Chapter IV

Women as the Hapless Victims of Exploitation

In the context of hierarchal suppression, the subaltern women are placed in peripheral surface. The life of subaltern women is charged with massive frustrations because of the unfavourable political and socio-economic dispensations currently affecting it. Both Bama in India and Miriam Tlali in South Africa largely concentrate on women characters, who are almost oppressed and suppressed under the patriarchal hegemony, and most of those characters explain their own community’s womanhood and other socio-political and cultural practices. Thus, Bama and Miriam Tlali’s works portray dalit and Black experiences in the contemporary hegemonic society from dalit and Black feministic perspectives. These two novelists deal with personal elements but it represents the day to day events of their community’s people who burden economically, sexually and gender wise.

These two women writers have written number of essays, short stories, and novels. But they are best known for the novels. Their desires are to write the experiences of subaltern women who were born from impatience with oppression and assumption that these writers should provide definite reflection of dalit and Black experiences. They also write about the life struggle of their fellow beings both at home and in the fields. The written anecdotes spread out their cultural patterns and communicate the problems like gender discrimination, sexual assaults, and caste and colour discriminations. Being a woman, their writings are not only considered as an adherent to the war against the hegemonic society, but they also portray the subaltern women’s identity.

In Indian scenario, the observation of women can be considered as lesser beings than men. This sort of ideology exists not only in India but also to all over the
world because women were treated as subordinates to men. For further analysis of the womanist perception of subaltern women, Dalit and Black women are seen as “thrice-subjugated as dalit and black, Women, and Dalit and Black women who perform stigmatized labour. The patriarchal society gives a second placement everywhere, though the human society completes a civilization after the participation of woman along with man. As Neena Arora points out; “… the place of women in society has differed from culture to culture and from age to age, one fact common to almost all societies is that woman has never been considered the equal of man” (8). Arora also emphasizes that the treatment of woman in patriarchal society is as “a beast of burden” and “an object of pleasure.” It is universal truth that men look down upon women and they are ill-treated women as “property, servile” to them in everywhere. She gives various examples from all over the world for the demeaning status of women.

The aim of Bama’s second novel, Sangati, is to unfold its theme of growth, decline, culture, and liveliness of dalit women in the Tamil Parayas community. Sangati has the rebellious nature of dalit Parayas and their hard work that have both in their home and in the field. Throughout Sangati, Bama herself proves her static standing in the emancipation of the Dalit Paraya community and dalit feminism or black feminism with its living examples are seen explicitly. Almost in the novel Sangati, the women character has become the specimen of dalit Paraiya’s sufferings and predicaments. But some of them made a resistance against the hegemonic power configurations of higher caste people. Lakshmi Holmstorm points out in her introduction to the text:

Sangati flouts received notions of what a novel should be… It has no plot in the normal sense, only the powerful stories of a series of
memorable protagonists. ‘Sangati’ means news, events, happenings, and the book is one of interconnected anecdotes … These individual stories, anecdotes, memories of personal experience are narrated in the first person … (S xvi)

Curiously, Dalit writing in India and Black writing in South Africa are similar in their closest literary relation. Like Bama in India, Miriam Tlali in South Africa is generating from an oppressed communities both in Race and Gender. Almost all the works of Tlali reflect an anti-apartheid and anti-patriarchy. The critics such as Gabriella Madrassi, Josephine Evans, and Pumla Gqola accurately admit that Tlali’s works deal not only with racial oppression but also with awkward interrogations with Gender: Gqola, as reference in chapter one, reports Tlali’s writing as a “simultaneous commentary on race and gender” (94).

Also Marigny points out that “her sense of the ideal is located in a future goal and her emphasis falls upon the active reformulation of traditional ideologies in the light of present practices” (90). From the observation of these critics about her works, my mind says that the novels have thrown down the gauntlet to patriarchal authority and also daringly questions a different fate for black women in South Africa. Tlali, in her essay – “Remove the chain on Index on Censorship,” obviously points out the women’s difficulties as a black female writer in the patriarchal society, especially for subaltern women:

In South Africa, the aspirant African female writer has still to struggle to remove the cobwebs of tradition, custom, and the colonial mentality . . . She has to figure out for herself how to circumvent all male chauvinists who are likely to lash out at her as if she were a
challenging force encroaching and violating the sanctity of their exclusive domain. (26)

Similarly Bama’s *Sangati* flouts the tradition of a novel and is filled with interrelated events in the life of her community. The very purpose of writing this novel is to represent not merely the sympathetic existence of the dalit women’s woes and anguish but also justify her intentions. In her regard, Bama says in her acknowledgements that:

My mind is crowded with many anecdotes: stories not only about the sorrows and tears of Dalit women, but also about their lively and rebellious culture, their eagerness not to let life crush or shatter them... about their passion to live life with vitality, truth, and enjoyment; about their hard labour. I wanted to shout out these stories. (S ix)

Bama deliberately extracts the experiences of *Paraya* women, their sexual and gender discrimination, and humiliation which by itself are rare in women writings. She challenges the notion of Dalit writing as mere sub-stories and goes to make them “angry stories” instead. Revealing anger is a much stronger and an exciting reaction than coming off wasted tears. She also talks about varied experiences of Dalit women that were not dealt in the mainstream discourse till now.

Thus, the aim of this chapter is to explore how the patriarchal society exploited women’s the realization of the empowering nature of economic self-reliance and sexual oppression in the form of cultural practice. The universality of women’s experience of sexual violence has always provided an immediate entry point for feminist intervention. Whatever the analysis of patriarchy and its relationship to class would be, the caste, community or race, feminist politics of all hues are able in relate directly to sexual violence—experienced in different ways and to differing degrees. In
turn, the writings of both have taken the powerful mechanisms of political activism through its women-centred creative writing which exposes their multiple oppressive experiences, not only to fight against their political and sexual oppression, but also to define themselves and their existence, as opposed to being defined, and to maintain their self-defined rights, identities, and independence.

Specificities of dalit women in India are seen to constitute the lower segment of Indian society and suffer from dual disadvantage (a) of being dalit; i.e., due to socio-economic and cultural marginalization (b) of being women; i.e., suffering from gender based inequalities and subordination. Early social reformers were concerned with two major problems - the emancipation of women and amelioration of the condition of depressed classes. Their first efforts were directed towards demolishing certain customs like sati, prohibition against widow marriage, female infanticide etc. Issues related to the lower caste women who were being marginalized by the new land legislation and exposed to the threat of sexual violence under the “zamindari” system and the distressing sale of women following the new land settlement were absent in these debates. Caste bondage had gender specifications and specific caste biased atrocities against dalit women were not discussed overtly.

From 1927, dalit women have been actively participating in the social, cultural and political strategies of the dalit movement. Dalit women see their liberation as associated to the abolition of caste oppression. Such a conception of liberation is based on the community and not individual, since dalit women form part of the community. They do not feel personally or individually insecure because they are as much bread winners as the males. Dalit women do not look upon their husbands as ‘protectors’ and ‘providers’ and, in this sense, they stand taller than their male counterparts in the family. Dalit women being a part of a larger movement, their struggle becomes everyday practice from which will emerge a new society.
Dalit women had actively participated in the Ambedkar-led section of the freedom movement in the pre-independence period. They were in the forefront whether it was the Mahad Satyagraha, the Kalaram or Mukhed of Ambadevi Satyagraha. Women were more active than men in popularizing the concept of Dharma of Ambedkar. Vidyut Bhagwat states:

By using the term dalit women we are trying to say that if women from dalit castes and of dalit consciousness create a space for themselves for fearless expression, i.e., if they become subjects or agent or self, they will provide a new leadership to Indian society in general and to feminist and dalit movements in particular. (2)

Dalit movement as a new social movement expressed itself through radical literature and action. But even this upsurge did not give vent to the mute voices of dalit women in rural or urban India. Realising that education is the first step for emancipation, education for the entire family has been the constant demand of dalit women.

