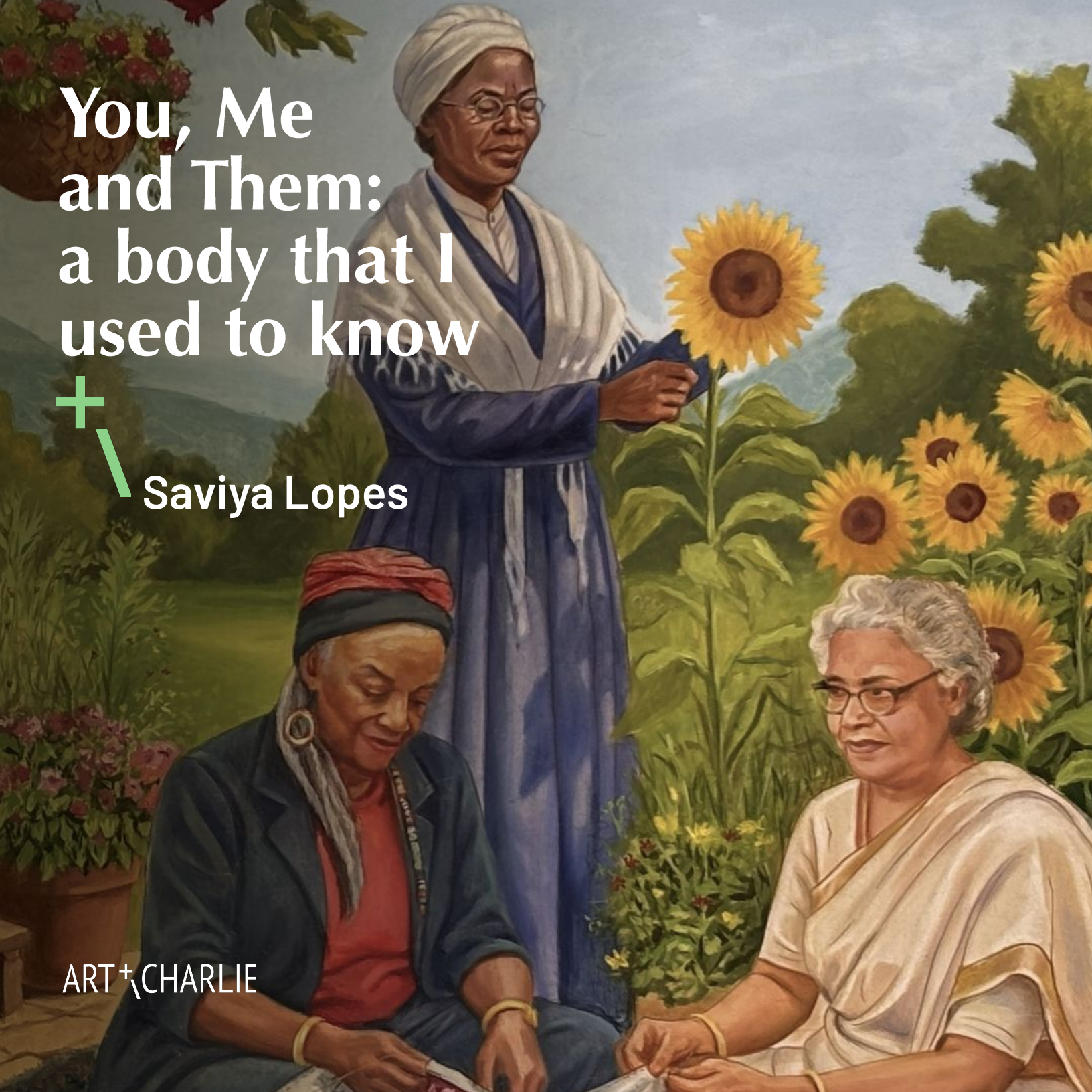

# You, Me and Them: a body that I used to know

Saviya Lopes

ART + CHARLIE

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# You, Me and Them: a body that I used to know

The body remembers. It carries within it the sediments of care, resilience, grief, and joy; traces that outlive the fragility of flesh. In A Body That I Used to Know, the body emerges as a vessel of intergenerational knowledge, a living archive that has witnessed the rise and fall of worlds, the making and unmaking of homes, and the quiet yet unrelenting persistence of everyday survival.

