CHAPTER – 3

SUBJUGATION THROUGH COLOUR AND CASTE

Beauty – a feeling that pleases everyone; a wish that every men and women, young and old alike aspire to fulfil; an idea that determines one’s social status and social circle gradually comes to be a standard by which one is known. Having a derogatory position being born as black or born in a low caste is an issue that certain groups of people in America and India respectively have been confronted with. These people live in binary opposition – male/female, high/low, rich/poor, white/black, beautiful/ugly. This dichotomy divides the society into “we” and “they”. In this hierarchy the former determines the laws and customs of the society, forms its cultural ideals and shapes the society in the fashion (s)he thinks right. In such a society the latter of the hierarchy is meant to live according to the set standards. One leads, the other is to follow blindly, silently. Morrison draws a hypothesis through the character of De Gobineau in her novel The Bluest Eye, “all civilizations derive from the white race, that none can exist without its help, and that a society is great and brilliant only so far as it preserves the blood of the noble group that created it.” (Morrison: 133) This silent submission automatically puts the former of the binary opposition on a higher rank, furthering the divide into superior/inferior. But at the same time the class considered as lower in rank does not always succumb to the expectations of the higher class. They rise and roar, resist and persist. These cries and resistances are heard in Toni Morrison’s The Bluest Eye and Joseph Macwan’s Dariya and Mari Parnetar.

Toni Morrison’s The Bluest Eye is a story of the most delicate and the most vulnerable person of the society i.e. a female child. It is a challenge to be born a woman and more so when the struggle starts from very childhood. The Bluest Eye is a story of the powerlessness of a black female child – Pecola Breedlove. Fear of poverty and homelessness strikes the characters of the novel. Through the story of Pecola, Claudia and Frieda, Morrison tells us how racism affects one’s psyche, emotions, family and relations. The characters are engrossed in finding and asserting their existence against a background of social and political pressures. These social, economic, political and psychological pressures help one understand to what degree
these characters suffer in society and are made ‘other’; how the process of ‘othering’ takes place and to what extent it torments and bewilders the subjugated characters. To quote Shail Bala, “The Bluest Eye… unearths that racism is hazardous to the self-image of the African society in general and the black female in particular.” (Bala: 37)

The very opening of the novel informs that something dreadful has occurred with Pecola Breedlove. With the metaphor of seeds of marigold flowers we are told that there is sheer hopelessness and vacuum in the life of black people. “…there were no marigolds in the fall of 1941… A little examination and much less melancholy would have proved to us that our seeds were not the only ones that did not sprout; nobody’s did.” (3) Seed is a metaphor which suggests that as seeds have become infertile, the blacks also have lost faith and innocence. There is total despair in the life of blacks. The worst part of the story is that they cannot question, cannot ask for reasons as the narrator states; “There is really nothing more to say except why. But since why is difficult to handle, one must take refuge in how.” (3)

In the preliminary pages of the novel there is a description of the house and of a family. The house is green and white with red door. The description of the “pretty” house suggests how colour-conscious the black people are. The family of mother, father and two children indicates that although they live in a well-furnished coloured house, there is no life in the sense that there is no bond of affection or communication between the adults and the children of the house. When little Jane wants to play nobody is ready to be her playtime companion, neither father nor mother nor even the pets – cat and dog. Even within the family the members are indifferent to each other. The opening passage is reflected in the life of Breedlove family. As father and mother are indifferent to Jane, Mr. and Mrs. Breedlove are unconcerned with their daughter Pecola.

Through various episodes the novel explores the distinction between the whites and the blacks and also within the blacks. Love-hate relationship exists not just between two different societies but also within the same community. The narrator Claudia MacTeer’s family lives in the white neighbourhood. Rosemary Villanucci, a white woman is her next-door neighbour. She does not allow Claudia and her sister Frieda to enter her house because she is white. As Claudia and Frieda face the denial at a very tender age, they develop a complex. They express their anger for Rosemary thus:
When she comes out of the car we will beat her up, make red marks on her white skin, and she will cry and ask us do we want her to pull her pants down. We will say no... whenever she asks us, we know she is offering us something precious and that our own pride must be asserted by refusing to accept. (5)

Thus, although Rosemary keeps a distance, Claudia and Frieda do not feel dejected. Rather they value themselves, their self-respect. They do not allow themselves to be humiliated. Although they are children, they know their self-worth. The confrontation with Rosemary also brings out the rich/poor divide. While Rosemary lives in a fine house and owns a car, Claudia’s house is old and cold. There is no electricity in her house. Only one room is lighted by a kerosene lamp, others are dark. There is also lack of communication between parents and children. Claudia avers, “Adults do not talk to us – they give us directions. They issue orders without providing information.” (5) Even their illness is treated with contempt. When Frieda falls ill, her mother shows dislike and disgust. She is angry not at her daughter but her sickness. Even then she humiliates Frieda. Parents are not able to love and care for their children.

Yet another story that develops parallelly is the story of Breedlove family. The family is in sharp contrast to what their name suggests – they do not breed love. Children are deprived of parental care and warmth; and parents, on the other hand, indulge in fight and beating. Ultimately, the family is broken. Patriarchal dominance ruins the whole family. Sammy, the son leaves the house. Pecola, the daughter, is raped by her own father and is sent to a nearby negro family until the country decides her future life or at least until the family is reunited. She is shifted to Claudia’s house where her mother calls Pecola a “case”. (11) Pauline, the wife of Cholly Breedlove goes to stay with the woman for whom she works. Cholly loses his human side and acts like a wild animal. It is because of his male-dominance that the family is fragmented. He puts his family outdoor. He is called “Dog Breedlove” (11) because of his inhuman behaviour. Claudia expresses her fear of being put outdoors; “Outdoors we knew, was the real terror of life… There is a difference between being put out and being put outdoors. If you are put out, you go somewhere else; if you are outdoors, there is no place to go.” (11) She says that to be sent outdoors by the landlord may be considered as a punishment. If one is not able to pay the rent, the
landlord may ask to vacant the house. Poverty-stricken family has no control over one’s income. Under the situation, they also cannot say no to the landlord. But if one's own kin asks to leave the house, it is criminal. She further states that to be outdoors is like the difference between death and being dead. Dead never changes and outdoors is to stay out permanently. Their marginalised position compels her to say, “Being a minority in both caste and class, we moved about anyway on the hem of life... Our peripheral existence, however, was something we had learned to deal with probably because it was abstract.” (11) Class distinction posits a group of people as minority and makes them choiceless. They have no control over their life. They are supposed to anticipate happiness or else there is no happiness for them.

Morrison also addresses the problem of how the American standard of beauty affects the black child. Talking about how the “whiteness” affects the mentality of the blacks, Morrison refers to Shirley Temple, the then white child-artist. Frieda offers Pecola some milk in a blue and white cup on which there is a picture of Shirley Temple. Pecola and Frieda fondly discuss about Shirley. Pecola admires her because she is very cute but Claudia hates her. She has a strange feeling for Shirley Temple. Unlike Frieda and Pecola, she says that she has not arrived at the psychological development that will turn her hatred into love.

Another striking episode which sows the seeds of love – hate relationship between the blacks and the whites is that of blue-eyed baby doll as a Christmas gift. Unlike Pecola who desires everything beautiful – white and blue; and wishes to be so, Claudia directs her dislike and anger to the doll. She finds it a “bone-cold head, ... uncomfortable ... sleeping companion.” (14) As she is interested in people of her age and size, she has no enthusiasm or interest in caressing the blue-eyed doll. She has only one desire – “to dismember it”. (14) She wants to know what it is made of, discover its dearness of which she is deprived. She pulls apart the doll to locate where the “beauty” lies. She expresses her restlessness thus:

I could not love it. But I could examine it to see what it was that all the world said was lovable. Break off the tiny fingers, bend the flat feet, loosen the hair, twist the head around, and the thing made one sound – a sound they said was the sweet and plaintive cry “Mama”, but which sounded to me like the bleat of a dying lamb… (14)
Claudia searches the beauty of the doll inside it, failing to understand that the culture she lives in does not see the beauty inside or say, the inner beauty. For them whiteness is superior. She laments that no one asks her what she wants as a Christmas gift. She cries, “I did not know why I destroyed those dolls... I did not want to have anything to own, or to possess any object. I wanted rather to feel something on Christmas day.” (14-15) She wanted to sit on a low stool in the kitchen when her mother is working, wanted to have lilacs in her lap and listen to her father playing violin for her only. The lowness of the stool in mother’s kitchen stands as a sign of security and warmth. She is want of love and affection and desires familial tie. Bhaskar Shukla also observes that instead of healthy interaction, warm touch and games, Claudia is bound in caressing an artificial object, dry and cold to feel what she feels. Thus, racism distorts not just her beauty standards but also family union. The episode of Shirley Temple, the cultural icon of the ’40s illustrates the influence of mass culture on young black girls. To quote Shukla, “...interaction with mass culture... especially for African-Americans, frequently requires abdication of self or the ability to see oneself in the body of another.” (Shukla: 65) Similarly, Claudia’s act of destroying the white baby doll symbolically means expressing hatred to white girls. Morrison remarks, “…the dismembering of dolls was not the true horror. The truly horrifying thing was the transference of the same impulses to little white girls.” (15) Rejection of the whiteness is, in a way, their hard attempt for the acceptance of the blackness.