The potential contribution of dalit women writers to dalit Literature is significant. At the outset, the writing of dalit women reflected self-experience and burning indignation. Muktabai, an untouchable girl who read her essay on the problems and sufferings of the untouchable in the school established by the great reformer Jyothirao Phule, in 1852, was the first example of revolt. After a period of hundred years or more, dalit women have finally awakened and are again giving literary expression to their deep feelings. Kumud Bonsode, Sugandha Shende, Sarekhad Bhagat, Asha Thoral, Aruna Lokhande, Susheela Mool, and Meena Gajbhiya are such writers from Maharashtra. Among the works of dalit women writing in Hindi, the novels of Raj at Rani Meenu, Kaveri, Sushila Takbhore, Raj Bharati and Tara Parmar show significant literary promise. Caste based discrimination and all out deprivation was the main ammunition for
the Marathi Dalit writers. A new crop of bold and experimental women writers have been bringing a quiet revolution lately. Meghna Pethe and Kavita Mahajan are some noteworthy names. ‘Little Magazine’ tradition continues in Bengal. These little magazines cater to localized readerships and their writings carry culture specificity and a regional flavour of their own. The dalit novel offers fascinating insights into how dalit writers have brought autobiographical and historical elements into fictions, thereby blurring generic boundaries even further. The subjectivity of female-desiring and the politics of pleasure that have emerged as the resistant voice in women's poetry seem to upset most of the canonical writers in Tamil. The sheer number of female poets in the 1990s was a phenomenon in Tamil. Salma, Kutti Revathi, and Sugirtha are the modern female dalit voices in poetry. Autobiography as a genre has come under major scrutiny and redefinition in Bama's Karukku or Sangati or Azhagiya Nayaki Ammal's Kavalai or Muthammal Palanisamy's Naduvittu Nadu. The narrated story is personal but the lives portrayed are of the whole communities. Naam Vidya (I am Vidya) is the first ever autobiography is written in Tamil. The self-excruciating narrative of unbearable weight found in these texts never falters towards the tone of successful overcoming of the same. At best, they remain tales of survival.

A non-dalit may delineate the pains and problems of dalits in his/her writings. They would turn to be just a record of observation. When a dalit writers about dalits, the writing will, no depth, be an authenticity of the pyshe of the dalits’ inner fetters. Dalit literature describes the world differently from a dalit perspective. Dalit patriarchy is an important subject of concern in Tamil dalit literature. The first dalit novel in Tamil was written by a dalit woman writer Sivakami. Her novel has prepared the ground for a sustained critique of domestic violence and abuse of dalit women at home by dalit men - fathers, brothers, sons, fathers-in-law, brothers-in-law, apart
from sexual and occupational harassment faced by dalit women outside their homes at the hands of upper caste men and the police. Dual oppression of dalit women on grounds of caste and gender forms an important issue of concern in dalit literature. Abimani’s short stories bring out the gender pressures over dalit women and caste hegemony over women at large.

Some critics point out that dalit women are not allowed an independent individual identity and that dalit patriarchy allows dalit women’s subjugation and perpetuates hierarchical relations within dalit community. Rajeshwari Sundar Rajan points to the instability of the notion of women’s identity and to the power imbalances which exist between different groups of women under the blanket notion of gender. Taking this further, the Dalit feminist critic, Sharmila Rege writes:

The Dalit Feminist standpoint is about historically locating how all our identities are not equally powerful, and about reviewing how indifferent historical practices similarities between women have been ignored in an effort to underline caste-class identities, or at other times differences ignored for ‘the feminist cause’. (7)

Caste and gender have become important subversive literary and critical leitmotifs in nearly all Indian languages. Rise and growth of dalit and women’s literature occupy a special position. Many women writers feel uncomfortable being described and discussed as an exclusive group and assert that by assigning ‘women’s writing’ under a separate category, the marginal position of women is only reinforced. Dalit literature on the other hand is quite vociferous regarding its separate identity from the mainstream writing. The discomfort of woman writers to be so called and classified also brings into question the subversive character of their writing. Ambai, a feminist critic, makes incisive critiques on the construction of the Tamil feminine subjectivity through literature
and points to the conformist attitude even in reformist/revolutionary writers such as nationalist poet Subrahmanya Bharati and the 'radical' writer Jayakant. Therefore despite avowals to the contrary, there is definite need to understand the ways in which a woman's literary tradition has emerged and has nurtured subversive techniques and themes. To this effect, it is necessary to juxtapose this tradition against the mainstream without necessarily considering the mainstream as superior. Ambai in The Face Behind the Mask asks: “Why a woman writing about women's experiences and issues is immediately seen as 'woman writer' while the same does not hold true for a man” (Lakshmi 61). It is necessary to realize that such an act of categorization is not the sole prerogative of criticism. Publishing houses themselves evolve many such categories.

Novels like Karukku were published by Macmillan India under two heads: 'The Macmillan Modern Novels in Translation Series' and 'Dalit Writing in Translation' thereby already evolving two critical categories: Dalit Writing and Translation. In such a scene, language is but one of the many parameters. Karukku belongs to the tradition of Tamil novel. Tamil dalit novel or Tamil dalit women's novel as translation has become Tamil dalit Literature in translation. Tamil dalit literature has gained a positive impetus through Dalit Publishing houses and more significantly through translations. dalit publishing houses like Vitiyal Pathippagam in Coimbatore undertakes not only publication of dalit writings but also publishes translations of dalit works from other Indian languages into Tamil. This traffic between Tamil and non-Tamil dalit works through the exercise of translation is a healthy, positive intervention or trend in dalit studies. But it should be noted that Tamil dalit works are translated less into other Indian languages.

Tamil dalit writers have a better access to non-Tamil dalit texts through translation though their works have not received significant visibility in other Indian languages. Sivakami has translated her first novel Pazhiyana Kazhidalum into English as The Grip of
Change (2006), Bama’s Karukku (1992), Sangati (1994), and Vanmam(2002) are available in English translations and Sangati in French too. Imaiym’s novels Koveru Kashukaigal (1994) and Arumugam (1999) were also translated.

There are two reasons that make it necessary to examine the patriarchies in South Africa in depth. First, the boundaries between Western and black African patriarchy are, at times, blurred, which makes it difficult to distinguish between the two, as this study tries to do. Second, the oppressiveness of black African patriarchies is sometimes contested, whereby Western patriarchy in the form of apartheid is blamed for all oppression of black women. The method used here to examine the patriarchies in South Africa, and black African patriarchy in particular, is to investigate in what terms black women describe the African social gender systems they are implicated in. Two influential autobiographies by black women writers reflect African patriarchies in the second half of the 20th century: Ellen Kuzwayo’s Call Me Woman (1985) and Mamphela Ramphele’s A Life (1995). Characterizing these two works, Desirée Lewis writes: “a legacy which continues to shape popular perceptions of women-in-the-nation, of women-as-citizens. In their representations of motherhood, the family and marriage, the texts reveal pivotal ways in which women’s citizenship is mediated (39)”. In addition, Lauretta Ngcobo’s novel And They Didn’t Die (1990), illustrate traditional the patriarchal mores in rural Natal in the 1960s, and finally Sindiwe Magona’s Mother to Mother (1998) portrays the adolescence and early married life of a young woman.

The patriarchal traditions addressed by Kuzwayo, Ramphele, Ngcobo, and Magona, it must be kept in mind, had first been impacted by colonialism and in the 20th century by apartheid. Therefore, according to McClintock, as mentioned above, it is hard and for our purposes not necessary to assess how pristine these traditions
were. Interestingly though, the idealistic view of original African patriarchal patterns that Tlali partly cherishes is shared by at least one other black woman writer, namely Ellen Kuzwayo. In her autobiography, Kuzwayo initially does not distance herself from the traditional patriarchal society she describes. As she tells her life story, from a rural childhood to her years of teaching (in an urban context), social work, and political activism during apartheid, Kuzwayo seems to accept a division of gender-roles where men represent the public sphere and women are first and foremost mothers who must feed their children, and who have to organise ‘their’ struggle against apartheid in support of the men, by themselves. Although Kuzwayo shows no awareness of it, her “laudatory naming of strong mothers,” Lewis claims, “Is reminiscent of a routine nationalist strategy through which women are ennobled yet simultaneously depoliticized and dehumanized” (40). Kuzwayo describes how women take the initiative to resist apartheid, recruiting from within their own sphere, but always in deference to the men.

Besides oppression by official ‘apartheid’ patriarchy, black African women, Ramphele claims, have traditionally been faced with rigid rules that have curtailed their behaviour, circumscribed their life spheres, and made demands on their productive capacities: “heaven forbid that a woman should shun (her child-bearing) duty,” she writes, “or be unable to discharge it. It was not surprising that most brides spent the entire (wedding) session sobbing uncontrollably” (28). These circumscriptions, for the most part, kept a woman strictly within the domestic sphere and if she ventured outside, as Ramphele did through her political activism, she confronted rejection by her male peers: “As a woman, an African woman at that, one had to be outrageous to be heard, let alone be taken seriously (71). The constricting structures that Ramphele suggests shaped black African women’s lives, and that still
existed in the rural areas in the 1960s, are illustrated in Ngeobo’s novel *And They Didn’t Die*. Since its depiction of the situation that young women encountered when they embarked on married life adds to our understanding of the patriarchal structures at the time, and shows how the oppression of women was linked to wifehood and motherhood.