This exhibition begins from the personal and unfolds into the public, revealing how memory, labour, and resistance are inscribed into the body. The paintings chart this shift through a series of reframings: quilting once held as an act of self-care becomes a spectacle for the gaze; grief, once intimate, now registers as political; kitchen spaces transform from sites of gathering to reminders of invisible labour; a womb once named for life becomes a contested ground for law. Grandmothers' hands, remembered as soft carriers of care, extend here into an archive of touch, testimony, and endurance.

The works foreground the paradox of the body: deeply mortal, yet non-ephemeral in its capacity to remember and to hold histories even when words falter. As the exhibition unfolds, the presence of you, the immediacy of me, and the continuum of them create a constellation of relations. The "front person" reminds us of the intimacy of the singular, yet this intimacy is inseparable from the unseen others whose emotional labour, rest, and resilience sustain survival.

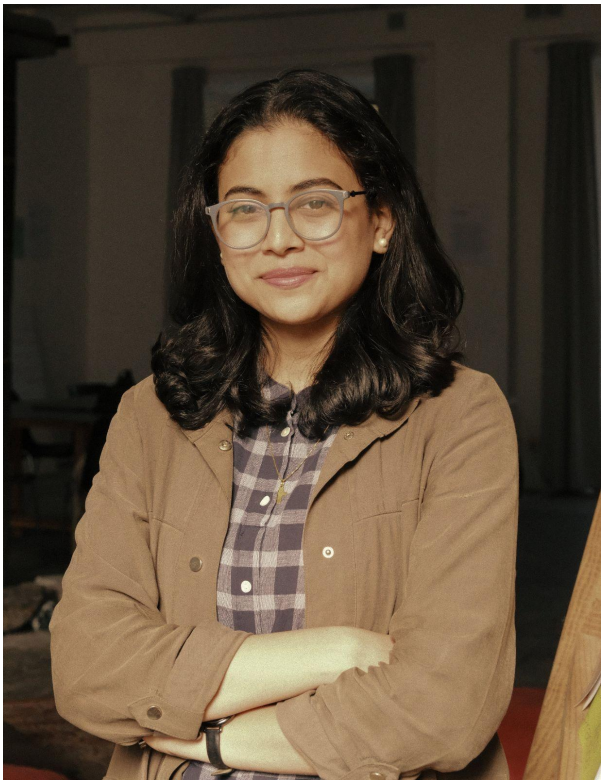
Within this constellation, the painting *The Land and the Body Will Not Forget* by Palestinian artist Reem Masri extends the exhibition's reflection on memory into the terrain of belonging. Her work weaves together the land and the body as inseparable entities; each carrying the memory of the other, each refusing erasure. Her work holds within it stories of exile, resistance, and return. It gestures the quiet persistence of those who remained, the pulse

of what the earth has absorbed, and the promise that even when silenced, life continues to speak through the land. Masri's voice resonates as both a lament and a declaration: that nothing truly disappears. Not the soil, nor the shadow, nor the trembling of those who fought to remain. In Reem's presence, the exhibition opens towards a shared pulse of resilience that transcends borders, where the body of the self and the body of the land speak as one.

From this shared ground, rest is recast as resistance: a refusal of extraction, a reminder that recuperation is not absence but necessity. The same soil that carries memory also cradles renewal. Emotional labour unfolds in the folds of fabric, in the gestures of hands, in the quiet endurance of everyday care. Remembrance here operates not only as testimony to grief but as a practice of celebration; an honouring of what endures through tenderness, solidarity, and survival.

The second movement of the exhibition, I Used to Know Them Through Books, But Now I See Them Alive, envisions a gathering across time. Here, feminists from different eras are conjured together in solidarity, reminding us of resistance as a continuum. In this speculative assembly, remembering becomes a form of hope; much like the body's way of recovering from what it has endured, and what it continues to resist.
Threaded throughout is the insistence that care itself is resistance; an everyday, feminist act that sustains life in the face of erasure. Another work declares, "Erasure is an old form of violence"...a warning and a witness. Memory is fragile not because it fades, but because it is silenced.

