caste and gender politics in South India.

Tlali’s novels, examines the causes and effects of her experiences due to her multiple oppressive situation, and simultaneously forces her to confront her internalized denigrating self-images by providing a conducive milieu for the adoption of empowering and objective strategies of altering those images. The process further leads her to a profound understanding of her past and present socio-political and economic reality, and confirms the fact that the policy of racial segregation in the country is a mere veil used to conceal the underlying socio-economic monopoly exploited by the South African government through its capitalist system. Bernard Magubane, a South African Marxist critic asserts that the apartheid policy has, as its goal, the psychological discouragement and mental enslavement of the oppressed classes. Indeed, claims for respect of cultural diversity among black people are at best a patronizing lie covering up racial and material oppression, sexism, and the potential for genocide. The adverse effects of systematic political and cultural intolerance of the majority black people by the minority white regime through the oppressive capitalist system inform the basis of Tlali’s fiction. Her writing communicates the necessity to immobilize the capitalist
system as it continues to oppress black people in South Africa. It also retains the evidence of black people's historical realities of oppression and subjugation on the one hand, and an objective consideration of their consistent socio-political concerns on the other hand.

Of all Tlali's narratives, *Amandla* expresses the collective historical and contemporary socio-political aspirations and frustrations of the oppressed people in South Africa. The title of the novel means "power" in Nguni (a linguistic group covering Zulu, Xhosa, Swati and Ndebele), and it conveys the oppressed people's right and means to power by governing their own economic and socio-political affairs, rather than be subjected to the designs of an illegitimate government that has imposed its atrocious laws upon them. The oppressed people's determination to achieve their political rights is compelled by the designs of the policy of apartheid that have systematically excluded them from any form of meaningful participation in the running of the state, consequently rendering them invisible and perpetual minorities in their own native land. The cry of "Amandla" voices their collective objection and resistance to the relentless onslaught by their oppressors as they challenge the antagonistic apartheid laws. *Amandla* is a cry for political self-determination and restoration of the lost pride and dignity that were ravaged by the legacy of colonial imperialism, perpetuated today by the apartheid policy. It is also a cry that asserts the revolutionary spirit necessary to fight for survival against oppressor forces that threaten to fragment or break it. Furthermore, it is an encouraging cry for those whose vision of the future has been clouded by their experiences of pain and humility, and has been fed with fear and doubts about ever realizing their rights to power and freedom.

Like *Muriel at Metropolitan* and two short stories from the *Soweto Stories* collection, *Amandla* was banned from circulation immediately after its publication. Tlali
derives the *Amandla* title from its historical and contemporary political significance in South Africa, and she conveys a message of political solidarity and social responsibility to those who are actively involved in the struggle for the abolition of apartheid inside the country and abroad. *Amandla* illustrates the liberating measures that the oppressed people are forced to adopt in order to communicate their collective concerns of achieving political independence and social equality. It outlines the conditions that shape the political development of the characters as it relies on concrete historical evidence. Its realism is embedded in the author's passionate fusion of historical facts with contemporary events in a milieu that sustains their political and revolutionary relevance. The novel effectively raises the political consciousness of the readers in relation to the roots of the characters' social, political, and economic subjugation that is still evident today. Tlali exploits her acute awareness of the history of her characters' social relations and the nature of their class society by voicing their concerns and devising means of transforming their presently oppressive life into one of political power and effective self-representation. The historical reality of apartheid and the consequent reactions of those who oppose it inform the historical and militant nature of this novel.

Tlali's narrative communicates an atmosphere of urgency and apprehension as Pholoso and Felleng join the rush back to Soweto. In Soweto, as in other townships around the country, the news of the Carlton Center bombing inspires dialogues about the course of action to be followed in addressing the country's questionable political history and its present state. Pholoso and his friends engage in heated debates on the issue, and examine their position in lieu of their denied political rights and economic opportunities in their native land. They also compare their colonized history with conditions in other parts of the world, regretfully acknowledging their vulnerability to
possible genocide should war break out. The grim reality of the consequences of their inaccessibility to weapons and other artillery drives them to depression and pessimistic views of their future. The regrettable massacre of innocent black people at the scene of the Carlton Center shooting fills most of them with trepidation, for it increasingly spells their uncertain future. While they bemoan their fate, other people in the township vent their frustration by destroying government administration buildings and vehicles, power stations, police stations, post offices and liquor stores, for they all symbolize their oppression. They resort to such violent actions not only as means to appease their pains, but also as counter measures to the violence propagated by the government itself in its enforcement of its repressive laws. As the administrative board offices are razed to the ground, people recount the pains they suffered in the hands of the white officials who worked there:

He was sitting against that window and he kept on sniffing through his nostrils and opening it as if something was smelling.


