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Intersecting Traumas: A Cross-Cultural Study of Race, Caste, And Gender in Morrison's And Bama's Fiction

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Abstract

This study examines the intersecting aspects of race, caste, and gender through a comparative analysis of Toni Morrison's African American tales and Bama's Dalit feminist works. Although the authors are from different places and cultures, they both write about the psychological and societal damage that comes from structural oppression. Morrison's The Bluest Eye and Beloved, along with Bama's Karukku and Sangati, illustrate the enduring influence of historical hierarchies—racial enslavement and caste patriarchy—on identity, belonging, and resistance. This research employs frameworks from intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989), subaltern studies (Spivak, 1988), and trauma theory (Caruth, 1996) to investigate how memory, body, and voice function as arenas of both oppression and healing. The study highlights how both Morrison and Bama reconstruct silenced histories, transforming individual trauma into collective consciousness through narrative resistance.

Keywords: Intersectionality, Trauma Theory, Subaltern Studies, Feminist Literature, Cross-Cultural Comparative Analysis

1. Introduction

The study of trauma in literature often transcends the boundaries of culture and history, revealing a universal struggle against structures of marginalisation. At the heart of such literary investigations lies the recognition that trauma is not only individual suffering but also the imprint of systemic violence—of historical erasure, silenced voices, and inscribed bodies. This research proposes that for the African-American novelist Toni Morrison and the Dalit feminist writer Bama (also known as Susie Tharakan), fiction becomes more than narrative: it becomes testimony, a reclamation of agency through voice, memory, and body.

Toni Morrison's early work, such as The Bluest Eye (1970) and later the monumental Beloved (1987), reconstructs the inherited wounds of racial slavery, segregation, white-beauty standards, and the internalisation of inferiority. For example, in The Bluest Eye we read of Pecola Breedlove's yearning:

"A little black girl who wanted to rise up out of the pit of her blackness and see the world with blue eyes."

And again:

"It never occurred to either of us that the earth itself might have been unyielding. We had dropped our seeds in our own little plot of black dirt…" (p. 49 in some editions).

These lines indicate how race is inscribed not just socially but physically ("blackness", "earth", "seeds") and how the longing for the "blue eyes" becomes a metaphor for internalised white-normative beauty and belonging.

On the other hand, Bama's work—especially the autobiographical testimony Karukku (1992) and the collective narrative Sangati (1994) — exposes the daily humiliations and subjugation experienced by Dalit women within Indian society. In Karukku, she writes:

"When I was studying in the third class, I hadn't yet heard people speak openly of untouchability. But I had already seen, felt, experienced and been humiliated by what it is." (p. 11)

And:

"…the Naicker women would pour out the water from a height of four feet, while Paatti and the others received and drank it with cupped hands held to their mouths. I always felt terrible when I watched this." (p. 14)

These first-person embodied accounts articulate how caste oppression is inscribed on the body, the everyday ritual, the water-cup, the "untouchable" touch. Moreover, they show how gender and caste combine to compound trauma: Dalit women are positioned both as caste-victims and gender-victims, in what might be termed "double marginalisation".

Though Morrison and Bama come from very different geo-cultural contexts—African-American communities in the United States and Dalit Christian communities in Tamil Nadu respectively—their writings articulate remarkably parallel configurations of structural oppression: race (in the US) or caste (in India) functions as the major axis of social exclusion; gender further complicates the trajectory of trauma and memory; and identity and belonging are constantly contested through narrative, voice and body. This cross-cultural study aims to understand **how** race, caste, and gender intersect to shape experiences of trauma and resistance in Morrison's and Bama's fiction, and **how** both writers employ narrative strategies — such as fragmented memory, embodied testimony, dislocated voice, collective mourning — to transform pain into empowerment.