In ***You, Me and Them: A Body That I Used to Know***, the invitation is to listen differently...to listen to what our own bodies have been telling us...to what the bodies of others continue to remind us. Survival is political; emotional labour is not invisible; empathy and love are urgent strategies for resilience.
The question remains: *are we ready to hear what the body remembers?*



# Saviya Lopes

Saviya Lopes (b. 1994) is a visual artist from Vasai (Bassein), India. Her practice delves into her East Indian Catholic heritage through detailed research of family archives and oral histories. She draws inspiration from activities like practising quilt making by her grandmother - a subtle, yet powerful act of dissent and preservation to explore cultural heritage through intimate narratives and intergenerational memory. Her works reinterpret history with a feminist lens, addressing themes of violence, heritage, and colonialism through a focus on emotional labour, protest, and identity. Her practice, informed by women's labour and textile history, explores the body as a living archive and domestic crafts as spaces of refuge and resistance. She examines the often-invisible emotional and physical work that sustains communal and cultural bonds, engaging with themes of resilience, erasure, and care. Lopes's work balances transparency with depth, exploring the interrelation between body, language, culture, and the navigation of spaces while positioning acts of care and domesticity as central to understanding histories of creativity, healing, and empowerment.

Lopes has showcased her work in numerous group exhibitions worldwide since 2015. Key exhibitions include Dakar Biennale (2016); The Showroom, London (2018); Ireland Museum of Modern Art, Dublin (2016); Foundation Fiminco, Paris (2021) and a co-curator for Kochi Students Biennale 2022-23.

She was the recipient of Inlaks - UNIDEE Award for International Artists' Residency at Fondazione Pistoletto - Cittadellarte, Italy (2024) and is currently on the advisory board of the Kaka Baptista East Indian Museum, Mumbai.

Picture Credit: Dalia Jacobs

I used to know grandmother's hands
as care...
but now I also know them as archives
2025

Oil on Linen Canvas

13 x 13 inches

This painting traces the intergenerational transmission of knowledge through women's gestures, acts of care that endure beyond speech. The grandmother's hands, marked by time and labour, guide the child's smaller ones into the soil. What is passed on here is not merely the act of planting but the politics of sustaining, an unspoken pedagogy rooted in repetition, labour, and love.

The work reclaims the domestic and the intimate as sites of feminist knowledge. It refuses the historical erasure of women's labour by framing care as both resistance and authorship. The grandmother's hands, etched with traces of unrecorded histories, become living archives, repositories of experience that challenge the division between intellectual and manual work.

In this intergenerational exchange, the body itself becomes the medium of transmission. The soil becomes a metaphor for relationality, mirroring the way women cultivate, nurture, and restore amidst systemic dispossession. Yet, within that shared vulnerability emerges a counter-narrative of strength: the capacity to nurture, to restore, and to begin again.

The painting unfolds as a feminist meditation on continuity, locating power not in dominance but in the quiet insistence of care. Each gesture of the hand becomes a citation, each touch an act of remembrance; an archive written not in ink, but in soil.

**I used to know quilting as self care.... but now I also know it as an ornament for the spectator (Harriet Tubman[5]) 2025**

Oil on Linen Canvas

36 x 48 inches

This painting reconfigures Harriet Tubman within an alternative visual and ideological frame, challenging dominant historiographies that situate her solely within the discourse of resistance and liberation. By relocating Tubman to a quiet interior, engaged in the intimate act of tending to the loose threads of a finished quilt, the work foregrounds care, contemplation, and selfhood as radical extensions of her political agency.

The composition performs a critical intervention into how labour, particularly female and racialized labour has been aestheticized, commodified, and stripped of its relational context. The floor tiles echo quilt patterns, tracing the invisible routes of resistance that women have historically mapped through everyday making.

The juxtaposition of the quilt and the crucifix on the wall interrogates the institutionalization of both faith and craft, suggesting how the sacred and the handmade are absorbed into hegemonic systems of value and display. Lifted from the hands of the maker to become objects of reverence or aesthetic consumption. In reimagining Tubman at rest, the painting reclaims the right to stillness and introspection as forms of resistance in themselves.

This work questions who owns the narrative of labour and care. By invoking Alice Walker's "Everyday Use," it reclaims quilting not as ornamentation but as a living archive of emotional labour; a repository of memory, survival, and self-definition. Tubman's silence here is radical: it speaks of the right to rest, to reclaim one's craft beyond its commodification, and to remember making as a language of love and resistance.