The superintended!' answered Betty, snapping back at Nana impatiently as if she should have known who she was talking about.

She went on: 'It was the day my dear brother experienced the humiliation of being considered an outcast in the land of his birth.

When? You mean Buti?

Yes. The day he drove Buti to the hostel and chased his wife out of Johannesburg. The morning after the Board's blackjacks had raided our house at three o' clock in the morning. (A 18)

To the adults standing by, memories of such painful and bitter incidents refuse to be diffused by the smoke from the burning administration buildings, for they are buried
deeply in their collective consciousness, and can only be placated by a truly democratic power. To the younger generations, most of whom do not even understand the historical factors that have led to their present social predicament, each crumbling building is greeted with the resounding shouts of "Power!" and *Amandla* for their fall signifies the cracks in the ultimate collapse of the apartheid regime, and an end to all their oppression. Apartheid has already tempered (pun intended) with their lives, and has negatively affected their political and socio-economic future in an irrevocable way. When they analyze their parents' lives, the youth can surmise the damage apartheid has done to them and their society. Those, who have been spared the humiliating experience of being evicted from their homes due to rent arrears, or having their parents or other relatives arrested under any of the apartheid laws, finally come face to face with the system when they register for school for the first time. The school system requires their parents to present them at the very same administration board's buildings before they can be admitted at school, thus exposing them to the horrors of the apartheid system quite early in their lives. It is at these buildings that parents are asked denigrating questions pertaining to their marital status, the whereabouts of other members of the family, the family's income level, the number of children in the household - irrelevant questions, all designed to insult the parents in the presence of their children. Despite the difference in the ages of the people gathered here watching the burning administration buildings, the intensity of their anger is the same, and their experiences arguably the same. The commonality of the oppressed people's experiences in the novel helps to bring them together in an acute sense of solidarity with each other, and each other's problems.

One of the strengths of *Amandla* is that it does not address the people's political reality in exclusive terms, but instead illustrates the integral role of political violence in
defining their unfavorable social conditions. Tlali examines other shades of violence in
the society so as to present a conclusive account of the adverse effects of the policy of
apartheid. The episodes of Agnes' abuse, by her husband Joe, and of Nicodemus'
clandestine love affair with Teresa in an otherwise political novel, indicate the
implausibility of excluding the influence of politics from any social setting. Tlali's
intention in including these love scenes is to illustrate that all the characters' actions
interpret their political system which, in turn, constructs their social reality. Nicodemus'
affair with Teresa is a defensive assertion of his self-defined identity in an environment
that is hostile to him as a black person and a policeman. Like the blackjacks,
Nicodemus and other policemen are treated with contempt by the people because of
their career, and they react by violating some social practices like marital fidelity. As
for Joe, his lack of respect for his wife and children is a direct consequence of a lack of
respect from the apartheid policy, coupled with the systematic denial of his right to
defend and maintain his integrity. Apartheid has made him hate himself and he now
hates other people, even his wife and children as a consequence. He projects his
problems on them, and because of their proximity to him (both in blood and physical
distance), he unleashes his anger and frustration on them. Tlali illustrates how these
interrelated psycho-social and political maladies find recourse only in the perpetuation
of violence, rather than in any life affirming behavior.

Other instances of violence propagated by the apartheid policy include the
consequences of the government's practice of forced removals of black people. The
location of the cemetery, where Gramsy Moeng's husband's tombstone, is unveiled is a
case in point. The site of the cemetery, as compared to the residential area of the
relatives of the people buried there, informs the reader of the historical facts and social
implications surrounding the country's political laws of racial segregation, some of
which are executed through forced removals. Braamfontein, initially a black area, has since been declared a white area, and relatives have to travel from Soweto and other surrounding black areas to unveil the tombstones of their relatives who were buried there before the introduction of the segregation laws. The decision to proclaim Braamfontein a "white area" was not an amicable one, but a show of brutal force encouraged by the government's total disregard for black people in South Africa. Tlali alludes to the same boorish attitude displayed by the government in *Muriel at Metropolitan*, whereby the old black township of Sophiatown has been allocated to white people. The town is now curiously known as Triomf, the Dutch word for "triumph." Again, the forced removals of black people from Sophiatown were not motivated by any positive considerations for black people, but were simply acts of violence and insolence on the part of the government.