In particular, the study will explore three interlocking dimensions: memory, body, and voice. Memory becomes the archive of unspeakable violence (for example, Sethe's "rememory" in Beloved, or Bama's childhood scenes of humiliation in Karukku). The body is the site on which oppression is inscribed—Pecola's black skin, Sethe's scar, Dalit women's "cupped hands", the taboo of touch. Voice becomes the medium of resistance—Morrison's multiple narrators and layered temporalities disrupt dominant narratives; Bama's colloquial Dalit Christian Tamil infuses her work with testimonial authenticity and subaltern articulation. Underlying all of this is the theoretical framing of **intersectionality** (Kimberlé Crenshaw, 1989), **subaltern studies** (Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 1988) and trauma theory (Cathy Caruth, 1996) — providing the lenses to map how multiple oppressions (race/caste × gender × class) converge, how the subaltern subject is silenced and yet (re)emerges in narrative, and how trauma must be both witnessed and narrated in order to be healed.

The present investigation therefore situates Morrison and Bama within a comparative transnational feminist-trauma framework, moving beyond mere analogy to interrogate how structural violence is culturally mediated, how individual and collective traumas overlap, and how narrative practices can become acts of witnessing, healing, and resistance. By analysing textual lines, narrative form, characterisation, and cultural context, this study will trace the pathways from oppression to voice, from memory to agency.

2. Objectives of the Study

1. To analyze how Toni Morrison and Bama depict trauma arising from racial and caste hierarchies.
2. To explore the intersection of gender with race and caste in shaping women's oppression and resistance.
3. To examine narrative strategies of remembrance, silence, and voice in both authors' works.
4. To highlight cross-cultural parallels in their representations of body, memory, and identity.

3. Theoretical Framework

First, Intersectionality Theory, created by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, says that people's experiences of discrimination are affected by a number of things functioning together, like race, caste, class, and gender. A person is not oppressed solely due to her gender or her affiliation with a specific race or caste; rather, it is the intricate interplay and overlap of different identities that leads to oppression. A Black woman in America or a Dalit woman in India experiences dual injustices—one stemming from societal gender bias and the other from racial or caste hierarchies. This theory aids the current study in examining how the female characters in Morrison's and Bama's works encounter multiple forms of inequality concurrently.

Second, Trauma Theory, examined by academics such as Cathy Caruth (1996) and Judith Herman (1992), elucidates how distressing individual or communal experiences inflict profound emotional and psychological injuries. Trauma encompasses not only a historical occurrence but also the enduring impact of that occurrence on an individual's life and memories. Morrison's protagonists, like Sethe in Beloved, and Bama's narrator in Karukku both have memories that they can't forget but can't properly talk about. Their experiences illustrate how trauma integrates into both the individual's internal experience and the

collective history of the community. These characters try to deal with, remember, and heal from that sorrow by creating stories.

Finally, Subaltern Studies, particularly the scholarship of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988), interrogates the capacity of marginalized groups—such as the impoverished, the colonized, or the lower-caste—to genuinely articulate their voices and be acknowledged. Spivak's renowned inquiry, "Can the subaltern speak?" has significant relevance for this subject. Bama, a Dalit woman writer, utilizes her own life story to answer such topic. Through Karukku and Sangati, she writes herself and her community into history, giving voice to people who have been denied one for a long time. Her use of the local language, her own experiences, and her straightforward tone make her writing a way to fight against the power of upper-caste and patriarchal groups.

4. Comparative Context

Although Toni Morrison and Bama belong to two different cultural worlds — the United States and India — their works mirror each other in surprising and powerful ways. Both write from within communities marked by centuries of oppression: African Americans shaped by the legacy of slavery, and Dalits burdened by the rigid hierarchy of caste. Their fiction becomes a space to question inherited systems of power and to re-imagine identity through memory, storytelling, and resistance.

In **Toni Morrison's America**, the wound of slavery remains open even after its official abolition. Her novels reveal how racism, economic inequality, and cultural stereotypes continue to shape the lives of Black people long after emancipation. In The Bluest Eye (1970), Morrison writes about Pecola Breedlove, a young Black girl who prays for blue eyes because she believes that only by looking like a white child can she be beautiful or loved. Morrison describes this painful longing as "the bluest eye, in this world where beauty was white" (p. 23). Through this single image, she captures how racial hierarchy works not only through social structures but also through the mind — turning self-love into self-hatred.