I used to know womb as life,
but now I also know it as a
battleground for law
(L-R : Sulochanabai Dongre[9],
Simone de Beauvoir[13], Billie
Holiday[12], Nina Simone[18]) 2025

Oil on linen canvas

36 x 48 inches

This painting stages four women as monumental embodiments of intertwined histories of reproductive struggle, bodily autonomy, and resistance: Sulochanabai Dongre, Simone de beauvoir, Billie Holiday and Nina Simone. They stand encircling a pomegranate tree. Here, the tree becomes more than a symbol of fertility: it is the contested site of autonomy, a living witness to the ways in which the womb has long been legislated, regulated, and morally policed. They stand in a gesture of protection central to the Chipko movement: an echo of movements in which bodies have formed barricades, protection circles, and lines of refusal.

Each woman draws from distinct yet resonant genealogies. Sulochanabai Dongre, one of the earliest advocates for reproductive rights within anti-caste feminist thought in India, stands beside Simone de Beauvoir, whose Manifesto of the 343 openly defied the criminalization of abortion in France. Inscribed discreetly on the tree trunk, the number 343 calls forth the audacity of that collective declaration; that women's own testimonies are sufficient to speak their truth. To their right, stand Billie Holiday and Nina Simone, whose voices transformed grief into the song "Strange Fruit" invoke another axis of struggle: the fundamental right to live, to breathe, and to be free from racial terror. Their presence calls to mind how the control of the womb and the policing of life itself are never separate struggles.

The pomegranate, cracked open at their feet, reveals seeds like histories: numerous, difficult to access, requiring labor to release. At the base of the scene, a porcupine stands quietly, its spines recalling the soft and sharp edges of survival, defense, and vulnerability.

This gathering does not imagine solidarity as already achieved but as learned, painstakingly, across differences. It asks whether we can recognize the monumental while we are still living inside it. It invites a re-reading of history; not as a distant archive, but as a living lineage that continues to shape the fight for the right to rest, to decide, to resist, and to remain fully human.


**I used to know grief as personal...**
**but now I also know it as political**
**(Mahasweta Devi[20]) 2025**

Oil on Linen Canvas

36 x 24 inches

"I used to know grief as personal, but now I also know it as political" is a work that gathers women in an intimate act of mourning. At the heart of the scene stands Mahasweta Devi, holding her book Rudaali, which foregrounds the long history of grief as a feminized labour, inherited and sustained across generations. The painting reflects on grief as a deeply personal emotion, yet one that becomes entangled within the social structures of gender, community, and expectation.

The work emphasizes the immense emotional labour involved in carrying, not only one's own grief but also tending to the pain of others. Women, historically positioned as professional or familial mourners, tend to carry this dual responsibility, where grief becomes both a burden and a duty.

Yet, the work also insists on reclaiming grief as a personal right. It argues for the necessity of allowing individuals to grieve for themselves, to tend to their own emotional landscapes, rather than being subsumed entirely within the rigid expectations of collective mourning. Here, grief is reframed not as weakness but as resistance; as a way of refusing the silencing structures that dictate how, when, and for whom one may cry.

I used to know photographs as absence....
but now I also know them as a Presence
(Top L-R: Ramabai Ambedkar[11], Jyotiba Phule[6] | Bottom L-R: Dr. B. R. Ambedkar[10], Savitribai Phule[7]) 2025

Oil on Linen Canvas
30 x 42 inches

This painting reconfigures the visual archive by transforming the photograph traditionally a vessel of memory and absence, into an active site of continuity, dialogue, and resistance. The intimate act of writing is carried on by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar and Savitribai Phule, while Ramabai Ambedkar and Jyotirao Phule preside over them like quiet ancestors of thought. Their presence frames an intergenerational continuum of feminist and anti-caste discourse, foregrounding the shared intellectual and emotional labour that has shaped social emancipation movements.

Through this scene, the painting reflects on how the legacies of Ambedkar and Savitribai were sustained by unseen emotional and intellectual labour, the companionship of Ramabai and Jyotirao, who, though absent in time, remain present through memory and influence. The act of writing here becomes more than documentation; it is a practice of survival, a conversation across generations, and a method of recording collective dreams of liberation.

The honey bees resting on the table emerge as metaphors for shared work, the ceaseless hum of care, endurance, and the emotional labour embedded within social struggle. By bringing these figures together, the painting challenges linear history, proposing instead a cyclical temporality where love, thought, and resistance are forever intertwined. The photograph, once a symbol of absence, here becomes a site of return; a testament to presence that refuses erasure.