The poverty and suffering of the Breedlove family symbolizes America’s brutal history of racial persecution. It reflects a race-based class structure that existed in the then American society. The accommodation they choose to live in suggests their blind acceptance of low status imposed upon them. Breedloves stay in a storefront house – an apartment which was formerly a store. They live in storefront because they think that they are poor and black. Being ugly, they cannot stay at any other place. The idea of beautiful and/or ugly has gone deep down in their psyche that none can convince them that they were not relentlessly ugly. Only Cholly is ugly in his behaviour. He has the meanest eye in the town and is the cruellest of all. His ugliness is seen in his temperament and carelessness for his family but other three “wear” ugliness. Morrison remarks:
You looked at them and wondered why they were so ugly; you looked closely and could not find the source. Then you realised that it came from conviction, their conviction. It was as though some mysterious all-knowing master had given each one a cloak of ugliness to wear, and they had each accepted it without question. (28)

Powerlessness of Cholly is also reflected in the way he accepts the broken and tattered furniture of the house. The narrator observes:

There is nothing more to say about the furnishings. They were anything but describable, having been conceived, manufactured, shipped, and sold in various states of thoughtlessness, greed, and indifference. The furniture had aged without ever having become familiar. People had owned it, but never known it. (25)

Breedloves lack sense of belongingness to their own people and possessions. The worst of all is that Cholly also dies in the workhouse, forever trapped in working poverty. This shows how the mind gets vitiated due to exploiting power structure. Monika Choudhary explains in her Ph. D. Thesis titled *Representation of the Subaltern in Toni Morrison*, “The fact, as it remains, is that the subaltens find themselves unable to speak for/of their rights for equality, justice and egalitarian notions attached to humanity at large.” (Choudhary: 54)

These characters lack self-awareness. They are tuned to agree with what their master says. Fight and brutality are also an inseparable part of the life of the blacks. Quarrel is routine in their house as if tussle is the only thing that interests them. They fight till the verge of killing. That is the reason that Sammy runs away from the house twenty-seven times by the time he is fourteen. Pecola, being a girl, endures. After all, a woman is born to endure. She wishes to die. Cholly does not need Pauline. He avoids her. Pauline, under the testing circumstances, considers herself an upright Christian woman. She is interested not in Christ, the Redeemer but Christ, the Judge. She considers herself a martyr and prays for Cholly to remove his pride. With every brutal act of Cholly, she becomes stronger, grows more powerful. At one point of time Mrs. Breedlove also beats him. The wilder he goes, the more splendid she becomes. Morrison depicts her women characters as winning though their victory is either short-lived or it, in one way or the other, mars their children, their family
M. S. Rajshree in the article “Delineation of Fragmented Female Psyche in Toni Morrison’s Sula” writes:

Morrison’s women are strong. They try to solve their problems. They fight to win their lost womanhood. But seldom are they successful. A healthy development of their self is often impossible. The powerless man often deserts her with a couple of children to their fate. She thus struggles not only for the lost identity but also for her livelihood... She looses her trust in her man... mothers... abandon their children and leave them as victims of psychological scars. (Rajshree: 80)

This is the reason that tired of violent acts of her parents, Pecola wants to disappear. She imagines all her body-parts disappearing gradually except her eyes. All pictures, images, impressions are there in those eyes and they always stay with her. She remembers her school-days when she is despised by her classmates and teachers because of her ugliness. For long she sits in front of the mirror trying to discover the secret of her ugliness. She recollects that she was the only who sat alone at a double desk in her class. As Claudia breaks the doll to find its beauty inside it, Pecola keeps looking at herself in the mirror to discover ugliness. Both of them, reflecting a child’s psychology, fail to understand that beauty or ugliness is determined by one’s thought process. It is the cultivation of the mind that makes one see good in bad or vice versa. They do not realise that the society and the culture they belong to see the physical beauty and not the inner beauty – how one looks is more important than what one is. Haunted by the idea of being beautiful and an urge for being accepted by the mainstream, she discovers that if she has different eyes – beautiful eyes, things will change for her. She fancies that she is despised by her classmates, teachers and parents because she does not have beautiful eyes and that if she has pretty eyes, people will not do anything bad in front of those pretty eyes. Morrison informs, “Every night, without fail, she prayed for blue eyes. Fervently, for a year she had prayed. Although somewhat discouraged, she was not without hope. To have something as wonderful as that happen would take a long, long time.” (35)

Black community’s white worship is a kind of self-hatred, self-imposed dislike for themselves. Her madness for blue eyes increases so much that she indulges into a magical practice. She goes to an ordained man, Soaphead Church asking him to turn her eyes blue. She believes that she cannot go to school without blue eyes. She
relates going to school and being popular, making new friends, winning everyone’s love with being blessed with blue eyes. She wants to rise out of her blackness and see the world with blue eyes. Soaphead Church writes a letter to God complaining His prejudice for the blacks. He says that his community has adopted the white master’s characteristics to retain their identity. As the blacks have no voice of their own, they are compelled to surrender. He writes:

The Purpose of this letter is to familiarise you with facts which either have escaped your notice, or which you have chosen to ignore... Tell me, Lord, how could you have a lass so long so lone that she could find her way to me?... She must have asked you for them [blue eyes] for a very long time, and you hadn’t replied... Did you forget about the children? Yes. You forgot. You let them go wanting, sit on road shoulders, crying next to their dead mothers... You forgot how and when to be God.

That’s why I changed the little black girl’s eyes for her... I did what You did not, could not, would not do... (140-44)

According to Soaphead, even God who also has blue eyes seems to be partial with some of His children. He questions God why He kept a difference when He created human beings. His relationship with God is an indirect way to express frustration with his life. Too much worship of the whiteness deforms their life. Pecola’s imagination to have blue eyes does not give her insight into the world around her rather turns out in the form of blindness. She can even look at the sun without blinking. Morrison notes in the epilogue of the novel, “She is not seen by herself until she hallucinates a self.” (172) Even her imagined friend does not protect her or help her feel secure. She also leaves her. Morrison explains that essence of happiness and true freedom lies in a feeling of connectedness with one’s own body and not a denial of it.

Morrison also illustrates the connection between American consumerism and subjectivity by showing how Pecola’s corporeality interferes with her role as a consumer. Pecola goes to Yacobowski’s shop to buy a candy. Addressed as “dandelions” and “weeds”, blacks are insignificant creatures for the whites, no matter whether that “dandelion” is a child or an adult. As Pecola climbs the steps, Yacobowski ignores her. He does not even look at her. “At some fixed point in time
and space he senses that he need not waste the effort of a glance. He does not see her, because for him there is nothing to see. How can a fifty-two-year old white immigrant storekeeper… see a little black girl?” (36) says the narrator. He proves his whiteness by excluding Pecola. She finds absence of human recognition in the storekeeper. Although she is not able to reason out his distaste, she knows that that vacuum is not new to her. Avoidance by the grocer makes her think of her ugliness only. She assumes, “The distaste must be for her, her blackness. All things in her are flux and anticipation. But her blackness is static and dread. And it is the blackness that accounts for, that creates, the vacuum edged with distaste in white eyes.” (37) When she pays him money, he is hesitant not to touch her. She is angry of being “dandelions” but immediately realises that anger gives her a sense of being. When one’s life is distorted by mistreatment it can create positive as well as negative meaning and every negative happening serves as an opportunity to give meaning to one’s existence. When Pecola points her finger at the candy which is wrapped with a picture of Mary Jane on it, it is regarded as a quiet and inoffensive assertion of a black child’s attempt to communicate with a white adult. This further indicates the divide between the child and the adult. Pecola is thrice oppressed – being a child, a female and a black. The picture of Mary Jane on the wrapper has blond hair and blue eyes. As she eats the sweet candy, she feels, “To eat the candy is somehow to eat the eyes, eat Mary Jane. Love Mary Jane. Be Mary Jane.” (38) The sense of victimhood kills the child in Pecola. She desires blue eyes for two reasons: one, to change what she sees; two, to change how others see her.