In Beloved (1987), the haunting of the main character, Sethe, by her dead child symbolises how slavery continues to haunt Black consciousness. Morrison uses the ghost as a metaphor for memory itself — a reminder that the past cannot be buried. When Sethe says, "It's not a story to pass on" (p. 275), Morrison plays with the double meaning: the story is too painful to retell, yet too important to forget. Her narrative structure — shifting voices, fragmented memories, and circular time — mirrors the process of trauma itself, where pain returns again and again until it is faced.

In **Bama's India**, caste functions much like race in Morrison's world — as an inherited social order that defines purity, status, and human worth. In Karukku (1992), Bama describes her shock as a child when she first realises what untouchability means:

"When I was studying in the third class, I hadn't yet heard people speak openly of untouchability. But I had already seen, felt, experienced and been humiliated by what it is." (p. 11)

Here, the language is simple but piercing. Like Morrison, Bama shows how discrimination is learned at an early age, through ordinary acts — a teacher's tone, a neighbour's insult, or the way water is poured from a height to avoid "pollution."

Her second book, Sangati (1994), expands this personal story into a collective one. The women in Bama's village work endlessly — cooking, cleaning, carrying water, and enduring violence — yet their laughter and courage keep the community alive. Bama writes, "Our women have hard lives… but they have laughter in their mouths, even when their hearts are full of tears." (p. 55) This sentence could easily echo the strength of Morrison's Baby Suggs or Sethe, who also carry their pain with a quiet dignity that defies erasure.

Both writers reveal that **oppression is not only external but also psychological**. Racism and casteism create what Frantz Fanon called an "epidermalised inferiority," where the skin itself becomes a mark of shame. Pecola's wish for blue eyes and Bama's childhood shame about her caste are two sides of the same experience — the internalisation of social contempt. In

both cases, the female body becomes the battlefield of history: it bears wounds, carries memory, and seeks release through voice.

Another key parallel lies in **their use of language**. Morrison reshapes English to sound like the spoken rhythms of Black communities — a mix of myth, song, and everyday speech. Similarly, Bama breaks literary Tamil conventions by writing in her own dialect, the speech of Dalit Christian women. In doing so, both transform the language of the coloniser or upper caste into a tool of resistance. Their linguistic defiance gives authenticity to their stories and reclaims dignity for those whose voices have been suppressed. Culturally, Morrison and Bama also share a **spiritual dimension**. Morrison's work is rooted in African American folklore and Biblical imagery, blending Christianity with ancestral myth. Bama, a Dalit Christian, reinterprets Christian faith from the margins, exposing hypocrisy within the Church while celebrating Christ as a figure of equality and compassion. Both women turn religion — historically a weapon of control — into a site of liberation and inner strength.

Ultimately, Morrison and Bama show that the struggles of the Black and Dalit woman are not identical, but deeply connected. Both suffer the double burden of social exclusion and gender subordination. Yet both also reveal resilience born out of community, memory, and storytelling. Where Morrison's characters seek redemption through remembrance and love, Bama's find dignity through solidarity and speech. Their works together form a cross-cultural dialogue about survival — a reminder that the fight for human dignity transcends geography, colour, and caste.

5. Analysis and Discussion

5.1 Toni Morrison: Memory, Race, and the Haunted Self

The creative worlds of Toni Morrison and Bama serve as mirrors reflecting centuries of pain, struggle, and survival. Both writers use fiction not merely as an artistic medium but as an ethical act of remembrance — giving voice to those silenced by race, caste, and gender. The following analysis explores how these authors portray trauma through four interconnected dimensions: **memory**, **body**, **voice**, and **community**.

5.1 Memory and the Haunting Past

In both Morrison's and Bama's works, trauma lives on through memory — a memory that refuses to die. Morrison's Beloved (1987) embodies this idea most powerfully through the ghost of Sethe's murdered child, who returns as a living presence. The novel opens with the chilling line:

"124 was spiteful. Full of a baby's venom." (Beloved, p. 3)

This haunting is not merely supernatural; it symbolizes the persistence of slavery's horror. Sethe's act of killing her baby rather than allowing her to be enslaved becomes an act of both love and trauma. Morrison forces her readers to confront the emotional truth behind the historical record — that freedom and motherhood were irreconcilable under slavery. The ghost of Beloved represents the repressed memory that demands to be acknowledged, echoing Cathy Caruth's view that trauma is "the story of a wound that cries out" (Unclaimed Experience, 1996, p. 4).