**I used to know the kitchen as a site of gathering...**
**but now I also know it as a site of invisible labour 2025**

Oil on Linen Canvas

48 x 36 inches

This work renders the kitchen in vivid, almost overwhelming detail: stacked utensils, half-cut vegetables, empty vessel on stove, scattered spices, dirty cups, and a stained cloth draped over the sink. At first glance, the scene radiates abundance; as if recalling the kitchen as a site of gathering, nourishment, and celebration. Yet, situated within this apparent plenitude is the unrelenting presence of invisible labour. Every pot to be scrubbed, every ingredient to be chopped, or every cup out of place, gestures to the body's exhaustion. Its repetitive, unacknowledged movements that sustain domestic life but remain absent from recognition.

The painting insists on seeing what is usually unseen: the weight of emotional labour within the kitchen. The warmth of feeding, the patience of care, the attentiveness to others' needs; all of these circulate here as silent demands are placed on women's bodies and, in many homes, the bodies of domestic workers whose labour is naturalized into the background. What appears as disorder is in fact the trace of constant effort, an economy of care where presence is measured through depletion.

By staging the kitchen in a state of abundance and disorder, the painting refuses nostalgic idealization. It wants to confront the viewers with the kitchen's duality: as a space of intimacy and togetherness, and as a theatre of invisible, undervalued work. In doing so, it tries to unravel the myth of domestic harmony and asks us to reckon with the structures that render this labour unseen: gendered expectations, class hierarchies, and cultural narratives that assign value to care while refusing to acknowledge its costs.

"I used to know the kitchen as a site of gathering, but now I know it as a site of invisible labour" becomes both testimony and critique. It mourns the erasure of labour from memory while reclaiming the kitchen as a space that must be re-read. Not as a neutral backdrop to domestic life but as an archive of bodies, gestures, and histories of care that demand recognition.

# I used to know them through books…
# But now I see them alive (series)

सध्या काय चाललय? / What are you up to these days?
(L-R: Toni Morrison[17], Babytai Kamble[31], Faith Ringgold[16], Sojourner Truth[4], Ismat Chughtai[15]) 2025

Oil on Linen Canvas

60 x 36 inches

What Are You Up To These Days?/ सध्या काय चाललय? disrupts the canonical history of painting by placing women, not men, at the center of monumental representation. Instead of grandiose battles or mythic exploits, the canvas locates significance in gestures of care, intimacy, and collective survival. The figures : Toni Morrison, Babytai Kamble, Sojourner Truth, Faith Ringgold, and Ismat Chughtai inhabit a space of quiet solidarity: writing, sewing, harvesting, and sharing. These acts, seemingly ordinary, are charged with radical meaning. They articulate how women have continuously labored to imagine freedom, not only in public struggles but in the intimate terrains of craft, nurture, and storytelling.

The iconographies embedded in the scene re-signify familiar symbols: the pomegranate as both womb and offering of knowledge, the sunflower reclaimed from histories of plantation to become an emblem of self-love, the quilt as archive of intergenerational memory and desire, the black cat playing with a potato as a subtle critique of colonial impositions on women's lives and bodies. Together, these elements create a visual vocabulary of feminist resistance, where rest itself becomes a political act.

The everyday question of "What are you up to these days?/ सध्या काय चाललय?" grounds the painting in the language of encounter. It gestures simultaneously to ceaseless work and the urgent need for rest, exposing how these women have always carried the weight of transformation yet are rarely imagined in moments of pause. Here, solidarity is not abstract but embodied, woven into acts of making, tending, and being with one another. The work insists that such gestures are not marginal to history but central to reimagining it.

**या जेवायला / Come eat with us**
**(L-R: Kadubai Kharat[29], Mikki Kendall[30], Iron Sharmila[27], Frida Kahlo[14], Alice Walker[23]) 2025**

Oil on Linen Canvas

60 x 36 inches

Come Eat With Us / **या जेवायला** is a re-visioning of monumental painting that brings together Kadubai Kharat, Mikki Kendall, Irom Sharmila, Frida Kahlo, and Alice Walker into a shared scene of rest, nourishment, and conviviality. Joy and sustenance appear here not as incidental, but as essential forms of resistance, foregrounding care and leisure as integral to the political lives of women so often remembered only through their struggles. The composition interrupts the historical gaze that has cast women as passive subjects, repositioning them instead as agents who define their own presence through practices of solidarity.