Although the theme of violence disrupts the novel's coherence, it nonetheless facilitates Tlali's realist intention in her portrayal of the complex black South African urban life. She brings out the characters' attempts at maintaining normal lives as portrayed in their going to work and watching movies, amidst the perpetual confusion created by the political upheaval in the country. Even the timing for company at T' Moremi's house in chapter four is no exception to everyday life, for it blends in quite naturally with the social demands of the time. The theme of politics even at this time of the night illustrates the content of current debates, thus confirming the centrality of politically related issues and activities in the lives of South Africans.

None of the incidents are linear in perspective, for they demonstrate the common valences active in all others, inherently disregarding the conventional European interpretation of chronology and the Aristotelian conception of the unities of time, space and action. Tlali constructs new unities by creating the theaters of
operation beyond the nature and duration of the struggle itself, yet subordinates all the
activities to a central end. She subverts the demands of chronology to the demands of
the narrative, effortlessly interweaving Pholoso’s life with the rhythm and fabric of the
society. As Watts observes:

_Amandla_ avails life to convincingly take over from literature, and assert
itself by dictating themes, literary conventions and questions of style and
form in an interesting interplay of flash-backs and flash-forward.
Through her authorial consciousness, Tlali lets reality construct textual
form, rather than subjecting her narrative to literary conventions. She
therefore affirms the primacy of context over text, and seeks to illustrate
how consciousness, like textual form itself, is also shaped by the social
environment. The primacy of context over text defines her experience-
based discourse. (165)

Given the pervasive disruption of a logical succession of events due to the
instability caused by violence in the novel, it is hardly surprising that death, whatever its
cause, should be the only consistent and sobering event. Death also serves as a unifying
factor for people who are continually disintegrating because of their socio-political
reality. Because of the banning of public meetings, funerals and similar gatherings
provide a forum for the characters to express their collective visions and ideological
beliefs in a peaceful and egalitarian society. Tlali incorporates the African philosophical
spatial and temporal components of "Hantu" to endorse the serenity provided by death,
and also to confirm the continuity of life after death which is expressed in the
inseparability of time and space. In the African sensibility, death does not signify any
spiritual disconnectedness between the living and the departed, for it is not viewed as a
destroyer of life. Instead, it reaffirms its continuous link with life, thus defining it as its
necessary passage. Death is as such revered because of its assurance of a more meaningful form of existence than the current one offered by life. In paying his last respects to Dumisani, a popular student leader says:

... We Africans respect and revere our dead. They are our saints and mediators. We believe that after death they are more active than when they are alive. We keep them “alive” by naming our children after them so that the living link with them is not severed. We remember them from time to time in many of our family ceremonies.... (A 76)

When Pholoso's turn to speak comes, he says:

Rest in peace, my dear brother. We vow on this day that we shall never tire, that we shall relentlessly pursue this course for freedom, until those aspirations and ideals for which you gave your life are realized. Son of the soil, your precious blood which was shed by the enemy shall sink into the earth and there nurture the roots of the tree of liberation .... (A 80)

Even though the words are uttered with great austerity, they nonetheless convey a sense of victory to the departed. The dead are perceived to have achieved a higher form of life, absolved of all human complexities and miseries, and they are thus worthy of respect. The mourners transform the negative cause of the violence that led to the death of the political unrest victim into a positive force of survival. They draw inspiration for more vitality and commitment in their daily struggle for human rights from the dead, respectfully invoking their eternal presence and guardianship. The ritual of burying their dead signifies the existing link between them which is maintained through a spiritual dialogic continuity.
Tlali illustrates a similar dialogic continuity by examining some of the psychological repercussions suffered by people of non-European descent under the apartheid clause of the Group Areas Act. In the short story "Metamorphosis" from the collection *Soweto Stories*, she illustrates the extent of the humiliations experienced by victims of family and community disruptions due to the government's bizarre systematic classification of a person's race based on skin color and other physical features. The social and material benefits enjoyed by white people entice some people from the subjugated groups to forge new identities by taking on European names and consequently separating from their blood relatives. Such actions do not go without their share of latent psychological problems for those affected, because such people are compelled to deny themselves their true identities for the demeaning sake of enjoying the fleeting material benefits generously offered to people of the preferred race. They are forever forced to live with the dilemma of either upholding their false identities, or renouncing them and going back to their own people.