Similarly, in Bama's Karukku (1992), memory functions as a double-edged sword. The very title "Karukku" means "palmyra leaves with serrated edges" — a metaphor for pain and resistance. Bama remembers the moment she became aware of her caste difference:

"When I saw my brother carry a packet of food for the landlord holding it by the string, without touching it, I laughed. Later, my grandmother told me we must never touch upper-caste things because we are polluted. I felt something break inside me." (Karukku, p. 12)

This moment of revelation is as traumatic for Bama as Sethe's haunting is for Morrison. The memory marks the beginning of her consciousness of inequality. Both writers use recollection as a form of awakening — an act of reclaiming identity from a history that tried to erase it.

5.2 The Body as a Site of Trauma and Resistance

The body, in both Morrison and Bama, carries the physical and emotional scars of oppression. In Beloved, the "chokecherry tree" on Sethe's back — a scar from a whipping —

becomes one of the most iconic images in African American literature. Morrison writes:

"It had been a tree. A chokecherry tree. Trunk, branches, and even leaves. Tiny little chokecherry leaves." (Beloved, p. 20)

Here, Sethe's body becomes a living text, engraved with history. Yet Morrison transforms the scar from a mark of shame into a symbol of survival. What once represented dehumanisation is now reinterpreted as a form of natural beauty — a testament to endurance.

In The Bluest Eye (1970), the trauma of the body manifests through Pecola Breedlove's obsession with whiteness. Morrison writes,

"It had occurred to Pecola some time ago that if her eyes were different, that is to say, beautiful, she herself would be different." (p. 46)

Pecola's desire for blue eyes is a psychological scar — a symptom of internalised racism that equates beauty with whiteness. The body becomes the battlefield where society's prejudice is fought and lost.

Bama's characters, too, bear bodily marks of caste and labour. In Sangati (1994), she writes of Dalit women:

"Their bodies are crushed from carrying water pots, firewood, and loads of bricks. Even when they are pregnant, they work in the fields until the moment of childbirth." (Sangati, p. 32)

For these women, the body is both a site of suffering and strength. Like Sethe's scar, the labouring Dalit woman's body embodies survival. Bama does not romanticise this pain but redefines it as resilience — the capacity to live and resist despite injustice.

5.3 The Voice: From Silence to Assertion

Both Morrison and Bama use the act of storytelling itself as a form of healing. Morrison once said, "If you are free, you need to free somebody else." Her narrative technique — shifting perspectives, fragmented timelines, and polyphonic voices — mirrors the collective experience of her community. In Beloved, the shifting first-person sections ("I will call her Beloved. She is mine.") show how memory is shared and refracted through multiple consciousnesses. The use of non-linear narration suggests that trauma resists simple chronology — it lives in fragments.

In Karukku, Bama's first-person voice breaks through generations of silence. Writing in colloquial Tamil — the language of the street and the churchyard — she deliberately rejects "literary" purity. Her narrative voice is confessional, angry, and deeply personal:

"For hundreds of years we have been told we are inferior. We believed it. But now we must open our eyes. Our strength is in our unity." (Karukku, p. 72)

This act of speech — raw, emotional, and direct — is itself revolutionary. It embodies what Gayatri Spivak (1988) questioned: "Can the subaltern speak?" Bama's answer is a resounding yes — not through borrowed academic language, but through her own lived idiom.

Morrison's The Bluest Eye similarly empowers marginalised voices through its structure. The story is told not by an omniscient narrator but by Claudia, a young Black girl who witnesses Pecola's decline. Claudia's narration interrupts the myth of white perfection by restoring Black girls' inner lives to literature. Her opening line — "Quiet as it's kept, there were no marigolds in the fall of 1941" (p. 3) — announces that something is wrong with the natural and moral order of the world. Morrison thus transforms language itself into a form of resistance, turning storytelling into remembrance.

5.4 Community, Sisterhood, and Healing

Despite the weight of oppression, both Morrison and Bama end their narratives with a sense of collective strength. In Beloved, the final section shows the community of women coming together to exorcise the ghost:

"They stopped praying and took a step back, then another, then all at once they let out their breath." (Beloved, p. 258)

This moment of unity symbolises the power of shared voice — an act of communal healing that replaces isolation with solidarity.