The life of three young girls – Pecola, Claudia and Frieda has become like winter season – cold, dry, monotonous, lifeless. They await spring and the disrupter of season is a light-skinned girl in their school – Maureen Peal. She is as rich as any of the white girls living in comfort and care. Maureen’s arrival breaks the monotony as she enchants the whole school. Her shining eyes, summery complexion and delicacy in her walk make her the centre of attraction for every boy and girl in the school. Teachers smile at her, black boys do not trip her, white boys do not throw stone at her nor do the white girls make faces. Black girls also make a way for her when she wants to use the sink. She is always found with companions around in cafeteria and brings fastidious meals. Hierarchy prevails even in imparting education to students in Lorain, Ohio. Pecola observes that while teachers smile at Maureen,
she is called on when everyone is asked to respond. Favouritism furthers the divide between the blacks and the whites. Education and religion do not graduate them from self-denial. The narrator further says that Maureen likes “white milk”. (48) Milk is naturally white but saying it emphatically – “White milk” suggests how the white standard in terms of beauty, living and food habits occupies their mind. Introduction of light-skinned Maureen itself suggests that whiteness is beautiful, blackness is ugly. She reinforces connection between race and class. The girls also draw economic difference between them. Maureen wears rich and fashionable clothes with fine shoes whereas Claudia and Frieda get a pair of leather shoes on Easter which disintegrates in May. Claudia and Frieda are irritated to see her. They try to find flaws in her. They start with uglifying up her name from Maureen Peal to Meringue Pie. As she has six fingers and a dog tooth, they call her “Six-finger-dog-tooth-meringue pie.” (48) They are hostile towards Maureen. They are jealous to the extent that Claudia wants to kick her although she secretly wishes to be her friend. She desires pretty things that Maureen has but doubts that to have things like Maureen she must be like her – beautiful. Claudia and Frieda had not learnt self-hatred so far. Maureen awakens in them the idea of physical beauty. The sense of beauty generates in them destructive feeling of self-hatred. Claudia understands that it is not Maureen she fears but what makes her beautiful.

Once while on their return from school Pecola is harassed by some boys. They make fun of her for the colour of her skin and for the sleeping habits of an adult, forgetting that they themselves are black and their fathers have similar habits. Their contempt for their own blackness makes them impulsive. Taunting Pecola in fact expresses their self-hatred. Frieda rushes to protect Pecola. Maureen also appears on the scene. As soon as she participates, the boys hesitate to tease Pecola anymore. Under her springtime eyes, they are reluctant to do anything wrong. Morrison shows boys weak as Claudia and Frieda can obstruct their way. Although Maureen behaves in a friendly way with Pecola, she makes her realise her low position of being black and ugly. She refers to a movie show the *Imitation of Life* in which as she says, “… mulatto girl hates her mother ’cause she is black and ugly but then cries at the funeral… Anyway, her name was Pecola too. She was so pretty.” (52) She likens the name of the girl in the movie to Pecola Breedlove but in the movie Pecola is pretty. That is to say, mass media prefers whites. This episode reflects her superiority. She
says that her mother had watched it four times. It shows the influence of mass media culture on people’s psyche. They are forced to undergo racial pressure. Claudia, Frieda and Pecola are stunned by her remarks and taken aback to examine old scars. Claudia cries:

We were sinking under the wisdom, accuracy, and relevance of Maureen’s last words. If she was cute... she was – then we were not... We were lesser. Nicer, brighter, but still lesser. Dolls we could destroy, but we could not destroy... the slippery light in the eyes of our teachers when they encountered the Maureen Peals of the world. (57)

She asks the secret of her beauty and why it is important to be beautiful. She wants to know what she lacks and what if she does not have what the Whites have. She further says:

Guileless and without vanity, we were still in love with ourselves then. We felt comfortable in our skins, enjoyed the news that our senses released to us, admired our dirt, cultivated over scars and could not comprehend, this unworthiness. Jealousy we understand and thought natural – a desire to have what somebody else had; but envy was a strange, new feeling for us. (57-8)

The passage speaks of the purity and innocence the blacks have. Although marginalised by the upper class of the society, they still preserve self-worth and genuine goodness within. Claudia does not regard Maureen worth of her enemy or hatred even. Self-pride weighs more than the worship of the set standards of the white society. There is also a reference of three prostitutes in the novel who live a relatively free life. Bound by the white patriarchy, they reflect,

“Everybody in the world was in a position to give them orders. White women said, “Do this.” White children said, “Give me that.” White men said, “Come here.” Black men said, “Lay down.” The only people they need not take orders from were black children and each other.” (108)
Power lies in the hands of the superior class – superior in terms of social status, gender difference, economy and racial standard. M. S. Rajshree observes in this regard:

Identity for black women can be described in three levels – race, culture and gender. Racially they do not fit into the American community which has the white dominant race that continues to treat the blacks as slaves and bestial creatures. But the blacks had a racial past of their own which they are unable to claim black. They strive hard in vain to establish their identities in an alien society. They were uprooted from their culture too. They are forced to imbibe the values and culture of a race that subjugates them. Their life is an eternal quest for a complete self. (Rajshree: 80)

Morrison discusses the story of brown-skinned family Geraldine, Louis and their son Junior. To receive acceptance by the whites these brown-skinned folk attend a school where they learn serving the white folk with refinement and etiquettes. They learn thrift, patience high morals and good behaviour. But in being good to the Whites they forget their duties towards their own family. Geraldine does not love her son Junior. She raises her child as she raises a cat. She fulfils all his physical needs but does not give him warmth. To quote Morrison:

Geraldine did not talk to him, coo to him, or indulge him in kissing bouts, but she saw that every other desire was fulfilled. It was not long before the child discovered the difference in his mother’s behavior to himself and the cat. As he grew older, he learned how to direct his hatred of his mother to the cat, and spend some happy moments watching it suffer. (67)

She also does not allow him to play with negroes. Her attitude towards them sharply reflects the colour difference that the then society rigidly followed. She finds coloured people neat and tidy and the negroes dirty. She takes extra care to keep his son decent. He wears white shirt and blue trousers, his hair are cut sharply and in winter he protects his skin by applying lotion. This speaks of high living standards of the whites or the brown-skinned people. Junior wishes to play with black boys and enjoys pushing them down and bullying girls. However he does not bother negro girls much as he was beaten by them once. Thus, while the negro girls are bold and
courageous, Junior is also commanding and authoritative. When Pecola passes through the playground he asks, “... What are you doing walking through my yard? Nobody can come through this yard 'less I say so.” (69) Every white or light-skinned family has their own ‘yard’ which an ordinary person is not allowed to enter. They have built a strong wall around them which if a black crosses will have to pay a high price. Junior invites her in his house tactfully and then imprisons her. There is a black cat with blue eyes in his house. Pecola is attracted by its blue eyes. Frustrated to see Pecola caressing a black cat, he pulls it and throws it against the window. It falls injured enough. On Geraldine’s asking, Junior proves himself innocent and holds Pecola responsible for the death of the cat. Geraldine calls her “nasty little black bitch” (72) and sends her out of the house.

The episode reveals that material comfort, neatness and quietude do not assure an orderly and happier existence. Life can be deadly without genuine human warmth. The sweetness that Geraldine has is only external. Her tidiness is deceptive as she lacks inner goodness. Propriety and cleanliness are actually the forms of self-betrayal. Although the light-skinned or black women are educated, they are more submissive to the white families. Nurturing or caressing the child comes not out of love but out of mannerism. Their houses are well-kept but full of human dirt and without human emotions. They care so much for the whites that they refuse to cuddle their own family. Geraldine’s emphasis on decorum is false as she lacks inner cleanliness. Cleanliness represents Morrison’s critique of a particular kind of internalised racism and middle-class contempt for the poor. While the MacTeers are comfortable in their own dirt, Geraldine hates dirt and disorder. Her hatred is linked to the hatred of negroes. She forgets that she also belongs to the same group, though light-skinned. This is also an example of self-hatred. In the novel all those who hate misdirect the feeling of love and hatred, multiplying the suffering of the oppressed. Geraldine, instead of hating racism, hates her family. Instead of showing affection to her son Junior, she misdirects it to her cat. Junior, in return, hates the cat and Pecola. It all becomes a blame game for each other, the sufferers are the children. They undergo emotional neglect and misplaced intense hatred. The cat and Pecola both become Junior’s scapegoat. After all, all are the victims of racial discrimination. Hence instead of blaming the children for their suffering, Morrison blames their families, their community and their nation.
Pauline also disregards Pecola when it comes to treating her daughter and the white girl for whom she works. Pauline is a maid-servant at the lake front houses – well-decorated houses but no sign of life. There is Lake Shore Park, a city park with lovely garden and fountain where only white children are allowed. The narrator notes, “Black people were not allowed in the park and so it filled our dreams.” (82) A beautiful garden with fountains, picnic tables and rides is always an attraction for children. But because Claudia and Frieda are black children, they are denied this pure joy. In a lakefront house where Pauline works, a little white girl calls her by name and Pecola, throughout the novel, addresses her as Mrs. Breedlove. This shows defamiliarisation within the family. When children are deprived of parental love they also grow up having no feelings for parents. Hence she addresses her mother as Mrs. Breedlove. In the master/servant divide even little children forget to pay respect and take advantage of belonging to the white race. By mistake as the black berries are splattered on the floor by Pecola, Pauline beats her and abuses her. Looking at the scene, when a little white girl starts crying Pauline looks after her with love and care. While she speaks with Pecola and her friends with anger, she talks to the little white girl with softness. When that white girl asks who those black children are, Mrs. Breedlove avoids answering. The poor black children always live in erasure and dejection not only by the white populace but also by their own people. Their submission to whites with the hope to establish equality makes them avoid their own family and children. Pauline renounces her own family for the family of the white employer.