Through its symbolic layering; the honey jar, pomegranates, bread, wine, and tea basket - the work gestures toward a cultural grammar in which representation, identity, and practice are inseparable. Iconographies traditionally dismissed as domestic or trivial acquire radical charge, recasting women's labour and collective rituals as political signifiers. The act of Irom Sharmila being fed honey; marking the end of her fast against AFSPA, becomes both a document of history and a re-inscription of intimacy as a political force.

By refusing the epic form's alignment with patriarchal histories of war and conquest, the painting reclaims monumentality to articulate an alternative narrative: one where women become legible not only as figures of sacrifice but also as creators of spaces for laughter, gossip, and replenishment. In resisting the tendency to reduce these women to singular symbols of resistance or suffering, the work expands their legacies to include tenderness, celebration, and everyday joy.

In this sense, Come Eat With Us / **या जेवायला** proposes a feminist grammar of monumentality: where care, sustenance, and collectivity are foregrounded as radical gestures, and where the invitation to "eat with us" becomes a political demand to reimagine the histories of painting, resistance, and togetherness.

चला बसूया / Come, let's sit together
(L-R: Angela Davis[19], Sojourner Truth[4], Tarabai Shinde[8], Bama Faustina[25]) 2025

Oil on Linen Canvas

48 x 36 inches

In चला बसूया / Come, Let's Sit Together, four women: Angela Davis, Sojourner Truth, Tarabai Shinde, and Bama Faustina, who have gathered around a modest table, their presence transforming an ordinary evening into a site of political intimacy. Wine, fried fish, and laughter fill the room, where music and writing flow as naturally as conversation. One woman, seen from behind, and an empty chair extend an invitation to the viewer: to listen, to sit, to belong.

Through this gathering, the painting dismantles the patriarchal and colonial histories that have often confined women's images to domestic roles or symbolic muses. Here, the domestic space becomes a site of political imagination. A place where laughter, song, and writing coexist along with struggle and fatigue. The keffiyah draped on the window sill and the olive branch outside gesture toward solidarity across geographies; an acknowledgment that liberation is always collective.

The women may have gathered after a day of protest, labour, or loss or simply to speak, gossip, and be. In this ambiguity lies the strength of the work: it recognizes the political within the everyday. "चला बसूया", a familiar phrase of invitation, becomes an anthem of belonging; an insistence that togetherness itself is revolutionary. Their gathering becomes a speculative feminist utopia. A space where dissent is nurtured through tenderness and storytelling. Writing, singing, and cooking are not separate acts, but interconnected expressions of survival and creativity. The painting attempts to challenge the patriarchal gaze that confines women's gatherings to domesticity or triviality, reclaiming gossip and leisure as acts of collective resistance.

चला बसूया / Come, Let's Sit Together transforms the ordinary into the monumental, reframing conversation, care, and rest as feminist acts of resistance. It envisions a world where women's gatherings, in all their tenderness and defiance, continue to shape the future: one shared meal, one song, one story at a time.


छाती भरून आली / Chest is full
(L-R: Nangeli[2], Audre Lorde[21],
Ana Mendieta[22]) 2025

Oil on Linen Canvas
54 x 42 inches

"Chest Is Full/ छाती भरून आली" rigorously interrogates the intersection of corporeality, historical violence, and the politics of representation by situating Nangeli, Audre Lorde, and Ana Mendieta within the seemingly domestic yet charged space of the kitchen. The table, laden with coconuts, pomegranates, melons, milk bottles, a hot iron, Minne di Sant'Agata (a Sicilian pastry) and a breast pump, functions simultaneously as a site of nourishment, labor, and embodied memory, registering the material and affective histories that have constrained and defined women's bodies. The hot iron recalls the violent imposition of bodily discipline; flattening breasts as a mechanism of erasure. While the presence of St. Agatha, alongside a breast imprint resembling a praying mantis's gaze, beside artifacts such as a wall hung sculpture of breasts and a blouse, underscores the enduring surveillance and codification of female corporeal expression.

Through the orchestrated gestures of these figures; Ana's drawing, Nangeli's coconut cutting or Audre's contemplative writing, the painting articulates a radical reclamation of bodily agency, situating care, labor, grief, desire, and creativity as mutually constitutive forces. The titular declaration, "Chest Is Full/ छाती भरून आली", functions as both affective and political lexicon: it simultaneously indexes the weight of emotional labor, intergenerational grief, joy, pride, and the burden of cultural representation, revealing the body as a repository of historical and ongoing struggles.