In this social system, a woman had no identity of her own: she was either her father’s daughter and her husband’s wife, or her child’s mother. In addition, towards the end of the quote Ngeobo touches on the custom of *Hlonipha*, a custom spread throughout Southern Africa, whereby the young newly-wed woman was also deprived of her language and ability to communicate freely. *Hlonipha* means “to respect” and entailed that a woman, out of fear of awakening or directing the ancestral “shades” towards her husband and his relatives in the new clan, may not pronounce a single syllable that belonged to any of his or the other relatives’ names, or to their articles of clothing or personal property. In other words, she must substitute every word that held a syllable that belonged to these senior members’ names or personal belongings with another word. This supports the idea that *hlonipha* has functioned, and perhaps still functions, to oppress women and re-enforce patriarchy. It may, at least, still have a lingering influence on the gender hierarchy.

In *Mother to Mother* Sindwe Magona does not mention the word hlonipha, but does show some effects of the gender-hierarchy. Portraying the position of a young girl, Mandisa, and her life as a newly-wed wife in the home of her parents-in-law, she outlines patriarchal traditions that support Ngeobo’s and Ramphele’s views that black African patriarchy oppressed, or oppresses, black women. Like Jezile in Ngeobo’s novel, Mandisa, a young wife being initiated into the clan, is forced to do all the household chores: “all that work they made me do . . . just killed me” (138).
She gets up at four in the morning to prepare breakfast for everyone and is the last to bed, is never allowed to rest during the day but must steal cat-naps when she is nursing her child. She receives no money and can hardly feed her child. When Mandisa reminds her father-in-law that, in the marriage negotiations with her clan, he had promised that she be allowed to continue her education, she is wary of how to approach “this man, who wielded so much power over my little life” (142). Talking to him she must lower her eyes in respect and must defer to his decision, although he almost predictably decides to go back on his promise. Mandisa’s mother’s comment on her own situation; “I do as I’m told . . . that is what my father taught me” (130), sums up this patriarchal context.

As these two women writers attest, African patriarchy in South Africa entailed set gender roles; men and women had different life spheres altogether, which affirms Kalu’s “duality discourse.” Contrary to Kalu’s claim of “complementary” and mutually respected roles for men and women, however, these roles, at least during most of the 20th century, were hierarchised to the effect that men wielded power over women’s and children’s lives, whereas women, as mothers, only had restricted power within the domestic sphere. The children (and the women) were ultimately regarded as the property of the husband’s clan. As Ramphele writes, “the children belonged to their fathers” (197), are including also the father’s brothers, whom Magona calls the “Middle Father” and the “Little Father” (124). Thus, the women were kept more or less as hostages in their husband’s clan. On the issue of hierarchy, however, Kuzwayo vacillates, at times suggesting that the hierarchy was an effect of apartheid. In line with Ngcobo, Ramphele and Magona, the African patriarchy at several points was reinforced by apartheid law, which also regarded women and children as the property of the father and his clan, this oppressive hierarchy, by and large, existed prior to the apartheid laws.
However, since colonial times the African patriarchal system has been inter-linked with Western patriarchy, and its affiliation with Western capitalism, “rooted in the division between private or domestic labour and social or collective labour,” is an unmistakable reinforcement. Cock writes:

Capitalism in South Africa inherited a sex-based division of labour and segregations of property and authority, together comprising a system of sexual domination. These were incorporated and reshaped within the capitalist system of production in South Africa and became active components of it. Regardless of its pre-capitalist origins, therefore, the system of sexual domination in [the country] must be seen as generated and determined in its specific forms and functions by the system of production and class structure of which it now forms a part. (241)

It is the new version of black African patriarchy during 20th century, the pre-colonial traditions are not preserved in any pristine form. The examination of women’s writing above suggests that there are distinct traditional black African patriarchal structures, such as the clan-system and the hierarchical, rigid gender roles, which differ from contemporaneous Western structures. These two patriarchies in place in South Africa may be regarded as parallel structures, or, in Butler’s words, parallel “rigid formations.” Although the Western social structure has been politically hegemonic, the African social structure co-existed and inter-acted with it historically. However, due to the spread of the Black Consciousness ideology in the 1980s, and the influence of Western feminism and demands for change voiced by black women activists, such as Miriam Tlali, this form of traditional African patriarchy has begun to change. Literary evidence of this change is found, for instance, in several short stories by black male writers published in 1995 that both thematic and evince resistance to patriarchal structures.
Dalit patriarchy is an important subject of concern in Bama's writings. She criticizes the domestic violence and abuse of dalit women at home by dalit men and sexual and occupational harassment faced by them outside their homes at the hands of the upper caste men and the police. In Karukku, she discusses oppression borne by dalit women at the hands of state Panchayat and further by dalit men at home. The collision of patriarchy with caste hegemony causes a hasher and more unjust suppression of dalit women. Through her writings, Bama unravels various phases of dalit women's life from birth to adulthood especially of the Parayas community. Lakshmi Holmstrom in the introduction to the English translation of Karukku refers to the literary endeavour of Bama thus; “It grows out of a particular moment, a personal crisis and water-shed in the author's life, which drives her to make sense of her life as woman, Christian Dalit” (K 7).

Thus, Karukku was a reaction to the personal crisis Bama had undergone as a Christian Dalit woman. The discriminatory treatment that she faced because of her Parayas background is the theme of Karukku. The personal experiences transcend and are extended to the communal. It is a collective biography of a people, who have been structurally subordinated for centuries. By placing Parayas women in the centre, Bama offers a different feminine view of the community, its experiences and its history. Violence in the life of the Parayas women differs from the violence done to men of their community because these women become the dalits of the dalit when ill-treated by their dalit husbands who are abused by the upper castes unjustly, violently and arrogantly.

Bama grandmother worked as a servant for Naicker families where even little ones called her by her name and ordered her about and her grandmother like all other servants would call the boy respectfully Ayya (master) and run about to do his bidding. It was shameful for Bama to witness this subordination. Even in the tender
years, a boy learns to dominate a particular caste, and their gender. Suppression and discrimination are naturally imbibed by the boy, and the elder dalit women endure this as if it is an ontological process. Everyday she would go to the Naicker houses, sweeps out the cow shed, collect the dung and dirt, and bring the left-over rice and curry from the previous day. Bama remembers how she considered the stale food as nectar of the gods. It is usually the women who managed the household and her mother and grandmother did hard work when her father in the Army did not send money, “It is my mother who manages to look after us, by picking up some coolie works... on occasion we children would finish off whatever gruel or porridge there was. Then it was my mother who had to go hungry” (K 62).

During school holidays, Bama helped her grandmother and mother at the Naickers. Sometimes, she went to pull out ground nuts from the field, and clean it. She explains the experience:

If we were in a great hurry, we'd use both hands as well as our teeth to shell the ground nuts. If you used your teeth, your mouth would fill with dust and your throat would choke... at the same time we had to be careful not to crack the nuts. If too many of the nuts are broken the Naicker would be really angry. If we chatted in between shelling or ate one or two of the nuts, that was it. Naicker would be furious and swear at us, using every term of abuse he knew. (K 43)

Bama was ready to do any job to help her mother, but what she could not digest was, “... even if they did the same work, men received one wage, women another. They always paid men more. I would never understand why” (K 47). The discrepancy in gender made them pay low and thereby exploit the strength and hard work of women. Oppression led even into the games children play. Girls were not allowed to play
boy's games like *Kabadi* or Marbles or *Chellaanguchi*; if played they are roundly abused. The play by children referred to in *Karukku* is an instance to be reckoned with:

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When school was over, we children joined together and played our games. We made no distinction between boys and girls. We played together... two or three boys would play at being *Naicker*. The rest of us would call them *Ayya, Ayya* and pretend to be their *pannaiyaal*. These boys would act as if they had a lot of power over us. They'd call us names, humiliate us, and make us do a lot of work. We'd pretend to work in the fields all day and then collect our wages and go home. We also played at keeping shop. The boys managed the shops, pretending to be the *Nadar Mudalaali*. (K 48)
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The games of children continued, they play as being married - the husband coming home drunk and hitting his wife; the police arriving and beating him up. As they grew older, the boys and the girls had different games. The patterns, in which these children played, alluded to the discriminatory system that prevailed in the society. Though unaware of the gender differences, the boys always took the role of the dominant *Naicker* and *Nadar*, or they became the *Mudalaali* and the girls were assigned subordinate roles like those slaves or servants. If the boy enacted the role of a husband, he was sure to hit the girl who acted wife. This shows how the ideology of social system that is founded on caste, class, and gender discrimination filters into the young minds of the children. In another sense, the play by children reveals the intermingling of caste, class, and gender identities within Indian society.