In a flashback Morrison narrates Pauline’s life. Pauline and Cholly start their relationship with genuine feelings but end in separation. She recollects how in movies white men take a good care of their wives. She regards Cholly “a model of sin and failure… a crown of thorns.” (48) When his aloofness brings financial crisis on the family Pauline herself had to go out to earn money leaving her little children behind. She finds beauty, order and praise at Mr. Fisher’s place – her employer. The sense of acceptance and community feeling which she was looking for with Cholly, she finds at Fishers’. She earns respect and recognition of bread-winner. They give her nick name Polly out of fondness for her and call her an “ideal servant”. As her master praises, “We’ll never let her go. We could never find anybody like Polly. She will not leave the kitchen until everything is in order. Really, she is the ideal
servant.” (99) Like all her other novels, *The Bluest Eye* also celebrates female-centric family. Her life at the Fisher’s becomes lighter, happier and balanced. Triumphant, she becomes a martyr and joins the church where at prayer meeting, she prays for Cholly and for her children’s safety. But Pauline very well knows the harsh reality of the world outside which is cruel and unjust. Hence she keeps the fine treatment at Fisher’s place to her private world only. She does not introduce that harmonious feeling to her children. On the contrary, she teaches them fear as Morrison notes:

… fear of being clumsy, fear of being like their father, fear of not being loved by God, fear of madness like Cholly’s mother’s. Into her son she beat a loud desire to run away and into her daughter she beat a fear of growing up, fear of other people, fear of life. (100)

Pauline gives a gendered response in her approach to Pecola and Sammy. Remembering her past days of struggle, Pauline narrates her story of Pecola’s birth. When she was in the hospital to deliver a baby, the doctor tells his student that black women do not feel pain while giving birth. Pauline silently bears the insult. Perhaps black women are born to tolerate the insult as the narrator states, “The insults were part of the nuisances of life…” (120)

Pauline, enduring separation and loneliness because of her deformed foot, fights against poverty and racism and unfortunately unites with alternately cruel and tender husband. She is the victim of partly the circumstances and partly chosen fate. However, she mightily defends Cholly and rises above him. Although her life becomes more meaningful after she joins the Fisher’s as maid-servant, she causes great suffering to her daughter. She creates a narrative of love for Pecola before she is born and her love-story with Cholly creates a brief oasis of beauty and joy in the midst of bleakness. The lives of black women synthesise tragedy and harmony, wickedness and serenity, truth and fantasy. They have become indifferent to everything, even pain. They in fact ignore the very presence of pain.

Cholly also has survived abandonment, sexual humiliation and racism. White power also determines personal pleasures of the blacks. While enjoying his first love-making with Darlene, he is interrupted by two white men who stand behind and ask him to continue the act while they are watching. Cholly is muted to follow the instructions as they are “big, white, armed men” whereas he is “small, black, helpless.” (118) Frustrated, Cholly hates the girl instead of hating those two white
men. He understands the futility of hating them as he says, “...hating them would have consumed him, burned him up like a piece of soft coal, leaving only flakes of ash and a question mark of smoke.” (118) This speaks of how white power deforms black lives. His joyous and beautiful moments of life fade away like fading colours of an evening sky. Not a wonder he becomes careless and fearless. His freedom is marked by disinterestedness. Ultimately, it results into a lack of interest in life and leads him to a state of oblivion. This is the reason that he rapes his own daughter, Pecola. Mixed feelings of revulsion, pity, guilt and love compel him to act madly. Blacks are so depressed that they even do not spare the blacks. Shail Bala opines in this regard:

The power of love can also be spoiled owing to the viciousness and insensitivity of the American white society. The death of romantic love on the one hand and the distortion of love on the other lead to serious consequences for the psychic health of the individuals, and damage their ability to relate one another in a positive manner. (Bala: 43)

Love which is inherently healing and redemptive force turns out to be the most damaging in the novel. Suffering does not make them sympathetic. Rather they transfer anguish to their children too. As parents had emerged from histories of oppression, they reproduce that degradation within the family unit. The nurturers become the destructors. Instead of protecting his family, Cholly persecutes his family. Continuously encountering rejection and erasure by the dominant group, Cholly’s act may also be interpreted as an attempt to exert his existence although it ends in violating his own daughter. Similarly, the sight of Pecola’s abused body on the kitchen floor incites Pauline to beat her rather than comfort her. She feels no motherly obligation to nurture the offspring. She also finds her new-born child ugly. These are the examples of debilitated parenthood due to series of oppression.

As she learns that a white family’s servant wields far more power than a black family’s mother, she spends all her time working as a helper for the Fishers, where “Power, praise, and luxury were hers...” (99) Morrison informs about Pauline that as a child in Alabama, especially in Kentucky, “She liked, most of all, to arrange things. To line things up in rows – jars on shelves at canning, peach pits on the step, sticks, stones, leaves...” (86) That is, she always preferred order and symmetry. She
liked to express her artistic self in her tasks. It is only after getting job at Fishers’ she is again able to express her artistic sensibility.

Towards the end of the novel Claudia and Frieda are shown feeling sorrow for Pecola. But that sorrow is not shared by the adults of the society. One finds sad demise of innocence and understanding in the adults because of psychological trauma that their subordinated position brings. The adults of the world blame Pecola and think that she should be taken out of school. They refuse to see the destruction of little black girls like Pecola. Claudia says that like Pecola there were many other girls who were not married and had babies. Perhaps, being blacks they had no right over their body. The whites behave with them as if they do not exist or if at all they do, they are a commodity. While the so-called mature people find Pecola and Cholly ugly and look at their act as ugliness, Claudia and Frieda look at the beauty of the unborn baby and its future. They decide to live with dignity in a corrupt society. She declares:

...We had become headstrong, devious and arrogant. Nobody paid us any attention, so we paid very good attention to ourselves. Our limitations were not known to us – not then. Our only handicap was our size; people gave us orders because they were bigger and stronger. So it was with confidence, strengthened by pity and pride, that we decided to change the course of events and alter a human life. (150)

They pray for Pecola’s child to live. They are ready to sacrifice their bicycle and money. They bury the money, plant marigold seeds and indulge in magic and singing songs as their ardent wish for Pecola’s baby. Planting seeds is equalled with the growth of Pecola’s baby. The act reflects their humility and humanity. They think that wanting Pecola’s baby to live is a way to counteract everyone else’s love for white dolls and girls. Although Claudia’s and Frieda’s plan of prayer and sacrifice does not work, it certainly shows hopefulness to heal the disjoined family/community. It is also their humble attempt to strengthen the inner bond between human beings.

Morrison contrasts the characters belonging to the same race: Claudia and Frieda who resist the oppression and Pauline who submits to it. It should be noted that the two girls can take stance first because they are protected by their parents and are unaware of the adult world; secondly, they have not encountered life-and-death
problems. However, the fact also remains that the willingness to defy vanishes with adulthood.

At last, flowers do not grow and Pecola’s baby dies. Claudia and Frieda also express their hatred and rage for Pecola and present her as scapegoat at the end.

All of us – all who knew her – felt so wholesome after we cleaned ourselves on her. We were so beautiful when we stood astride her ugliness. Her simplicity decorated us, her guilt sanctified us, her pain made us glow with health, her awkwardness made us think we had a sense of humor. Her inarticulateness made us believe we were eloquent. Her poverty kept us generous. Even her waking dreams we used – to silence our own nightmares. And she let us, and thereby deserved our contempt. We honed our egos on her, padded our characters with her frailty, and yawned in the fantasy of our strength.

(163)

All those who appear in the life of Pecola dump their suffocation and guilt on her. Claudia clarifies that she did not plant the seeds too deeply but it was the fault of the land of their town. The land of the entire country was hostile to marigolds that year as if trying to convey that the victim had no right to live.