In Sangati, Bama captures similar moments of collective female strength:

"Our women may be poor, but they have such spirit. When one is beaten, the others run to her help. When one weeps, the others console her." (Sangati, p. 45)
This everyday solidarity mirrors Morrison's scenes of women working, praying, and remembering together. Both writers thus redefine resistance not as violent rebellion but as compassion, endurance, and storytelling.

5.3 Intersectional Parallels

The intersection of race, caste, and gender forms the most crucial comparative ground between Toni Morrison and Bama. Both writers reveal that oppression operates through intertwined hierarchies — economic, cultural, and psychological — which determine how individuals experience trauma and how they resist it. Although they emerge from different historical contexts, Morrison's African American women and Bama's Dalit women inhabit remarkably similar social positions: they are excluded, silenced, and exploited, yet they continue to assert humanity through memory, voice, and community.

Dimension	Morrison (Race)	Bama (Caste)
Oppression Structure	Slavery, segregation, internalised racism	Caste hierarchy, untouchability, patriarchy
Victimhood & Resistance	Black motherhood, repressed memory	Dalit womanhood, testimonial voice
Language & Expression	Poetic, fragmented, symbolic	Vernacular, oral, testimonial
Healing Process	"Rememory" and reconciliation	Collective solidarity and self-awareness

Oppression Structure: Race and Caste as Systems of Dehumanisation

Both race and caste are not simply categories of identity; they are historical systems of control. In Morrison's America, slavery institutionalised the ownership of bodies and the denial of personhood. The legacy of this violence continues to shape Black consciousness in Beloved and The Bluest Eye. Morrison writes of Sethe:
"Freeing yourself was one thing; claiming ownership of that freed self was another." (Beloved, p. 95)
This sentence captures how freedom after slavery did not automatically restore dignity. The scars of dehumanisation remained internalised — a point that echoes Kimberlé Crenshaw's idea that oppression is not linear but overlapping.

Victimhood and Resistance: From Suffering to Assertion

For Morrison, Black motherhood becomes both a burden and a form of rebellion. Sethe in Beloved kills her child rather than allow her to live as a slave, turning maternal love into an act of radical defiance. The same motherhood that society devalues becomes the source of empowerment. Morrison redefines the Black mother as a keeper of memory, whose love resists the erasure of her people's past.
In contrast, Bama's Dalit women resist not through dramatic rebellion but through daily endurance and collective strength. In Sangati, she portrays women who work in fields, kitchens, and homes, yet continue to laugh and help one another. One woman says:
"Even if we are beaten today, we will go to work tomorrow. What else can we do?" (Sangati, p. 47)

Language and Expression: The Politics of Speech

Language is central to both authors' politics of liberation. Morrison manipulates English to echo African American oral rhythms — blues cadences, Biblical resonance, and folklore. The narrative voice in The Bluest Eye moves between the innocence of Claudia's child-perspective and the lyrical introspection of the omniscient narrator, symbolising a community of voices. The fragmentation of her narrative mirrors the fragmentation of Black identity under racism. Bama performs a similar linguistic revolution in Tamil literature. Writing in the dialect of her Dalit Christian community, she rejects the elite Tamil used by upper-caste

writers. Her prose in Karukku is rhythmic, conversational, and unapologetically colloquial. By writing "as people speak," she transforms ordinary speech into literary resistance. This act reclaims the power to define truth — turning "broken" language into a sign of authenticity, much like Morrison transforms oral tradition into a form of written art. Both writers thus demonstrate that language itself can be a tool of emancipation. Morrison liberates the English language from Eurocentric grammar and meaning; Bama liberates Tamil from Brahmanical control. In doing so, they make the very act of narration a political statement: to speak is to exist.

Healing Process: Remembering as Resistance

Healing in both literary worlds begins when the characters confront their pain. Morrison introduces the idea of "rememory," the process of revisiting the past to understand it:

"If a house burns down, it's gone, but the place—the picture of it—stays, and not just in my rememory, but out there, in the world." (Beloved, p. 35)

For Sethe, remembering is not an act of dwelling in sorrow but reclaiming ownership of her history. The ghost of Beloved must be faced so that Sethe can live again. Morrison suggests that only through memory can trauma be transformed into understanding.