At yet another level, the story deals with the political transformation of Velani who has always been relatively passive where political events are concerned. Even when he loses his car and risks his life as well, he still fails to see the correlation between what happens to him and the wider political spectrum. When life in Soweto proves to be increasingly unbearable, he seriously considers taking his uncle Boetie's advice of moving to Eldorado Park. He is the very uncle who refuses to acknowledge him as his nephew in the presence of other people, and only treats him as one of his customers in his panel-beating business. Velani's life reaches a complete turning-point when his uncle now discourages him from entertaining any ideas of moving to Eldorado Park. He actually advises Velani to stay in Soweto, because Eldorado is now like Soweto, and:
His "disease" has spread all over. We also have "comrades" here. They want solidarity with the people of Soweto. They say they are returning to their roots. They have wiped off the numbers from the houses. They say unless we are one the struggle against the settlers is forever lost. (A 92)

As if that was not enough, Boetie adds: “We all have to change.” Finding it hard to believe that it is his own uncle at the other end of the line discouraging him from moving to Eldorado Park, without another word, he: “... dropped the receiver and sank on to the sofa next to him. He sighed and whispered to himself, It's no use. Real protection will come from the people themselves. From now on, I'm with the people” (A 92).

Boetie's own metamorphosis is remarkable, even though he refers to the popularity of the struggle as “the disease.” His change of heart affects Velani in such a way that no other experience has ever done. Both Boetie and Velani demonstrate some growth in their personality and comprehension of the political situation that teaches them that they cannot escape from the system as it is, but that they should learn to confront it and deal with it. For Velani in particular, his passivity in addressing political issues has been challenged, and from now on, he is with the people, actively participating in their political projects. Only the youths remain trapped by their violent activities, and cannot possibly alter their lives for the better until they know and understand the factors that contributed to their problematic status quo, and learn more constructive ways of dealing with their anger and frustration.

In “Metamorphosis”, Tlali illustrates the primacy of an individual's complete personal transformation in the achievement of collective political empowerment. Velani's and his uncle Boetie's metamorphoses are echoed in the collective convictions operative in Amantle, and they all point to the growing momentum of political
consciousness among the people. Each one of them undergoes a cathartic process that exposes them to personal experiences that are potentially transforming, albeit their violent and humiliating aspects. For the reader, the experiences of the characters are redeeming, for they provide an outlet for their own frustrations in a politically oppressive society. Tlali facilitates this process by her portrayal of characters that are believable, for they are drawn out of a concrete milieu that continues to exist today. The fact that there is no conclusive evidence to the effect that Boetie, eventually leaves Eldorado Park and moves back to Soweto despite his understanding of the situation, does not weaken his credibility. Instead, his continued residence in Eldorado will serve to conscientize his community about the direction of the political situation in the country. Pholoso's character, on the other hand, is one of the most easily identifiable in all of Tlali's fiction and the most believable, for it reminds us of the thousands of youths who joined the political struggle in the early seventies. Given the political climate of the time, Pholoso's decision to "skip" the country was shared by a multitude of youths who chose exile rather than be hounded by the state and its security police. His journey into the unknown illustrates his political convictions that are sustained by the certainty of victory in the end. In his parting words to Felleng Pholoso says:

Let us not lose faith, Felleng. We are still young and the future belongs to us; it is in our hands. Let us continue to look ahead and work hard. It is only when we work hard towards the attainment of our ideals that there can be hope for Azania. We can never fail, we shall win because history is on our side. (A 293)

Pholoso's belief in the future can only be maintained by his determination to work hard for the political empowerment of his people. Once more, Tlali fuses history with the contemporaneity of events, for Pholoso is propelled by his knowledge of historical
evidence in his venturing into the future. He becomes the "problematic hero," to use
the concept that Lucien Goldmann borrows from Georg Lukacs. Pholoso sets out to
search for authentic values in a degraded society. Goldmann goes on to say that the
problematic hero forms one half of the duality of the ontological and metaphysical
existence, because he depends on history and all the modalities of time to inform his
beliefs. Likewise, Pholoso is convinced that his authentic values of justice and
egalitarianism are the required antidotes for his degraded society.