In the epilogue of the novel Morrison raises some question regarding racial beauty such as why beauty needs wide public acclaim. According to her, assertion of racial beauty is a reaction against inferiority. She states that behind the urge for blue eyes there is self-loathing. She opines, “Beauty was not simply something to behold; it was something one could do.” (167) She focuses on a female child to demonstrate how domestication of race could take root in a child and mar its psychological development. As the white hegemony had repressed the blacks for centuries in America, they are not able to express their inner self. The subaltern psychology mars their lives. Morrison probes into inter-racial and intra-racial preoccupations based on colour-consciousness and economic status. She explores social and domestic aggression and not dehumanisation of characters. For they are the victims of the circumstances. She wants readers to interrogate the process of devastation. She attempts to break the silence while shaping it. Pecola symbolises beauty and suffering, hope and fear of her community. Children in Morrison are victims, activists, recorders, even oppressors – all rolled into one.
Joseph Macwan’s *Dariya* (2002) is a story of a woman’s endless suffering. The title of the novel reflects the predicament in the life of the central character Dariya. ‘Dariya’ in English means a sea or an ocean. It suggests that the life of Dariya is an ocean of sorrow. As the water of the sea is not sweet, her life is also not sweet. Dariya is a woman born in Valmiki community. Valmiki community is considered the last cadre in the backward class. The job of the community is to clean the dirt of the village. Macwan calls the community ‘protector of health’ in his *Vyathana Vitak*, a collection of character sketches. When there is scarcity of doctors these people dispose the dead bodies of animals, wipe the cow dung and clean the village. Despite all these, they are always apathised by the so-called upper caste people. The rigid caste system of the nation has always tortured the lower strata of society and has never repented for disregarding them. Set in the year 1945 – pre-independence India, the novel narrates the evil norms of society and the class that is kicked out. It covers the time when the fight for freedom was on its peak and under the influence of the missionaries, the low caste people were converting to Christianity. It also depicts the mentality of the converters.

The novel opens with the freedom movement in its full swing. There is strife between the converted Valmiki community and the Patel youth. Shantukaka is a respectable elderly person of Patidar community of the village. He is against the British Rule. He is also a neutral man who does not believe in untouchability or caste distinction. When on Sunday night all the villagers gather for *Bhajan*, Shantukaka sits in the middle of Valmiki people and knowingly asks for drinking water. Thereby, he silently breaks the class rigidity. He considers the British responsible for price-hike, scarcity of sugar and other problems in society. Although he is much respected, nobody supports him when it comes to alter the British. Major David, an officer of the Muktifoj Mission, favours the British Rule and says to the villagers that the British are a friend of the poor. He says:

> Once upon a time these people were polluted even by our reflection. They used to touch money [paid by us] by putting it on the threshold of the shop and sprinkling water on it… It is because of the British government that we got true religion. Our sins are cleansed with the blood of our Saviour. [*ek kale... paap dhovaya*] (Macwan: 2-3)
He affirms that even if lakhs of Gandhis try hard, the British government whose sun never sets, cannot be drawn out of the country. They consider their existence thanks to the British and that they will have bad times in the absence of the British. Hence he denies them to believe Khadi-worn Patel. People agree with Major David and welcome what he says by loud utterance of the name of God ‘Alleluyah!’ This shows the impact of conversion on them. They think that Swaraj is not in the benefit of the oppressed and tired of the exploitation by the upper caste they change their religion, change their God.

Patel youth, on the other hand, is writing the slogan of ‘Quit India’ on the walls of trust hospital. The Christians who were around get dispersed for safety. Being Patel by caste, nobody could stop them except Major David. Non-violent revolt is expressed by the converted Christians. When the Patels ask the reason why they do not love independence, Major David says, “British are Christians and so we are. If we can walk with respect, it is due to their reign. You still believe in untouchability…” [angrejo khristi... aabhadchhet palo chho] (4)

As the Patel has always been a dominating caste, they could not bear the insult done by the untouchables. Nobody had the right to tell them anything or stop them. One young man orders others in group to attack the low caste people as they were opposing the Patels. He addresses them as ‘pollutes’ (dhedha). Major David also announces open revolt. It is actually the fight of powers. Caste that should actually be determined on the basis of division of work comes to be fixed on the basis of birth. That creates fuss. Although the Patels are minority in number, they overrule the lower in birth. They are determined, “Tolerated a lot. Now when the time is, better to take revenge even if one is to leave the village the next day.” [bahu dahada... bhagi jayu pade.] (5) They had support from Dr. Cook and faith in the God of Army, Yehovah. The upper caste people had insulted their sisters and daughters-in-law many times and now they had an opportunity to teach them a lesson. But Major stops them at that very moment saying, “Let this man speak abusive words as per his sinful nature. We don’t want to beat them.” [aa bhai... nathi ugamvo.] (5) On the other hand it becomes even more intolerable for the Patels to step back. Shantukaka convinces both the aggressive groups to work with harmony. The Valmiki people are also afraid of the Patidar that if they stop calling them for labour work, they will not be able to earn their living. They realise the fact; they understand
the phase that India is passing through and join the Quit India movement of the Patels.

Set in the backdrop of political upheaval in colonial India, Macwan also addresses the issue of humiliation of the low caste women by those holding the seat of power. He depicts the perverted society and its corrupt ways to exploit the downtrodden. At the same time, he highlights the self-esteem of the subjugated in their fight for justice in the novel.

Kasna is a sweeper in the village. Her job is to sweep Mukhi’s veranda. Once because of the wrong direction of wind, the dust spreads over Mukhi and Ratno sitting there. Ratno thinks that Kasna, an ordinary sweeper is throwing dust on them. Mukhi also gets irritated and says, “Is this the power of the low caste!” [me’taranini... okat!] (9) He uses offensive words for Kasna. His abusive words hurt her self-esteem. Besides being disliked and abhorred by the Patidars, they are now insulted also. But Kasna is a strong woman who can fight and defend herself. The more he gets angry, the more fearless she becomes. When Mukhi is about to beat Kasna with a stick, Ratno intervenes and warns him that if Kasna also strikes him with a broom, he will have to look down. The villagers will also make an issue by saying that the village-head beat a woman. Beating someone is also related with one’s position. Not beating a woman does not come out of respect for her but out of worry for being beaten in return. A counter-attack by an untouchable becomes a matter of losing dignity for Patidars.

As Mukhi calls Kasna “my untouchable mother-in-law,” [mari hahu bhangdi] (10) she prepares to answer him for his words. She plans for an open revolt with Shaniya Mukhi. She calls women in her neighbourhood and takes out a procession. Dr. Hasyada Pandya in her article “‗Dariya’na Dariyav Streepatro” observes, “The hypnotising strength of uniting people and self-confidence that were in Gandhi’s words for independence are seen in Kasna.” [aazadi mate...jova male chhe.] (Pandya: 107) Angry and hurt by his bitter comments and to slap him for his words, she decides to arrange the marriage of her daughter Dariya with Mukhi. She tells everyone that being trivial and insignificant, they cannot refuse Mukhi’s words. They are bound to fulfil his wish. The backward class women in Macwan are not suppressed by the elite of the society. They resist and rise for the right. When the attempts are made by the upper class to crush their identity, their rebellion gives
them a unique identity. The procession marching ahead with adorned Dariya as a bride, gradually turns the marriage song into *fatana* in which evil character and misdeeds of Mukhi are exposed. The courage of the “weaker sex” frightens and freezes the close friends of Mukhi. They had made fun of those women many times but now their mouths were shut. To protect their reputation, they were not able to beat them which otherwise they used to. When Shantukaka requests them to go back, head-strong Kasna says that by going back, they will not let their reputation be smashed. Dehaikaka thinks that it is because of the independence Shantukaka wants that these people are raising their voice. It indicates that upper class does not wish social equality since they cannot bear the “other” taking the seats of power. Kanji also feels that they are marginalised in their own village. Ultimately, the decision is taken in favour of the sufferers. Fine is levied from Mukhi and Kasna is freed from sweeping his veranda. The women also take assurance from Dehai and Shantukaka for their protection, and that in case of any harassment, he will have to resign his village-headship. Thus, the journey of the subalterns in Macwan is from ‘silenced’ subaltern to ‘speaking’ subaltern.