In *Karukku*, she describes the self, and in *Sangai* and *Vanmam*, she describes the community itself. In these two works, she presents the dalit women subjected to
violence and injustice. The polyphonic voices in *Sangati*, narrating the incidents of their daily lives - sometimes rising in anger or in pain and lashing out at each other and against their oppressors - serve as indices of the oppressed society in India. *Sangati* examines the differences between women, their different needs, the different ways in which they are subjected to oppression and their coping strategies. In the opening chapter of *Sangati*, she mentions about the differences in treatment of boys and girls. Even though boys and girls were looked upon with no difference at birth; as they raise them, they were more concerned about the boys than the girls. Boys are always preferred to girls in dal it homes. If a baby boy cries, he is immediately picked up and given milk. It is not so with girls, and boys are breast-fed longer than girls. When the children are a bit older, boys are respected better than girls. They are fed well, not burdened with household activities while girls stay home and keep working, cleaning vessels, drawing water, sweeping the house, gathering firewood, washing clothes, and carry the younger siblings, and take care of them when they play. Discrimination continues in labour too for which women are paid less, “Even in the matter of tying up firewood bundles, the boys always got five or six rupees more. And if the girls tied up the bundles but the boys actually sold them, they got the better price” (S 18). Unable to tolerate such discrimination, Bama asked her *Paati* why they treat boys and girls differently, “It's you folk who put butter in one eye and quick lime in the other” (S 29). But they were not allowed to speak against men. To remain subservient to men is what has been injected into the minds of girls from the beginning, “From your ancestor time it has been agreed that what the men say is right. Don't you go dreaming that everything is going to change just because you've learned a few letters of the alphabet” (S 29). They believed that it is the boy, who would look after them till the end, and rearing a girl is only to give her away into another family.
In the view of marriage, Bama narrates how marriage is often mistaken for authority by men. They consider their wives as their possession, and with this blotched egoistic notion, the dalit men often terrorize their women and are unsympathetic towards them. In Karukku, a man nicknamed 'Uudan' meaning blower, dragged his wife by the hair to the community hall and beat her up with his belt as if she were an animal. He went into this marriage without his liking and hence the ill treatment to the innocent woman was justified. In Sangati, Paati sadly enumerates the story of her elder daughter who was married at a very young age to a brute who tortured her day and night. She had eight children and then she was suspected to be killed by her husband. When enquired why he killed her, she said, “Because the man was very crazy with lust ...he is an animal that fellow. When she refused he practically broke her in half” (S 10). When questioned, he would shout, “She is my wife. I can beat her or even kill her if I want” (S 10), and put this theory into practice. Similar injustice was encountered by Thaayi, another woman who was beaten by her husband with a belt and brutally chopped off a big chunk of hair and tied it to the door-post to crush her pride. The women generally become slaves from the very day they are married. The men keep them under their control and take away their freedom and this trap is too entangled to get away, once married. “Once you've put your head in a mortar, can you escape from the pestle?” (S 44), asks Paati. Bama exhibits a mixed feeling of anger, excitement, fury, resentment and hatred against this in her works.

Men are allowed to marry anyone and even outside their community or castes but marrying outside the caste is not accepted in the case of a girl. They would bring down the pride and honour of the whole community and hence they are not allowed to cross the line drawn by the community. Maikkanni's father had taken a concubine and no one bothered about it and her mother's health deteriorated due to bearing seven
children. Though such injustice towards women were prevalent, no woman was allowed to remain alone or unmarried. Bama writes, “They speak ill of her and want to put a bridle through her nose and see if everything doesn’t sort itself out” (S 20), which means that women are like cattle that need taming. And it is women themselves who often claim that “if we are to be kept in check, then men must put Thalis round our necks” (S 120). Bama says that even if all women are slaves to men, dalit women really are the worst sufferers. They opt to be different from the women of other communities or castes because dalit women have to bear the torment of upper caste masters in the fields and at home they have to bear the violence of their husbands. Paati had given instructions not to go to certain places to collect fire wood because “... if upper caste fellows clap eyes on you, you are finished. They’ll drag you off and rape you, that’s for sure” (S 8).

Women are constantly vulnerable to sexual harassment and abuse in the workplaces. Bama brings afore many characters in Sangati who were victimized for being a woman. Mariamma was accused, abused, and made a scapegoat because she escaped from the landlord's efforts to molest her. It shows that power rests with men, whether they are caste-courts or churches, the rules regarding sex differ for men and women. The men had the freedom to have concubines or even to end the marriage and it is accepted as natural: “They say he is a man, if he sees mud he'll step into it, if he sees water, he’ll himself. It's one justice for men and quite another for women” (S 24).

Paati voices the fate of her folk: “if you are born into this world, it is best you were born a man”(S 6). The exploitation and violence lead to psychological stresses and strains which account for dalit women's belief in their being possessed by evil spirits or peys. A deep investigation into the lives of the dalits tells Bama why the dalit women feel so. At home, they were red by their husbands or children, in the
fields they worked hard besides the harassment of the landlord. When they return home after a hard labour, the men go about drinking and abusing their wives or children to give vent to their feeling of frustration and depression. The women who silently bare the burden at domestic and social fronts feel overwhelmed and crushed by their own feelings of disgust, boredom and exhaustion. The mentally stronger women back physically and verbally against the dominant patriarchy to lease out their mental strain and survive everything, but the mentally feeble ones are totally oppressed: they succumb to mental depression and behave as if they are possessed by peys. Though an illiterate, Paati had a reply to the question about why the spirits possess women and not men: “How will it catch men? They know how to be brave in their hearts. The peys only catch people who are scared. Its women who are always fearful cowards” (S 50).

Patriarchy works in an unjust manner that women are wage earners as much as men but men could spend their earnings as they please while women have to bear the burden of running the family. To make both ends meet, children often go for labour, like Mikkanni in Sangati who went to the match factory to help her mother whenever she was pregnant. Once her father way laid her and left her crying. She was required to work far harder than her years demanded and also behaved with a common sense far beyond her years. Girls hardly ever enjoy a period of childhood; before they grow up, they are burdened with the house work, taking care of the babies and going out to work for daily wages. Education is denied to girls by their fathers and they are destined to remain farm hands and drink only Kanchi to appease their hunger. Madathi remembers how the missionaries gathered the children to educate by offering slate, pencil, and note books. But since they were too poor, they could not continue with their studies and their fathers did not allow them to, otherwise she would have
become a teacher. She is reminded of her friend Pakyam who was excellent at Mathematics that even the teachers were surprised at her aptitude. Education was denied to the women and Bama foregrounds a social system that targets dalit women most unjustly. All Possible avenues of progress are closed to them. She brings out the complex, multilayered profile of dalit women's oppression by showing how the Parayas men were violent, abusive, and unjust toward their womenfolk as the upper caste landlords were towards the dalit community.

The critique of practice in Catholic Christianity occurs in Vanmam where the impact of Hinduism is almost existed in Churches also in the way of oppressing the dalit Nun. When the church conveniently forgets the duty towards its oppressed class, they in turn also lose faith in the church and respect to the priest. This is reflected in the writings of Bama when she describes such an experience in Vanmam, where the church and the priest remained silent and inactive whenever the oppressed dalits needed them. When a communal strife broke out in the village, the elders and youngers gathered to ease the tension. When Jayarasu opined that they should meet the priest, discuss the matter and take a decision with his help, instantly Antony got up and shouted, "We can't accept this idea. Is he a priest? Where was he all these days? Does he participate in any of the functions in our street both good and bad? So it is a waste to call them" (V 87). The others agreed: "Yes, the priest would say 'what he had done is a sin, so let him get the beginning as a punishment of his sins and quietly skip out of the situation. Whatever it is, he is one from upper caste. If he is of our caste he would understand our difficulties, our loss, and our feelings" (V 87). They also remembered that, when there was a riot in the street, it was this priest, who ran away first. The adverse comment on the silent church and its non-interference in the matters of dalit strife is highlighted in the novel.
Bama notifies that priests also show casteist discrimination. In *Vanmam*, she describes the activity of a particular Nadar priest who supported his caste and showed indifference to the dalit believers of his parish. The priest had hung the photograph of Kamaraj in the monastery, which is against the holy order. The dalit youth questioned the partial attitude and demanded him to keep Ambedkar’s picture too. When the dalit youth asked him to keep the pictures of “Pope and the Lord as usual” (V 72), immediately, he refused and created an issue in the village. The Nadars community was instigated and came to support the priest. The dalit youths were adamant in not allowing the picture of Kamaraj to be hung unless Dr. Ambedkar’s picture was also hung. The matter became serious and reached the Bishop, who immediately gave orders to transfer the priest elsewhere so that peace could reside between the Nadars and the dalits.