The end of the novel marks a parting of ways between Pholoso and Felleng, and
the dawn of a new era in their love life on the one hand, and their political struggle on
the other hand. Even at such a difficult time in her life, Felleng is portrayed as
perceptive of her situation. Despite her shadowed existence, Felleng understands the
existential reality that propels Pholoso to take such decisions, because she is equally
committed to her political beliefs in a just and democratic society. She is therefore not
being acted upon, as in fulfilling the cultural obligations of a woman expected to stay
behind when her man goes to fend for his family. Rather, she displays an innate
stoicism of a politicized and informed woman, whose understanding of the debilitating
effects of the patriarchal system which oppresses her and her lover, allows her to
empower him, by encouraging him to go and fight, instead of whimpering in self-pity.
Although Tlali does not develop Felleng's character independently, she is nonetheless no
mere adjunct to Pholoso. Rather, she sees the struggle not as separatist, but as an
opportunity to forge links with men whose mutilated identity and sense of self has been
created by the apartheid system. This integrated image of female and male gives the
novel an optimistic ending, because it suggests that both sexes can cooperate in their
political struggle, rather than create gender barriers between them. Felleng gives up
Pholoso in a spirit of sacrifice to a greater cause. She watches him as: "He started
running, without looking back. He seemed to be heading for the starry void ahead. She
looked at the receding figure until it was a mere dot against the horizon, where the
twilight of a new day was already becoming visible, and she turned to go” (A 294).

The end of Amandla is an affirmation of the continuation of the liberation
struggle in which Pholoso and other comrades are involved. It points to another stage
of their struggle in which exile becomes a necessary option. Exile is therefore viewed
not as a loss of one's familiar space, but as a creation of new platforms upon which the
ideals of democracy should be experienced. It is also important because the alternative
would be to live like a hermit, or worse still, to rot in jail, ultimately curbing the
progress of the struggle. Also, the risks of assassination by the security police inside
the country cannot be ignored, as some comrades have already been eliminated that
way. The option of exile demonstrates the real consciousness of Pholoso and other
comrades, for their potential consciousness under the circumstances would make a
haphazard and unrealistic claim towards effecting an easy resolution, thus falsifying the
novel's thematic and contextual complexities.

Writing for political transformation and empowerment is a process that confirms
the causal connection between oppressive socio-political conditions and revolutionary
art and writing. It is a creative utilitarian activity which a socially conscious author
undertakes with a view to incorporate and intensifies the political consciousness of her
reading audience, positively influencing their analyses of the contradictions inherent in
their political dispensations within a system that propagates hostile social forms to them.
As a fiction writer, who is engaged in the culture of liberation and guided by Marxist
feminist principles, Bama and Miriam Tlali participate in a revolutionary creative
process of eradicating the presently oppressive and punitive political system in India and
South Africa known as “Varna” and "apartheid," and replacing it with an alternative
legitimate socialist systems that will be democratically implemented. Both the systems operate by systematically entrenching caste and racial segregation and exclusivity, simultaneously promoting cultural hegemony by the ruling them. These subjugated communities are controlled by political non-representation, material deprivation, and its continued exposure to systematic violence and terror which is maintained through a series of vicious laws that wage psychological warfare against those who offer resistance.

Bama and Tlali exercise their inalienable right to freedom of speech and choice of themes through their revolutionary fiction, radically condemning reactionary persecution meted out by opposing authorities and other mainstream critics. Their enforced inferior status as a dalit and black woman living in India and South Africa under the policy of hegemonic social systems have created the urgency for her to make a critical examination of her marginalized socio-political reality, analyze its content, and to act upon it by motivating her reading audience to participate in definitive actions that will empower them to transform their degrading conditions into respectable ones. To achieve this, Bama and Tlali have to reaffirm their own identity by continually addressing the imposed varieties of social hierarchies of political voice, materialism, and gender biases within her society, vigorously challenging them and replacing them with genuine social equity and justice.