The aftermath of war-like situation is that Kasna receives the news that Mukhi has planned to kidnap Dariya. Immediately, Kasna builds high wall surrounding the house and arranges child-marriage of Dariya thinking that nobody can harass a married woman. This is the traditional belief that people then and even at present nurture in their minds. A woman is never imagined to live her life independently. She is expected to tie a knot with a man not out of any affectionate bonding between the two counterparts but mostly out of societal compulsion and/or as a label of security. Dariya’s marriage is arranged so quickly as if marriage is a stamp for her protection. For a woman to be safe, she must have male counterpart. Although Macwan’s women are courageous, they live in some unknown fear. In her childhood, Dariya was hypnotised by an ascetic. Nobody believed that a Hindu ascetic could hypnotise an untouchable. The untouchability or caste distinction has affected people’s mentality so much that what is condemned is not a bad act of hypnotising but one’s birth in low caste. Yet another situation where the downtrodden are underestimated is when Karsan learns pistol-shooting, Mukhi surprisingly asks, “Can a *bhangi* shoot a pistol?” [*alya bhangiya... bhangta hashe?*] (24) Pistol-shooting is concerned with possessing power. The downtrodden are not
supposed to possess power or own anything. Some of the elites of the society consider Mukhi as coward as he wages war with the harijans but he thinks of resigning due to them as cowardice.

When Mukhi’s tortures cross all the limits Kasna plans for his death. She spreads kerosene in his room and when Mukhi gets up to light a cigar the sparks of the match fall on the floor and his room catches fire. His death is considered due to election politics. When the harijans are doubted for his accidental death, Mamadmiya, a close friend of Mukhi says that harijans can not be so courageous. The Valmiki community, an epitome of courage and bravery, is disregarded by the upper caste people.

In the novel the writer also appears as one of the characters. Through the character of Jasyo, Macwan questions the then societal norms. Jasyo asks Satya:

As such these Patels are polluted by us. We also have to be careful while going though the village. Mohan doesn’t allow us to drink water from a public place. You were saying that your father bows down at Ramji temple from outside. Then why they are not polluted by our young daughters and wives [while harassing them]? [aam to... nathi abhadata?] (45-6)

Jasyo thinks about the restrictions on the Valmiki community. He thinks that they are considered in the last rung of society. Although they clean the entire village, people neglect them. They humiliate them to the extent that they make sure that even their shadow does not fall upon them. They are also not allowed to fetch water from the public well. Once when no one was around, Jasyo calls Tara to fetch water from the village-well. But as the village panch comes to know they levy fine from Tara and her husband Karsan for breaking the law and polluting the well. Despite the punishment, Jasyo gains the identity of ‘merciful giver’ [diyalu datar] (47) among the Dalits. Thus, there are also the characters in the novel who, though converted, do not believe in casteism. For this reason only Jasyo is willing to have a cupful of tea made by Dariya. He says that he will not be polluted like a well. Besides the conflict between the high caste and the low caste, Macwan also addresses the issue of marginalisation within the community.
Since childhood Dariya’s husband – Lakhaman’s elder brother used to call him weak and feeble. He was very cruel with his younger brother. The elder brother always dominated the family. He had also sent his wife out. Lakhaman is infertile and his brother forces him to mix with the eunuch. Left alone, Dariya also starts doing the same work that her mother used to do. To protect her she keeps a sharp sickle with her. Dariya is youth and beauty personified. When a man teases her by commenting on keeping sickle while doing labour work, Dariya becomes aggressive. She throws a heap of garbage on his face and threatens him on the edge of the sickle. Here it is noteworthy that the Valmiki community is well aware of the fact that the upper caste needs them because nobody would do the kind of work they are doing. Hence Dariya, Kasna, Tara and others can challenge and argue with anyone. Dariya is rightly called “the incarnation of Goddess” [jogmayano avatar] (45) She manifests the Supreme Power that protects the good and destroys the evil. After the demise of her parents she takes the responsibility of her brother Dalpat and gets him married. On the other hand, Mukhi had not mended his manners even after his trial with Dariya. He exploits another woman. As she conceives an illicit child, she commits suicide. The whole village is moved by the mishap. It is at this time that Kasna thinks of killing him. Killing Mukhi is, in fact, killing an idea – the idea of casteism. Her dreadful act symbolises removal of rigid caste distinction and establishing equality. Violence by the upper caste has always been justified or forgiven. The question then is why not forgiving the Dalits as well who fight for justice? Their challenge lies in their fight for self protection. Two points are important here: one, if violence is the only way to improve the condition, it is obvious that the Dalits will also take up the weapons; two, to avoid violence, the upper caste has to be at peace first. They have to love Dalits with respect and pride. Shantukaka represents the latter idea. Where the Varna system of the Hindus has made the upper caste intriguing, selfish, inert and disgusting, people like Shantukaka strive for neutral and stable society. Unhesitatingly, he sits with the harijans in their locality, eats and drinks with them. Instances of harmony between the two communities can also be traced in the death of Kanji and Dehaikaka. When Kanji dies all the communities join his grand funeral procession without any discrimination. Shantukaka becomes the pall-bearer. Similarly, when Dahaikaka passes away, entire village, irrespective of the caste they belong to, join in cleaning the streets of the village for the funeral procession. When Kasna expresses the wish to leave the village to escape from Mukhi’s tortures, Juja
Bhagat opines that she should not disregard the whole village just because of one devil. Thus, through such instances Macwan indicates a possible future where unity prevails in true sense, where everyone lives in concord and harmony. He puts forth an idea(l) for the mass to follow.

Lakhaman, as he is proved impotent and forced by his elder brother, joins hermaphrodite – a group of people who have no space in the mainstream society. They are not allowed to meet people outside their world. In search of Lakhaman when Jasyo reaches their residence, their head tells him, “We don’t have such rules.”

Macwan represents two sections of society – one having abundance of everything and the other struggling to be known – struggling even for its identity. However, Lakhaman is not pitied for his deformity rather he becomes a respectable person due to his generosity and broadmindedness. In Lakhaman’s world Dariya is a foreigner but she remains a committed wife all throughout. When Tara suggests her to re-marries as there is no news of Lakhaman after he left his home, Dariya rejects her idea completely. Tired of waiting for Lakhaman’s return, at last, she also leaves home; takes an unknown path. Tara rightly observes, “…Some evil spirit of previous birth is re-born in our community through Dariya. Otherwise it is difficult to find such a person.”

Macwan uses the word ‘nirih’ to describe the character of Dariya. The word ‘nirih’ is made up of two words: ‘ni’ means ‘without’ and ‘ih’ means ‘desires’; the one who has no desires or the one who has killed the desires in the caste-ridden male-dominated society. She is not able to fulfil her wish of living a life of companionship with her husband as she is to fulfil the wishes and expectations of society. She is forced to live life. Dr. Hasyada Pandya rightly remarks, “Waiting and search are the two significant foundations of her life.” Thus, Dariya is not a tale of an illiterate woman but an unexpressed woman whose love remains unexpressed, wishes unfulfilled, search incomplete.

Joseph Macwan’s another novel Mari Parentar (1988) is also a tale of the problems of the oppressed class. Depicting orthodox and rigid society of pre-independent India, the novel addresses the issues of caste distinction and marginalisation within the community. As in other novels of Macwan, women are doubly oppressed – by caste and by gender. However, women are powerful and spirited enough to raise their voice against injustice. Full of confrontations and strife,
the novel unfurls various layers of subalternity and how the subalterns justify their existence.

The central character in the novel is Gauri. Courageous, outspoken and fearless, Gauri represents her community and womankind. As the child marriage prevailed in the then Indian society, Gauri is married when she is only one and a half year old. When she grows up, she does not like the idea of child marriage. She is eager to see her husband. She sends Jasyo, her relative to her in-law’s place. Jasyo is disappointed to see Gauri’s husband. He is thin and lean and not of a stature. Gauri is not willing to marry him and asks for separation. She tells her mother, “… if you force me to marry, I will hang myself. Tell my father that if he loves me, he should arrange for my separation by selling house and farm.” [jo aanano... fargati kari nakhe.] (46) As per the societal custom, in child-marriage the groom’s side had a louder say. Even if the bride’s father paid a larger sum, unless and until the groom’s side declare separation, they could neither get separated nor settle the girl with someone else. In a rigid society decision is always taken by dominant males of the family. Gauri’s in-laws deny separation until she enters their house. The village panch also decides, “Once a girl performs marriage ritual she must worship the steps of the in-law’s house. Then if she is not comfortable, who denies separation?” [ek vaar je kanya... chya nanam chhe?] (47) Gauri’s parents request her mother-in-law to settle the matter by offering monetary help but she is not convinced. Ultimately, preparations of Gauri’s marriage begin. A girl who marries once is regarded as virtuous. More than one marriage devalued the reputation of girl’s parents. Hence every seven out of ten girls used to sacrifice their life. Born as female, they were absolutely powerless and choiceless. They were allowed neither to choose their life-partners nor take decision for their life. Helpless, Gauri’s father also urges her to save his reputation. Marriage is the most sacred and the most important part of one’s life. Every young girl has a dream of marrying a man of her choice and live a life of togetherness. But Gauri, with all the tender feelings in her heart, is forced to sacrifice her life because of the reputation of her parents. Her parents also worry more for their prestige than for their daughter. For her father’s sake Gauri accepts the relationship but with firm decision to end her life shortly than to live in hell. Immediately after her marriage, Gauri’s brother-in-law tries to harass her physically. But brave Gauri beats him and leaves the house. Her revolutionary step of leaving
the husband and his family is criticised by all. Her friends ask her to bear everything like *sati*. They think that women are meant to surrender and not to rise. Gauri answers boldly, “If I don’t get a man of my choice, I will remain unmarried throughout my life but will not allow myself to be polluted by an idiot.” [man to... nai abhda dev!] (65) She asks her parents, “Tell me, am I a burden on you? As a girl grows up, should she be thrown anywhere like garbage!” [tame kyo’... fajeti devani!] (65-6) The orthodox society does not accept valiant women. As Gauri had troubled her in-laws, nobody is ready to hold her hand in marriage. For this reason she hates all the males. The author rightly observes that Gauri is a woman who would accept the challenge and would never beg pity.