If the Church remained callous to the communal problems of the dalits, it remained cruel in the case of marriage for women. Inter-caste marriages are allowed to men but a girl or rather a dalit would never marry outside her caste. Though the church preaches that inter-caste marriages are commendable, the priest himself sometimes block such marriages. An instance in *Sangati* focuses on how a priest deals with the situation when a Parayas girl fell in love with the Pallar boy. The girl found it difficult to get a permission letter from her Parish priest to marry in a church in a different Parish. Moreover she also faced a threat to her job since she was working in a school run by Christian priests. However the girl had no choice but to ask the priest for a permission letter:

The parish priest listened to the girl’s story and then went and broadcasted it to all and sundry, humiliating her and holding her up to ridicule. He spoke about her as if she had been behaving like a whore,
cast suspicion on her morals, met her in a room all alone and leered at her, made false promises to her and kept her running between the church and her home like a dog; but he never organized a wedding or anything for her. (S 108)

Unlike the black women, dalit women suffer from a different order of oppression, i.e., untouchability. The dalits cannot touch the upper caste or they were not allowed into the households of them. The whites refuse to sit near a black but an Indian untouchable is much more pungent because the very shadow of a dalit would make the others polluted. The dalits subaltern status is inherited from birth and sanctioned by sacred authority. It is believed to be eternal and unalterable. But dalit especially dalit women are no longer prepared to be silent occupants of the liminal space to which they had been confined for centuries by the men – both upper caste and dalit.

The life of a black woman in South Africa is one fraught with massive frustrations because of the adverse political and socio-economic dispensations currently affecting it. It is also a life of resistance and political activism fostered by the black woman’s vigilant spirit of striving towards political and sexual liberation, and her realization of the empowering nature of economic self-reliance. The South African political system has marginalized black women from the public center of political and economic power and discourse, and has relegated them to shadowy positions of obscurity and subordination where they are defined as perpetual minors. This dialectical relation of oppression and resistance defines the socio-political context within which Tlali produces her fiction. Her exploration and documentation of the lives of black women in South Africa is a demonstration of her commitment to extend their horizons, and to bring them to the attention of the wider public, actively engaging them in public discourse. Her fiction provides ammunition to black women’s activism, and illustrates
the cogency of their collective voice in procuring an effective counteraction to their political oppression.

Tlali's subjugated position, which is defined by her blackness, her womanness, and her unprivileged social class in a society that is hostile to all those social relations, impels her to name her semi-autobiographical work, *Mihloti*. It is a Tsonga word for "tears," and it conveys Tlali's thoughts and emotions as she reflects upon the lives of black women in South Africa. Although the book is a tearful wordscape that textualizes the daily hardships experienced by black South African women in particular, it is far from being a lamentation sung out of self-pity. Instead, it is a passionate revival of the revolutionary spirit necessary to sustain the black women's struggle in their transformation of their political position in South Africa. The novel is a lucid illustration of the profundity of the assertive and determined self and black womanhood in impressively overcoming the historically oppressive male-conceived obstructions that stand between the realization of the women's political, material, and gender power. *Mihloti* expresses Tlali's intentions in feminist mediated discourse, which aims at undermining all the patriarchal ideas that designate a woman's mode of operation as domestic.

Tlali uses the preface to *Mihloti* to render a concise commentary on the social implications of her political status in South Africa. She effortlessly exposes the socio-political issues that shape the daily lives of black women, the lives that are forever relegated to the fringes of mainstream society, systematically silenced, and never meant to reach print. The first person narrative of the preface succeeds in engaging our company on Tlali's journey to telling her-story, thereby arousing our political consciousness, and appealing to our senses of immediacy in viewing her situation. The preface is an intriguing exposition of a black South African everywoman, and it
spans her life from childhood up to adulthood, discreetly making inroads into our understanding of her social position in relation to the larger political, cultural, and economic framework. Charting the contours of her South African black female third class existential landscape, and engaging in an internal persuasive discourse, Tlali says of herself:

Very often, I have had to shed tears. As a child, I had to shed them for my grandmother who had to till the soil with me on her back; to scrape the earth with her bare hands and build a mud-house in which to cook for us. For my father who died when I was an infant. I shed tears too when later my mother informed me that when I was born my father was disappointed because he wanted a son.

I shed tears for my beautiful mother who had to struggle alone. Far the loneliness of my elder sisters and I, as we scanned the horizon hoping that 'Me would appear ... a lone bread-winner carrying parcels containing provisions (especially lipompong - bon-bons).

Now that I am a mother, I shed tears for my children when I realise that I would never be able to live with them and know fully the joys of motherhood. I often shed tears for their destiny, and the fact I can do so little to protect them and provide for them. I have often shed tears for the fate of all black children. For those we love so much who have left our land and cannot return. For our denigrated humanity which we must retrieve.

Mihloti...teardrops...Masolinyana (my name) ... The tears burn my eyes and drip down on to the paper before me. I have to shed them (Mi xv).

The preface reveals Tlali's acute understanding of all the socio-political layers that constitute her multiple subjectivities which define her marginalization. As young
children, most black women and men have watched the sun rise and set while strapped to the backs of the elderly womenfolk who were tilling the land to make a living. To scrape the earth with one's hands is no mean feat, and to build a mud-house in which to cook what the earth has provided is a demonstration of tenacity borne out of unenviable living conditions under which, almost inevitably, a black woman finds herself. Black women are systematically forced to engage in such odious activities as part of their daily household duties because of the lack of any decent means of survival.

Tlali's concern for these social evils is echoed also in Amandla, in which the enforcement of the influx control laws results in a systematic disintegration of black families. Left on their own, the women devise strategies for survival. They become the sole providers for their households, and to a great extent, the shapers of culture. Tlali sheds tears again when she learns of her father's disappointment at her birth because of her gender. He wanted a son! The humility of living with the knowledge of one's father's disillusionment because of one's sex confirms the gravity of the unenviable status in the society. To a great extent, it instills in the mind of the girl the idea that she is second best, and that her contribution in the society can only be considered when male opinion has failed to produce the desired results. Tlali's fiction documents variations of the same hostilities that have unabatedly continued to complicate the lives of black women.

The first entry in Mhloti, “Detour into Detention,” reveals the multiple layers of oppression that black women suffer. The punitive racist government makes them easy prey of the wrath of black policemen who driven by hate and ignorance exercise the destructive power given to them by their white superiors. Tlali relates her experiences, and those of other women and teenage girls of being detained in a cell at the Meadowlands Police-Station because of their defiance of the government's
restriction on a mass burial of the slain Black Consciousness Movement's activist and leader, Steve Biko, in King William's Town. Tlali's account of her encounter with the police on this day centres on when she and other women in her group are already apprehended and held hostage at the Meadowlands Police Station. One woman tells of how a black policeman tried to attract her attention by showing her his pay cheque, pathetically oblivious of its meagerness, and obviously proud of his deplorable career:

Did you perhaps have the time to see what was happening where I was? That soldier or policeman who was sitting next to me pulled me down and made me sit near him. He kept asking me many questions. 'What's your name? Where do you live? Don't you want to pay me a visit at the Protea Barracks?' I said 'yes' to everything. I gave him a wrong address and all false names. I was frightened lest he attack me. I made a hundred-and-one promises. I said I was merely accompanying friends to King William's Town and he smiled saying I am a sensible girl. He even pulled out of his jacket his pay cheque and showed it to me. He said, 'Look, How much da this?' I looked and said seventeen rand, ignoring purposely the first number. He shouted, disgusted: 'Can't you see it'sR21? I'll slap you! How can X earn so little money?'

They're so stupid. (MI 27)

Another woman adds: "Yes. They must be from the bund us, from the mountains. That other one kept asking, 'Why are you tramping on my Florsheim shoes? Do you know how much Florsheims cost? Will you buy them? Fancy boasting about shoes in a police van" (MI 27). These women's episodes reveal the black policemen's pride in their career, which alienates them from their own people. The false power given to them by their white sergeants serves to make them all the more arrogant, thus preventing them from
analyzing their attitude towards their own people, and start participating in the revolutionary struggle. They also reveal a high level of corruption because they think that women will fall for them because of the amount of money they make. There is very little realization that they are paid dirty money, offered by a government that revels in oppression and murder.