Bama's healing process, by contrast, lies in collective awakening. Through sharing stories of exploitation and endurance, Dalit women in Sangati create solidarity. Bama writes:

"As each woman tells her story, we learn that none of us are alone." (Sangati, p. 68)

This collective narration becomes a therapeutic act — what Judith Herman (1992) calls "recovery through community." While Morrison's healing is psychological and individual, Bama's is social and communal. Yet both depend on the reclaiming of memory and voice as instruments of liberation.

5.4 Feminist Reclamation and the Body

In both Morrison's and Bama's fiction, the **female body** becomes a living archive — a site where pain, memory, and survival coexist. It bears the imprints of violence inflicted by patriarchy, racism, and caste hierarchy, yet it also emerges as the ground for resistance and self-definition.

In Beloved, Morrison inscribes trauma onto the skin through Sethe's scar, famously described as a "chokecherry tree." The white scars, shaped like branches, symbolise the deep roots of slavery — marks of both cruelty and endurance. Morrison writes:

"It looked like a chokecherry tree. Trunk, branches, and even leaves. Tiny little chokecherry leaves." (Beloved, p. 20)

This description transforms Sethe's wounded back into a paradoxical image — something beautiful growing out of violence. The scar, once a sign of dehumanisation, becomes a testament to survival. Morrison's language, rooted in Biblical and natural imagery, reclaims the Black female body from the gaze of the oppressor. It no longer exists as a passive object of pain; it becomes a symbol of resilience and creativity.

Similarly, in The Bluest Eye, the body becomes a canvas for psychological trauma. Pecola's wish for blue eyes and fair skin mirrors the colonial and racial obsession with whiteness. Her self-loathing reflects what bell hooks calls "the politics of domination," where beauty becomes a tool for oppression. Morrison exposes how the social gaze fractures the female self, showing that bodily alienation is a product of cultural conditioning, not biological inferiority.

In Bama's Karukku and Sangati, the Dalit female body bears the twin burdens of caste and gender. Her women's bodies are exhausted by endless labour, scarred by domestic violence, and controlled by religious and social taboos. Bama observes:

"Their bodies are broken and their hands are full of calluses. They work in the fields until their backs bend. Yet they never rest." (Sangati, p. 33)

Through such imagery, Bama shows that oppression is inscribed not in metaphors but in daily, material realities — hunger, fatigue, assault, and childbirth without care. Yet, just as Morrison transforms Sethe's scar into a site of strength, Bama redefines these bodies as emblems of courage. They may be worn down, but they are never defeated.

For both writers, the body is not merely a vessel of suffering but a repository of collective history. In Sethe's "chokecherry tree" or the calloused hands of Dalit women, one reads generations of endurance. Judith Butler's concept of "the performativity of pain" (1990) applies aptly here — pain becomes a performance of survival, and survival itself is an act of defiance.

5.5 The Role of Community and Silence

Community in Morrison's and Bama's works serves as both a space of healing and a source of complicity. Silence — whether imposed or chosen — becomes a central motif that reveals the complex dynamics of power, shame, and survival.

In The Bluest Eye, Pecola's psychological collapse is not merely a personal tragedy but a collective failure. The community's silence — their refusal to intervene or empathise — enables her downfall. Claudia, the child narrator, later reflects with guilt:

"All of our waste we dumped on her and she absorbed it. We were so beautiful when we stood astride her ugliness." (The Bluest Eye, p. 205)

This confession exposes how the oppressed internalise the logic of oppression. Morrison criticises not just the external racist system but also the community's internalised self-hatred. Silence here becomes a moral wound — a sign that social trauma thrives when victims turn away from one another.