There are other incidents of domestic violence in the novel. Couples like Devji and Harkha, Maniyo and Mariambhabhi, Premji and Monghi are the victims of patriarchal society. Devji, Maniyo and Premji rule over their wives. Devji’s wife Harkha says that she shoulders all the responsibilities of household and farming, takes care of the family and children. But Devji is a drunkard. He does not do any work and beats Harkha and children. When Harkha slaps him to protect her, he says, “I am a man! Being a woman, she slapped me. So I do not want her anymore…” [u marad... na joie.] (68) Harkha also declares that being a father, he must share the responsibility of children’s upbringing. Fortunately, the *panch* gives decision in favour of Harkha. Devji surrenders.

Mariam is Maniya’s second wife. He had given divorce to his first wife for no fault of her own. He likes Mariam but beats her brutally. Mariam is not able to utter a word. Jasyo tells her not to suffer and be strong like Harkha. Later when Maniyo again tries to beat her she fights back. As the duel becomes tensed, police comes. Mariam begs for protection. Police beats Maniyo badly and ties a noose around his neck to take him to police station. Elders of the village request the Rajput police to forgive him and free him. This is the first incident in the village where a woman’s fight calls the police; for the first time a man is beaten in public for ill-treating his wife.

Similarly, Premji also, prompted by his friends, tries to beat his wife Monghi. His friends believe, “A stupid and a woman never live properly without beating. The one who does not control his wife is not a man.” [dobani jaat... re’j nahi.] (76) Monghi is a loving and decent lady. She does not tolerate the cruel behaviour of her
husband. She beats him so harshly that he is forced to apologise for his misdeed. She asks, “How far is it just to tolerate men because they are born as females?” [astrino avatar... chyano nya’?] (78) As Gauri teaches a lesson to her brother-in-law, Harkha, Mariam and Monghi also do the same. From the entire village only Jasyo worships Gauri for her pride and self-esteem and the way she fights against the injustice. He states, “I strongly dislike a man unnecessarily showing power and ownership on a poor woman. I hate such men. On the other hand I also did not like a man following his wife in every little thing.” [mane potane... na gamto.] (66) However, except Jasyo all other village-men think that Gauri has taken a wrong step. They pronounce, “Gauri has crossed her limit. What like-dislike or comfort-discomfort a woman should have? She is to tolerate all that comes in her way.” [Gauri paal... levu pade.] (73) They are of the opinion that Gauri’s act will spoil other women of the village. When her friend Amba’s marriage is postponed her aunt blames Gauri thinking that she has influenced Amba. The eldest of the village, Metho also opines that because Gauri is blamed in another village, Amba’s marriage is postponed. He also considers her responsible for the women of locality going for police complaints. But Gauri faces the panch bravely. She questions:

Where were you all when my father suffered a lot and like a cow I had to go to a slaughter-house? Haven’t you asked for separation when you had to think of your pride? Then why did not you come to help me? Is it because I am a low caste? People also worship the heap of garbage while making manure in a farm! You do not respect woman at all? [mara bapana... aamanya na’i?] (84)

She reminds him about his past when her in-laws had requested to cancel the marriage because he was blind. But at that time Metho’s father did not succumb to their demand. He also sacrificed his daughter on the altar of mismatched marriage. He forces his daughter Khani to marry Khundhiyo*, Metha’s brother-in-law to save Metha’s life. As she does not like Khundhiyo, she gives a commitment to his cousin. This results into a tough fight between the two families. Panch also declares that she has to go back to Khundhiyo. “What does it matter to a girl if her husband is hump-backed or blind?” [chhokarini jatyane... toy shu?] (88) At last, Khani commits suicide. Gauri asks Bhikho also for his indifference to his cousin. Gauri had decided to show everyone their real faces. It was for the first time that a girl had questioned
Metho otherwise so far he had been giving orders. She had given an open challenge to all. Dr. Dhiraj Parmar in his article “Gujarati Dalit Sahityana Mobhi – Joseph Macwan” rightly says, “Gauri is not weak but strong. Going against the panch she breaks the capriciousness of the panch.” ['Gauri’ e... nakhya hata.] (Parmar, 227)

Madhukant Kalpit also shares a similar opinion in his article “‘Mari Parnetar’ma Tanakhato Aakrosh” that Gauri is virtuous, affectionate, mature, understanding, and self-respective. Along with being fearless and truthful, she also believed in targeting two birds with one arrow. However as nobody answers her questions, she comments, “...You consider a woman insignificant so you do not even feel like answering.” [tame chhokarin... layak nathi ganta.] (93)

The panch is known for being fair and just in its decisions. They decide that nothing untoward should happen as in case of Maniya and if married women are seen filing complain, charge will be levied. Their basic requirements will not be fulfilled. At the same time nobody will beat his wife and in case of separation panch itself will take initiative. They also put a ban on child-marriage. They send a message to Gauri’s in-laws informing that they are debarred from the caste for their misbehaviour with Gauri. They apologies immediately.

Macwan depicts the society that was ignorant, superstitious and believed in rigid tradition and custom. It was the time when the customs of Kanyavikray* and Kankukanya* were popular. A man could marry a woman by offering handsome amount. If parents could not find a match for their daughter, father will get the daughter married without taking any money from the groom. If the girl went to her in-laws without money, she was not respected much and if her father asked for more money while selling her then also she was abused. Despite such rigidity and abuses, the orthodox society did not allow any girl to die unmarried. If Kanyavikray or Kankukanya was not possible, she was expected to marry Lord Shiva. In case of Gauri villagers gossip that rather than living a life of spinster, she should marry Lord Shiva. Ignorant women used to say, “Why not Bholanath rather than holding the hand of a careless or impudent? At least she will be free from difficulties in her next birth, if not in this.” [namarmoonda... tari javay.] (99) The caste-ridden Indian society kept distinction even in the worship of God. When such marriage was to be fixed, the idol worshipped by the upper caste could not be used by the people of lower strata. They had to go to an unworshipped temple at the end of the village.
Once she was married to Lord Shiva, she was supposed to withdraw from all the worldly attachments, keep fast and live a simple life. A girl’s life dedicated to Shiva was then like walking on the edge of a sword. Gangaram Maharaj says that Gauri means Parvati. When she was born, with the grace of Lord Ganesha, the name Gauri came immediately to his mind and since then she is destined to unite with Mahadev as her name suggests. On the other hand the priest of Ramji temple tells Gauri that her caste cannot worship Lord Shiva. He says, “Look my child, your caste cannot worship Mahadev. The villagers are not happy with that. They say that God will be polluted and God will also not be happy in it. You people cannot even climb the steps of Shiva temple. Better you drop that idea.” [dekh beti,... chhodi devi.] (141-2)

When Gauri clarifies that she is not going to worship the idol that is worshipped by the high caste, the priest tells her that it is not a matter of worshiping the idol or linga of any caste since all Shivas are theirs. To this Gauri offends, “Then which God is ours Father?” [to pachhi... bapji?] (142) For a moment the priest fails to answer her question. He had never thought that an illiterate girl can ask such an intelligent question that will break the doors of darkness. The priest tells her that they cannot perform rituals like them, cannot take vows in the name of Lord Shiva and cannot compare them with the upper caste daughters in marrying the God. Gauri does not understand distinction in God. She asks further, “Has God taught such untouchability, Father?” [aavi aabhadchhet... bapji?] (142) She also asks Jasya in which scripture it is written that God belongs to them. Jasyo confesses that it was for such discrimination only that his father got converted to Christianity. Gauri doubts the Truth of the God. Her response shows her sharp intelligence and the knowledge an otherwise illiterate person can hardly have. She says,

After all, Mahadev is also the human incarnation. How will He be affected by the sorrows of a woman’s heart? Otherwise can He let the priest of Ramji temple utter such unjust words? If there would have been Truth in Lord Shiva, he would have controlled his tongue. [aakharkaj... sat hoy to...!] (149)

Mission Master Jaysing Rathod shows his readiness to help Gauri by informing the government and the police. He does not want her to do anything out of helplessness. He also shows his willingness to marry her leaving the job in mission school and his dream of becoming a priest. But Destiny has decided something else
for Gauri. She does not want her parents to bear the insults by the villagers, invite trouble for her two younger brothers and let the villagers boycott her father. Jasyo observes about Gauri that she was so firm, determined and obedient that if her father asked her to end her life as a solution to put an end to all the riddles, she would happily take poison. She does exactly what Jasyo had observed in her. She accepts death. She prefers death to destruction of the family by marrying Jaysing Rathod, originally Rajput converted to Christianity. She sacrifices her personal gain for the sake of collective reputation of the family. Not in vain, Macwan calls Gauri in the introductory pages of the novel “Light of the darkness of traditional servitude”. [rudhidayana tamasno ajvaas] (5) Gauri lives not in years but in deeds. Her truthful life enlightens the lives of many others.