Given the humiliation that black women suffer, Tlali illustrates how they can empower themselves by getting together and transforming their oppression into effective defensive weapons and means of asserting their rights. She explores the theme of sisterhood in those stories that deal with women-to-women relationships. In the short story “Masechaba's Erring 'Child','” Tlali illustrates how women can empower themselves by counseling each other on their thoughts and actions, and resolve sensitive issues without creating any animosity among them. The story is about Masechaba, an elderly widow of fifty, who awakens to the fact that her oppression of other women was due to her own oppression by her husband, Senatla. 'Masechaba had encouraged her husband to court other women so as to stabilize her own marriage. She reckoned that she could not deal with a distracted husband whose interest lay outside the house than inside. One of the objects of Senatla's fancy was Tholoana, whom he met when she was working at a bakery. Senatla's approach to Tholoana exudes the confidence of a wealthy man exercising his power over a materially deprived woman. So when Tholoana rejects Senatla's advances, he goes to tell his wife, who expresses her disapproval of Tholoana's decision:

Yes, yes, I know everything, my dear,' she chipped in smiling. 'I even know that you refused him... How could you be so cruel anyway? Ntate loved you so much.... He was nearly sobbing like a child when he told me. I couldn't help feeling very sorry for him. (MI 151)
Tholoana is shocked to learn that Senatla has actually told his wife about the incident. She feels humiliated by the reasons advanced by 'Masechaba for her husband’s actions, and enters into a long tirade about 'Masechaba's insensitivity to other women's feelings, and her disrespect for their integrity. In defense of herself, 'Masechaba says: “I allowed him to enjoy himself just like you allow a child to play. He was like a child - an erring child, that's all. I kept on hoping that one day he would grow up and stop his child-like ways but he never. I grew tired of trying, tired” (MI 160). Tlali’s ridicule of irresponsible men is communicated through the seemingly innocent and naive voice of 'Masechaba. In the end, it turns out that 'Masechaba understood all what her husband was doing, but because she had tried without success to discourage him, she finally relented. The laugh remains on Senatla, whose absence at this very interesting gathering fails to account for his foolish manners. The same kind of sisterhood is communicated by the working women in the short story “Fud-u-u-a,” which literally means “Stir the Pot.” The women lend support to each other as they face their daily lives of male oppression in its many faces. In a ceremonial way of garnering this solidarity among themselves, Mashadi says to her friends, Nkele and Ntombi: Come, my sister, let us whisper. This corner here looks safer. They won't crush us here. Re basadi bo batlhe (sic); tlaeang re itshebeng (we are all women; come, let us whisper to one another) (MI 33).

The theme of the story centers around the humiliation of women by men as they commute on the trains. The train rides subject them to robbery and revolting fondling of their bodies by thugs, while other people pretend not to notice anything, and prefer to join in the singing. As Nkele narrates her experiences, one can feel the nausea that accompanies the experience. She tells her friends:
Those who could lift up their hands, started clapping them - hard. I wanted the music to stop because, instead of helping, the very noise was being used as a "shield". I was trying to scream that someone was busy massaging my thighs and backside, trying to probe into my private parts and nobody was paying attention. It was embarrassing and awful! That day, I thanked God for having given me big powerful thighs because all I did was cross them over one another and squeeze as hard as I could. I clenched my teeth and wished that I were grinding those fingers between my thighs. You see, with so much congestion, it was impossible to see who the culprits were. (MI 41)

Nkele is humiliated even more by the conspiracy of the singing people, for their voices drown her own pleas for help. Mashadi and Ntombi can only nod in helpless acknowledgment of Nkele's story. They have also experienced the same humiliation as their friend in one way or another. Mashadi can hardly tell of her experiences because of their bitter memories. The confusion and shock created in her mind leave her with no words to relate her story. All she can talk about is the crowdedness of the train, which, with its noisy sound as it sways from side to side, seems to collaborate with the offenders.

The three women's experiences are echoed in another short story, "Devil at a Dead end," where a train journey from Ficksburg Station to Bethlehem turns into a nightmare as a young woman travelling alone is sexually abused by one of the white railway guards. After ascertaining that the young woman is left alone in her compartment as the other passenger has reached her destination, the guard approaches her, and abusing his position of authority as a white male train guard on a lone black woman passenger, lets himself into her compartment and says to the girl:
Don't be afraid, please. Come; just stand up. Come, man, don't be lazy. Just stand up and let's have some fun. Just a little love making," the guard implored, touching her slim shoulders tenderly and stroking them. "Come. It won't hurt, please. Come on, hold me tight, tight!" he demanded, taking the girl's hands and crossing them behind him. The girl slackened her grip, but he stopped her. "Don't do that, please. All right, just clasp me against you and I'll be satisfied. (MI 115-16)

Terrified by the guard's actions, and fully aware of the absence of a public podium where she can voice her complaint as a victim, the young woman feels confused and at a loss for words. However, as the guard leaves her compartment to attend to his duties at a station, the girl examines her situation, and chastises herself for seeming to be a willing partner in her own assault.

All of these stories deal with some of the many forms of women's oppression in South Africa. The stories confirm the fact that their oppression will remain a reality as long as apartheid remains a policy in the country. Tlali balances the content of her fiction by talking about the strengths of women. In one of her travelogues, "Setsumi Qoqolos," Tlali experiences the ultimate joy of reaching the top of Mount Qoqolosi. That has been her main objective for a long time. The mystery surrounding the mountain top had always challenged her wits as a woman, and she finally undertakes the journey to reach the peak of the mountain, and to live to tell the tale.

Tlali communicates a sense of fulfillment against all odds in her autobiographical novel Muriel at Metropolitan. She reconstructs her experiences of working at Metropolitan Radio, a busy electronics store located in central Johannesburg catering to lower income blacks and whites. The firm is a microcosm of South African urban life with its variety of people and their curious relationships with
one another. The protagonist is a black woman, Muriel, whose position as an accounts typist at the store constantly forces her to reflect on her moral commitment to her people. Her inner tension is compounded by the contempt with which her Jewish boss, Mr. Bloch, and other white employees, treat her, and the rest of the black people coming into the store. Tlali illustrates how an employee's race and gender determine not only her salary, but also the kind of gift she receives for Christmas. Muriel's conversation with Mrs. Ludorf, a white co-worker, reveals Mr. Bloch's discriminatory policy of remunerating his employees. After hesitantly enquiring about Muriel's standard of education, Mrs. Ludorf asks her: “... How much did your boss give you for Christmas bonus? Nothing, but he gave me a travelling rug worth about eight rands. What, a lousy blanket, after all these years? That's a shame! And you know what he gave them?” (MM 187).

Mr. Bloch's choice of a present for Muriel is significant, for not only does it fulfill the white South African stereotypical association of African women with traditional blankets for adornment, but it also reveals his meanness, and his total disrespect for Muriel. Mrs. Ludorf's conversation with Muriel does not result from any genuine concern, but is based upon her white superiority complex, which she derives from the larger socio-political system. Her questions betray her inner desire to retain her privileged position as a white woman over a black woman. They also point to the threat that Muriel poses to her as an efficient and educated black woman. As Muriel notes, Mrs. Ludorf used to comment about her vital statistics and diet as a way of asserting her superiority over Muriel because of her unflattering weight.

Muriel's resigned tone in the above passage confirms her earlier assertion that she does not want to stage a "one woman's protest" against her employer. However, her worst moments of frustration occur, when she has to ask the black customers for
their particulars and pass books before she can process their Hire Purchase applications. Muriel expresses her ambiguous feelings:

... Every time I was forced to be loyal to the firm I would get those cramps deep in my entrails. Every time I asked for a black customer's passbook I would feel like a policeman who in this country is a symbol of oppression. I would continue to feel like a traitor, part of a conspiracy, a machine deliberately designed to crush the soul of people. (MM 140)

Tlali's dialogism in this passage reflects Muriel's relationship with other people. Muriel wrestles with her conscience which forces her into a double versed discourse with the dissonances engendered by the hostilities towards her social relations. During her meditative moments on her working conditions, Muriel is haunted by a specter of herself as a policeman, a personified symbol of that level of oppression only a black South African can understand. Her language reveals her consciousness of her oppressive conditions, and also her social relations that enforce those conditions. These conflicts of interest define her socially constructed subjectivity which she experiences out of her mistaken assumption of the guilt, responsibility, and blame for the inefficiencies of the status quo. Her silent conspiracy with the firm's cheating is therefore not done out of sheer ignorance, but is a result of forced "loyalty," even at the expense of a troubled conscience and a deafening pounding of the heart.