In Beloved, however, Morrison reimagines community as a site of redemption. The women who come together to exorcise the ghost at 124 perform a ritual of collective healing. The scene echoes traditional African American spiritual practices, suggesting that solidarity and shared voice can break the curse of silence. This communal act fulfills bell hooks's belief that "healing begins where domination ends — in shared speech and love." Bama, too, portrays community as both oppressive and liberating. Within her Dalit village, caste hierarchy and patriarchy coexist. Women face harsh conditions, and even men within their community reproduce gender-based oppression. Yet, Bama's narrative shows how female solidarity cuts through this oppression. In Sangati, she writes:

"If one woman is beaten, others run to help her. When one cries, all share her sorrow." (Sangati, p. 45)

Here, Bama presents a vision of community built on empathy rather than hierarchy. Her women turn shared pain into mutual support, redefining silence not as submission but as strategic endurance — a pause before protest.

Moreover, silence in Karukku represents both constraint and rebellion. The Dalit woman's silence is forced upon her by caste structures and religious institutions that deny her voice. Yet Bama transforms this silence into writing itself — the act of narration breaks centuries of muteness. As Gayatri Spivak (1988) asked, "Can the subaltern speak?" Bama answers not with a theoretical essay but with lived testimony. Her autobiographical voice converts silence into speech, absence into presence.

6. Findings

This study finds that Toni Morrison and Bama, though they write in very different cultural settings, both tell powerful stories about how people—especially women—live with pain, remember it, and rise above it. In Morrison's world, the wounds come from the long history of slavery and racism; in Bama's world, they come from caste discrimination and patriarchy**.** Yet, both show that even in the harshest conditions, women find ways to survive, remember, and speak for themselves.

Both writers use **memory** as a way to heal. In Beloved, Morrison shows that forgetting the past does not bring peace; only by facing it can one begin to heal. Sethe's "rememory" of her painful experiences helps her understand her worth and her right to be free. In Karukku, Bama also goes back to her childhood memories—not to stay trapped in pain, but to expose the truth of caste oppression and awaken pride in her identity. For both authors, remembering is not weakness; it is courage. It turns silence into voice and suffering into strength.

The **female body** in their books tells stories that words cannot. Morrison's Sethe carries scars on her back in the shape of a "chokecherry tree"—marks of slavery and abuse that also show

endurance. Bama's women have hard-working bodies, bent from labour and burdened by poverty, yet they keep going. Both authors show that women's bodies are not symbols of shame but living evidence of survival. The body becomes a record of history, strength, and resistance. Language is another strong link between the two. Morrison reshapes English to sound like the songs and speech of African Americans, giving beauty and rhythm to their voice. Bama writes in the everyday Tamil of Dalit women, which was once dismissed as "low" or "impure." By using their people's natural way of speaking, both writers challenge the idea that only "high" language deserves literature. Their writing proves that truth can be spoken in any voice — and that every voice matters. Both Morrison and Bama also highlight the power of community. In Morrison's The Bluest Eye, Pecola's pain grows because no one helps her; the community's silence allows her to fall apart. But in Beloved, women come together in a powerful moment of prayer to drive out the ghost, showing that love and unity can heal even deep wounds. Bama's Sangati shows a similar truth — Dalit women may face violence and poverty, but they always stand together, comforting and protecting one another. Their unity is their power.

In the end, both authors show that freedom is not just political — it is emotional, spiritual, and shared. True healing comes when people tell their stories, listen to one another, and rebuild their self-worth. Morrison and Bama turn pain into literature that gives hope. They remind readers that when the oppressed finally speak, they do more than break silence — they create history.

7. Conclusion

Toni Morrison and Bama, though they belong to two very different worlds, both show how deeply systems like race and caste can hurt people and strip away their dignity. Their women characters—Sethe in Beloved, Pecola in The Bluest Eye, and Bama herself in Karukku—carry the memories of generations of pain and injustice. Through them, we see how society's unfair rules and institutions continue to control people's lives, even long after slavery or untouchability are said to have ended. But both writers refuse to let their stories end in hopelessness. Instead, they use storytelling as an act of courage and healing. By remembering and writing about their people's suffering, they give meaning to pain and turn it into strength. Their stories help reclaim history from those who tried to silence it. Morrison and Bama show that speaking out—no matter how difficult—is the first step toward freedom. In their fiction, writing becomes survival. It is a way of saying, "We are still here." Every page becomes a small act of resistance against forgetting. Through their characters, they teach us that true liberation begins when the oppressed find their voice and dare to tell their own stories. Both writers remind us that memory, even when painful, can be a path to dignity, self-knowledge, and hope.

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