Another episode of caste distinction can be traced at Mukhi’s place. Khano of Gauri’s family works as a labourer at Mukhi’s place. He exploits him and beats him for not working properly. Tired of his torture, Khano takes revenge. He also strikes Mukhi in return. Injured Mukhi says, “…This untouchable killed me…” [hahra dhedhae... nachyo...] (105) Khano threatens Mukhi that if he even speaks his name, he will kill him. Belonging to low caste and being labourers, they were not allowed to complain. They were beaten even if they committed a small mistake. As Khano had beaten Mukhi, people were afraid of Patel’s attack.

Mukhi also does not allow the downtrodden to move around without proper haircut. As Devo’s and Dungar’s hair were grown a little, Mukhi orders Baliyo to cut their hair and tells him that if he gets polluted by touching them, he should take bath. Devo and Dungar are moved by shame, insult and guilt. Every year Bhavaiyas used to travel from village to village to perform Bhavai and entertain the folks. But because of the insult of Devo and Dungar, they perform Bhavai in some other village on the incident of their hair-cutting. The performers are good at making fun through their performance. Jivram Mukhi comes to know about it but could not take any action as the Bhavaiyas may spoil his name. To teach a lesson to Mukhi, the labourers think of acting like Bhavaiyas with the help of the Christians. They also think of becoming Christians. Due to such subjugation only, Jaysing Rathod’s father had got converted to Christianity. Rathod recollects, “Tormented during the famine of ’56, my father got converted but he died contented and told me his last words: ‘Son, we have found true path and true religion … Maintain your cultural values of
Rajput in being loyal to the religion.” [chhapana duka... jalvi janje.] (182) The lines suggest how a subaltern is made to change his or her tradition, culture, religion and thereby the entire being because of the tortures by the upper class. Being himself a sufferer, Master Jaysing Rathod motivates them to resist and fight. An open revolt breaks out against the oppressors. Rathod asks them to live with pride. He says, “For long you lived in subjugation and revulsion. Now learn to die. You can live with respect only if you get rid of the fear of death... Your population is large but there is no unity, no self-respect. Oh, learn to live with little self-respect.” [bahu da’da... jivvanu to shikho.] (116) In this regard Manilal Suthar observes in Jindagi Jivyano Harakh, “The author intends to teach from this incident that... every human being has to be self-existent to live with self-respect.” [lekhakno nirdesh... thavu pade chhe.] (244) Looking at their spirit, the attackers disappear. Mukhi and his friends sit helpless. Rathod is successful in uniting the downtrodden.

The society that believed in the evils of untouchability does not entertain the low class to occupy the seats in public transport. Preference is given to upper class to avail the facility. Until they get the seats, the lower class could not occupy. As Master Jaysing Rathod takes the seat and some Patidars stand in a public van, the driver Gulam Mahamed insults him, “Until this Christian gets down, I will not drive!” [jabtak... chalavunga] (120) Rathod reminds him that his Hindu brethren also got converted to Muslim as they had also suffered. After this incident Master starts buying Soda and *pan* from Gulam’s shop. Afraid of police, Mukhi asks him to tolerate. They are not able to take revenge on the oppressed. In just one day Master teaches them how to honour the self. Mukhi and others worry that if these people take so much liberty now, what they will do after independence. Master asks the entire Vankar community to hold each other’s hands to fight the subordination as they are exploited in various ways by the Patidars. The farmers are not paid wages until they go on strike. Khano informs all not to go for labour. Maniyo also takes away the gold buttons and bracelet of Bavji Revanda as a return of his unpaid wages. The whole community comes together and decides not to tolerate the mean.

Truly, Mari Parnetar is a painful saga of the downtrodden who survive the social, economic and physical exploitation by the ruling class. They struggle hard to make their existence meaningful in a society that is orthodox and follows rigid codes of conduct. Raising voice against the oppressors and non-cooperation to them, their
revolt against untouchability are some of the issues that the characters are confronted with. Although they are treated worse than animals, they do not leave their human side. The sufferers are full of tender feelings and sense of respect for the self and for others. Madhukant Kalpit rightly observes in this regards that in this tragic life-story smashed in the social reality the characters are depicted fighting against women exploitation, servitude, gender demarcation, diplomatic panch. The characters do not let go of their pride and fight for the cause of values. Gauri proves to be the harbinger of equality. In the preface to the novel Manilal Patel rightly remarks, “… Gauri is a real woman of a different soil. However to suffer for no fault of her own and to burn in the fire lit by her relatives or society is her destiny. She raises voice while suffering and against suffering.” [Gauri nokhi... avaj uthave chhe.] (16)

Suppression to rejection is the journey of the subalterns in Toni Morrison and Joseph Macwan respectively. In Morrison they are hyphenated from the mainstream because they are children and female whereas in Macwan they are able to alter the positions of the ruler and the ruled because they cultivate sense of respect with age. Morrison’s characters mutually destruct each other, irrespective of the race they belong to. Macwan’s characters enlighten and sublime each other. While in Morrison the black/white divide gives rise to disgust even for one’s kin, in Macwan the high and the low castes unite when a respectable man of the society dies. Death is inevitable for all, more so for the marginalised in both the cultures but in one it is destructive; in other it is celebrating. Female characters in Morrison strive for recognition in white society. Female characters in Macwan live without it – they are recognised by their resistance. While Morrison presents her characters compromising on their ethical values and succumbing to the demands of the superior class, Macwan depicts his characters embodying moral values and making the upper class mend the laws for the fairness to prevail. Morrison’s characters let go of their real self to merge with the natives whereas Macwan’s characters fight and rightfully ask for equality. It is noteworthy to refer to Bharati Vaidya’s opinion here. In her article “Jivannu Varvu Vastav Aalekhati Vishrambh Kathao” she writes:

A peculiarity of Shree Joseph Macwan’s literary world is that... his characters are thrown to tragic... They experience unimaginable sorrow and cunningness. Sorrow and the experience of the cunning only becomes their destiny. The seed of destiny are in the nature of
the characters or in the social situations surrounding them. Despite
knowing the matter, it is not in their hand to bring changes. The
characters are helpless to live succumbing to it. [Shree Joseph
Macwanni... majbur chhe.] (Vaidya: 185)

To this it may be admitted that though Macwan’s characters encounter sorrows and
sadness in their life, they do not surrender to it. They do rise and resist. In the novels
under study the characters are seen raising their voice, demanding their rights, paving
their way seeking protection of any sort. Kasna, Dariya, Gauri, etc. are the leading
examples of how a woman can fight back. Bharati Vaidya’s observation that the
characters fail to bring a change in their condition reminds one of Kasna asking the
panch for redemption from cleaning Mukhi’s veranda, Gauri’s decision not to go to
father-in-law’s house if the marriage is not a union of heart, her fiery questions to the
panch and to the temple-priest interrogating basic human values and the Truth of
God. These and several other instances reveal that though these characters live a
pathetic life mostly ending in death, they rise in death. Their life is not filled with
only the tragic (karuna) but also with heroism (veer) or bravery (shaurya), with the
latter dominating.

Subjugated by colour and caste the blacks and the Vankars represent their
trials during the then cultural disturbance in their respective nations and their
attempts to locate themselves in the storm.
REFERENCES


End Notes:

*Khundhiyo is called so because he has a hump in his back.

*Kanyavikray – selling of the girls. Any man could marry a girl who paid for her

*Kankukanya – If a girl’s father is not able to give money, the girl is married without taking money from the groom’s side

*pan – a roll of betel-leaf with areca-nut, lime, etc.