When Muriel’s working conditions fail to improve, but actually get worse, she takes a firm stance, and resigns, ultimately freeing herself from the shackles which had bound not only her hands but her soul as well. Her resignation confirms her political commitment to the people, for it reconciles all her conflicting inner voices and brings her peace and a clear conscience. The end of the novel portrays Muriel's
determination to uphold righteousness, and to reclaim her pride and dignity in the face of the looming threat of financial difficulty. Her resolute decision is captured in the words:

When I took my bag and said to the boss 'Good night, Mr. Bloch' for the last time, I did not know what the future held in store for me. I did not care. I had no regrets. All I knew was that I could not continue to be part of the web that has been woven to entangle the people whom I love and am part of. I would never again place myself in a position in which I had to ask for pass-books or 'be loyal to the firm' at my own people's expense. My conscience would be clear. And I added, as I looked into Mr. Bloch's eyes: 'Thanks for everything.' (MM 190)

Muriel's resoluteness is a celebration of her determination to honor her convictions. It endorses her victory over all the political, social, economic, and sexual constraints imposed on her life, and paves the way for other women to follow. The whole situation characterizes the text as a site for social and sexual struggles and contestations, rather than simple conduits of power. She moves from the position of a victim to that of an individual who believes in her own consciousness, and is empowered to take control of her life. Her voice concludes the text, for Mr. Bloch's voice no longer has any legitimacy at this stage. Once more, that dialectical relation of oppression and resistance emerges as the core character of a South African black woman's experience. Tlali empowers black women by illustrating that they can be at the centre of their lives irrespective of the social relations that collaborate to marginalize them.

A life of Dalit woman is full of suffering, which starts from her infancy. Bama recalls in Sangati about women’s living as “hard lives”. Because their grief filled life
starts even they born a gender bias babies. The case is different for boy: “if a boy baby cries, he is instantly picked up and given milk. It is not so with the girls” (S 7). She continues that this case doesn’t change even after they have grown old, “boys are given more respect. They’ll eat as much as they wish and run off to play. As for the girls, they must stay at home and keep on working all the time…” (S 8). The hapless victims of women in cultural practices start from their beginning life of journey in which the young dalit girls hardly enjoy their childhood. She recounts how a young dalit girl’s life starts:

In our streets the girls hardly ever enjoy a period of childhood. Before they can sprout three tender leaves, so to speak, they are required to behave like young women, looking after the house work, taking care of babies, going out to work for daily wages. Yet, in spite of all their suffering and pain one cannot but be delighted by their sparkling words, their firm tread, and their bubbling laughter. (S 75)

Thus, the cultural discrimination has been imposed even in childhood games. Bama as a young girl of twelve learns that boys have different roles as they wish to play than girls who are continued in the form of gender games that they are made to play as children. Kabadi and Marbles are meant for boys to play. But girls even when small had to play only cooking or getting married, home keeping, minding babies as in real life as well. This incident makes distress to the author and raising questions with her Paatti that whatever men say is assured to be correct while whatever women say is supposed to be always incorrect;

Why can’t we be the same as boys? We aren’t allowed to talk loudly or laugh noisily; even when we sleep we can’t stretch out on our backs or lie face down on our bellies. We always have to walk with our heads
bowed down, gazing at our toes . . . even when our stomachs are screaming with hunger, we mustn’t eat first. We are allowed to eat only after the men in the family have finished and gone. What, Paatti aren’t we also human beings? (S 29)

In spite of her anger against the real social condition of dalit women in the Male chauvinistic world who impose the inhuman treatment on women, Bama’s documentation displays the patriarchal society insisted and trained up women with cultural practices for the development of gender discrimination. As the young Dalit girls hardly enjoy their childhood, the Black girls have started to suffer from very beginning of their life. The restriction has been thrusted on them in the name of tradition, custom, and culture. According to the patriarchal society, the boys are always free as they wish. But the girls’ desires only are kept by the parents even to sleep within home. In this way, Tlali’s *Amandla* depicts the conspicuous documents about the life of Black girls and their difficulties within the domestic sphere; “other, the boys, sleep on the floor. The two youngest ones sleep with their mothers because they refuse to sleep on the floor. Mummy, of course, insists that her place is next to me” (A 40). This is the real condition of women in domestic sphere.

In the family system under the influence of savagely patriarchal tradition, women have always been brutally treated by men, because wife is dependent upon the husband. Even the dalit women are much subjected to mental torture and violence at home apart from the oppression of Upper caste that is a denunciation of women in the patriarchal society. They are manhandled by their husbands without any specific reasons. Bama depicts the sad tales of the dalit women. On her way back home from school, she used to find a dalit woman called *Thaayi* weeping. Bama writes; “*Thaayi*’s husband beats her up again and again with the belt from his waist. She
didn't even have a chatat on. Everywhere the strap fell on her light skin, there were red weals” (S 42). When the neighbours move to save Thaayi, her husband said that he will beat and kill her because she is my wife. After hearing such words no one is ready to convince him. So, Thaayi is being existed in hapless victimization of brutal cultural practices.

Seemingly, Tlali’s Amandla displays the suffering of the maternal figures has only suffered in domestic sphere. They are largely confined within the kitchens and bedrooms and men are interrupting them to allow for the private conversations on the streets and in the shops of the township. The influence of patriarchal tradition has hoped men to subjugate women through their cultural practices which make an abusiveness of violent treatment by their husband. They do not escape from certain brutal treatment because they are repressed into the cobwebs of tradition and custom.

Like Thaayi as a hapless victim in Bama’s Sangati, Tlali’s Amandla enlightens an abusive character named Agnes who is subjected to mental torture and manhandled by ‘Bra-Joe’, her husband, without any specific reasons under the influence of liquor. When Bra-Joe has drunk, he abuses Agnes only for proving his strengthen of thoughtless sense of selfhood and his compulsive attempts access to abuse and attack her is symbolized the “subjecthood of subalternity.” First, the abusive thing is associated with excessive intoxication of liquor: “when he is drunk, which is every weekend, he gets home and starts beating up Agnes and sometimes their three children” (A 42). When Agnes tries to refuge at Nana’s home, he has described a capricious character. So in such occasion she is peacefully going to church, “carrying Bibles and hymn-books” (A 179).

Thus, the stereotypical traits of women in the domestic sphere still adhere to their part of the social contract in contrast to the men. They are almost concerned to
serve as nurturers who would have been cared for both the aged and their children. Historically, all the commitment of women at various levels, such as older women, young mothers, and children, would have been bothered for within the father’s clan. However, in the context of *Amandla*, which conveys the contemporary patriarchal practices different, they feel better to have only the sons rather having the daughters, and even the sons are doing nothing in nursing of the clans. This double-voicedness of women surfaces as ironically depiction by the expectation of Mmane Marta, who gives a hint that some beneficial traditional structures have been irretrievably lost in the context of the township which implies:

You don’t know how I fought to come here. I forced the *motsoetse* (nursing mother) to ask for two days off from her work so that she could come and spend one night with that team of children. Sometimes I feel that it’s better to have only sons instead of daughters. It seems you and I have been loaded with girls to make up for the fact that we were the only two girls among six boys… (A 35)

This passage extracts if women are not fulfilling their traditional duties to their families, the husbands/fathers give up both their wives and their children. In other words, even though the men have accepted to one part of the patriarchal social agreement for another as to be a substitute, the older women are committed to the young women to step in and take over the men’s traditional duties in the context of township.

The mistakes and evil deeds of the upper caste people are cast upon the dalit women. They suffer more cruelty at the hands of men, for no fault of them. The men take advantage of their situation and when women protest they are labeled as whores. The concept of gendered violence as used here includes domestic abuse, sexual
harassment, and rape. Wife battery is a term used by the sociologist December Green to connote all forms of domestic violence where the perpetrator has a close relationship with the victim:

Like torture, wife battery commonly involves some form of usually escalating physical brutality. Methods of this intimate violence resemble the common methods of torture: beating, biting, spitting, kicking, slashing, stabbing, strangling, scalding, burning, and attempted drowning. The consequences include physical and mental pain and suffering, disfigurement, temporary and permanent disabilities, miscarriage, maiming, and death. (25)

Green’s definition shows the severity of gendered violence and that domestic violence may include all forms, including rape. In this way, dalit women’s sexuality is an important domain of concern in Tamil Dalit literature. Dalit writers discuss the containment of dalit women’s sexuality from pre-puberty stage to menopause by family in the caste-bound society. In terms of sexual oppression, the subaltern women have been treated as a “beast of burden.” They are the victims of molestation not only within the family men but also the outside of the family, like upper caste men. Bama, in Sangati, depicts obviously the sexual harassment of women in domestic sphere by Paati who is revealing the story of her own daughter. When Bama asked Paati how her Perimma had attained the death at very young age, Paati replied her that she had not a natural death; instead, she was killed by her husband. While Bamaagers to ask the truth, Paati reveals:

Because the man was crazy with lust. Because he wanted her every single day. How could she agree to his frenzy after she worked all hours of the day and night, inside the house and out? He is an animal,
that fellow. When she refused, he practically broke her in half. Once in
my very presence he hit her with the rice-pounder. (S 10)

In addition to *Perimma*, women like Mariamma not only had to face the wrath
of their fathers at home but also the danger of being molested by men outside the
family, mostly upper caste men. The *Parayas* men did not have the power to question
the landowners for fear of losing their favors and finally accepted, as truth, the
*mudalali*’s words in condemning the innocent girl. Kumarasami is an upper caste man
who tried to molest a dalit innocent girl, Mariamma: “When she went innocently to
get some water, he seized her hand and pulled her inside … afraid that his reputation
might be in ruins, hurried to the village and went complained to the headman of the
*Parayas* community, the *Naattaamai* (S 20). Without proper trial or enquiry, the
words of the upper caste man were taken blindly. “… did the Mudalaali lie to in
everything he said?” The girl’s cry is heard by none and they called her “whore” and
“was asked to pay a fine of Rs.200 …” (S 26). The mistakes of men fall on women
and, even though the women knew it, their words fell on deaf ears. Bama through
Arokkyam portrays the reality,

Look how unfair these fines are. Even last week, when my
granddaughter Paralokam went to pull up grass for the cow the owner
of the field said he would help her lift the bundle on to her head. That
was his excuse for squeezing her breast, the barbarian. He’s supposed
to be the mudallali’s son. He’s supposed to be an educated fellow. The
poor child came and told me and wept. But say we dared to tell anyone
else about it. It’s my granddaughter who’ll be called a whore and
punished. Whatever a man does, in the end, the blame falls on the
woman. (S 26)
From Bama’s view only the dalit women suffer from this kind of molestation. Bama wonders why the dalit women alone suffer in the hands of men and the society. She questions if it is “… because of our caste and because of our poverty, every fellow treats us with contempt. If ever there is a problem or a disturbance, everyone, starting with the police, chooses to blame and humiliate the women of our community” (S 66). Again from Bama’s view, spirit possession or pey happens only to dalit women. She is bewildered to know that even evil spirits pey possess only women and not men. “I began to wonder how a man could even among women, I never heard of upper-caste women becoming possessed or dancing in frenzy. The peys always seem set on women form the Pallar, Paraiyar, Chakkiliyar and Koravar communities” (S 58). She does not stop with questioning alone but comes out with the answer too:

... I thought about the fact that only women – and Dalit women in particular – become possessed. And when I examined the lives of our women, I understood the reason. From the movement they wake up, they set to work both in their homes and in the fields. At home they are pestered by their husbands and children; in the fields there is back-breaking work besides the harassment of the landlord. When they come home in the evening, there is no time even to draw breath. And once they have collected water and firewood, cooked a kanji and fed their hungry husband and children, even then they can’t go to bed in peace and sleep until dawn. Night after night they must give in to their husbands’ pleasure. Even if a woman’s body is wracked with pain, the husband is bothered only with his own satisfaction. Women are overwhelmed and crushed by their own disgust, boredom, and exhaustion, because of all this. The stronger ones somehow manage to
survive all this. The one who don’t have the mental strength are totally oppressed; they succumb to mental ill-health and act as if they are possessed by peys. (S 59)

The sufferings of the dalit women cannot be expressed better than this, even though one should also note that similar experience is not uncommon, in fact it is similarly widespread, among the poor and socially supposedly lower castes among the non-Brahmin communities in Tamil Nadu. Since Bama’s focus is on dalit women in Sangati, it is natural for her to focus such suffering as part and parcel of dalit women’s lot.

The context of hierarchal suppression is not stop with dalit women but continued to the black women. In such a way, Tlali’s stories incorporate gendered violence, distancing is mainly used when broaching the more sensitive topic of sexual harassment: Hlonipha and the discursive taboo on sex, as we know, make this topic extremely sensitive. On the other hand, the distancing is also part of Tlali’s sacrificial discourse. By portraying the perpetrators as traitors to the cause of freedom from apartheid, Tlali not only marginalizes the perpetrators, who brutally plan the sexual violence within the context of apartheid. The gendered violence can thus be regarded as sacrificial violence that reproduces the status quo of apartheid: the perpetrators, victimized by apartheid, in turn victimize black women, keeping the mina doubly subordinate position. In the case of the white perpetrator, who represents the oppressive system more directly, the victimization of black women in the name of apartheid is more obvious. Furthermore, especially in “Devilata Dead End,” apartheid is shown to be informed by a patriarchal ideology, and therefore the sacrificial discourse involves both apartheid and its patriarchal structures. Only in “Masechaba’s Erring’ Child” does Tlali venture to address African patriarchy more directly, partly abandoning the distancing technique.
“De-tourinto Detention” merely implies sexual harassment and rape, yet, its implications are nevertheless unequivocal. When, unprovoked, the police attacked with tear-gas and arrested hundreds of people who were brutally crammed into kwela-kwelas, (police-vans), and taken to prison without being told what they were being charged with. Among those arrested is Masoli. During the journey in the kwela-kwela the police officers maltreat her and the other ‘passengers’ by repetitively lashing out at them with their batons, trampling on their feet, and, it is insinuated, abusing a few of them sexually, one girl to the verge of rape:

The poor girl had been struggling with the strong arms of the policeman. He was trying to pull down the zip in the front of the pair of jeans the girl was wearing. For a short while, they were locked in a tussle and when his hand broke loose, his fist went flying towards the girl’s face, hitting her on the eye so that her eyelid started swelling immediately. I looked at him, but my eyes were attracted to the open fly of his trouser. His naked male organ was protruding rigidly, and at right angles to his body! (FQ 12)

After this passage, there is a telling break in the text before the next paragraph begins:

“The police van gurgled to a jerky halt in front of a big gate, and I breathed a sigh of relief because it appeared that we had as last reached our destination” (FQ 12). The break gives the reader an instant in which to imagine what might have taken place in the van. In this way, the silence surrounding these issues is represented by an actual blank space in the text. Only much later in the narrative, when Masoli is relating this “shocking” incident to her friend Mabel, the readers are given to understand that no rape, in the sense of vaginal penetration, actually took place:
And shame, that poor girl, she must still be in a state of shock. She has
been so quiet. She has bruises and a very swollen black eye. It was
fortunate that she was not wearing a dress but a pair of jeans.

... I think it was a blessing that the distance between Dube Hall and
Meadowlands was not longer. Many of us would have been raped.

(FQ 28-29)

In this incident, the jeans saved the victim; however, Mabel blatantly states what the
reader has been invited to imagine as a possibility all along: beyond doubt, during
transports such as this, black women, at this time, were sometimes raped by black
police officers. Moreover, there is no doubt that rape like sexual abuse is implied,
because the incident apart from the mentioned marks of abjection leaves the girl “in a
state of shock” (FQ 28-29), which it would take her a long time to get over. The hiatus
in the text invites an insinuation of worse violence than that is ultimately depicted.

Like Bama’s hatred and disappointment on dalit women’s cruelty treatment
and sexual torture, Tlali hint sat the difficulty of alluding to sexual violence in
connection with the abuse the of women suffer in South African society. In Tlali’s
narratives, rape is not mentioned in connection with domestic abuse and is only
suggested for incidents that take place in the public domain. In Tlali’s short story
“Fud-u-u-a!” the narrator complains that “we were too hurt, too shamefully abused, to
speak. Who would we speak to? Who would we accuse? Who would listen to us ever
if we tried to complain? Everyone would tell us that ‘it is too shameful to say
anything about this” (FQ 41). Tlali, in the interview, underscores this, saying: “These
things are not spoken about” (11). Though Tlali describes the silence surrounding
these issues, the narrative itself partakes in breaking the taboo, and thereby Tlali
resists patriarchal expectations on her as a woman.
The researcher concludes that even though these two writers’ belong to different cultures at nation, both have singularized in conceptions of instilling a global regime of human rights. Hence, the patriarchal society exploited women’s political and the realization of the empowering nature of economic self-reliance and sexual oppression in the form of cultural practice. In turn, Bama and Tlali have taken the powerful mechanisms of political activism through its women-centred creative writing which exposes their multiple oppressive experiences, not only to fight against their political and sexual oppression, but also to define themselves and their existence, as opposed to being defined, and to maintain their self-defined rights, identities, and independence. And the present study suggests that both are, in their recognition of resilience and resourcefulness in the female community, critique of patriarchal structures that endorse violence towards women, and the hints at a future where women are guided by choice and have redeemed a political voice, do “actively shape” the future. Dalit and Black fiction’s hybridized representational strategies that deform the form of women in the male-dominated society symbolize a battle over cultural values.