The work destabilizes traditional visual regimes by refusing the male gaze and canonical hierarchies of heroism, instead asserting that women's intimate, domestic, and creative labor constitutes a monumental register of meaning. Intersectionality is encoded not merely as content but as structural logic: the painting articulates how race, gender, labor, and embodiment converge, resisting reductive readings and exposing the complex semiotics of power. In doing so, it reframes the quotidian as revolutionary, the domestic as political, and fullness of the chest as an emblem of persistent, embodied resistance: a radical archive of memory, care, and creative labor across temporal and spatial terrains.


एकता बाजार / Street of solidarity
(L-R: Sant Soyarabai[1], Urmila Pawar[24], Artemisia Gentileschi[3], Tarana Burke[29])
2025

Oil on Linen Canvas

54 x 42 inches

In "एकता बाजार / Street of Solidarity", four women from different geographies and temporalities: Sant Soyarabai, Urmila Pawar, Artemisia Gentileschi, and Tarana Burke gather in a shared marketplace, imagined as a utopian site of resistance and kinship. Here, the street becomes a metaphor for solidarity, an intersection of stories, struggles, and gestures that have shaped feminist histories across time.

Soyarabai, seated on the ground with her ektara, sings of spiritual equality and caste emancipation. Her song reverberates through the space, grounding the scene in the rhythm of everyday resistance. Urmila Pawar, carrying books, embodies the written archive — the memory of Dalit women's experiences preserved in narrative form. Artemisia Gentileschi, the painter once confined by patriarchal patronage, paints anew, though the subject of her canvas remains unseen, inviting speculation. Tarana Burke, standing beside her, writes Me too on a wall layered with flyers; a quiet yet powerful gesture of collective remembrance and solidarity.

In the painting, the women inhabit the market not as consumers but as creators, reclaiming a public space historically shaped by gendered labor and exchange. The marketplace, often feminized and trivialized in art history, here transforms into a living archive of resistance, where song, writing, painting, and protest coexist in a shared rhythm.

Street of Solidarity imagines what it means for women to encounter one another across centuries; to recognize their reflections in each other's acts of defiance and care. It is a speculative geography of sisterhood, where differences in caste, race, and era collapse into collective purpose.

This painting redefines the epic. Not through war or conquest, but through gathering. It represents revolution in tenderness, intellect, and collaboration, suggesting that perhaps every great movement begins in places like these: over shared songs, open books, and walls waiting to be written on.

फुलांचा गुच्छा / A bouquet of flowers
(Phoolan Devi[26]) 2025

Oil on Linen Canvas
30 x 42 inches

In फुलांचा गुच्छा / A Bouquet of Flowers, Phoolan Devi stands amidst a vast field of sunflowers; unarmed, radiant, and self-assured. Her stance, with hands on hips and a gaze that meets the viewer directly, reclaims the visual language of authority and presence so often denied to women. Once confined to narratives of violence and vengeance, Phoolan is reimagined here as a figure of tenderness and strength, her body no longer a site of spectacle but of survival.

The field of sunflowers becomes a feminist landscape. Each bloom echoing her gaze. The small praying mantis at her feet, almost imperceptible, gestures to a quiet, natural assertion of the female gaze; one that sees, guards, and survives. In this gesture, the painting resists the patriarchal narrative that frames women's anger as chaos rather than consequence.

It refuses the familiar image of the distressed or idealized woman, instead offering a vision of joy and reclamation. Through this act of re-seeing, Phoolan becomes both the subject and author of her own story — one that acknowledges the violence enacted upon her body but does not let that violence define her.

This re-visioning also intervenes in the politics of representation: the image becomes a site of cultural negotiation rather than replication. Phoolan's body, often scripted by caste, class, and gendered violence, here writes its own narrative. A refusal of erasure. Her smile is not naive; it is reclamation.

The painting acts as a counter-image — a refusal to aestheticize trauma and instead to celebrate survival. The sunflowers, in their insistence on light, hold the memory of darkness without being consumed by it. This is a story that resists the "single story" — the narrow lens through which women like Phoolan are often remembered.

फुलांचा गुच्छा is an offering to Phoolan, and to all those women whose histories have been written through erasure. The sunflowers bloom as witnesses of resilience and collective hope, transforming the visual archive from weapon to warmth, from resistance to radiance, from object to the origin.

**I used to know pomegranate as a fruit, but now I also know it as labour (soft sculpture) 2025**

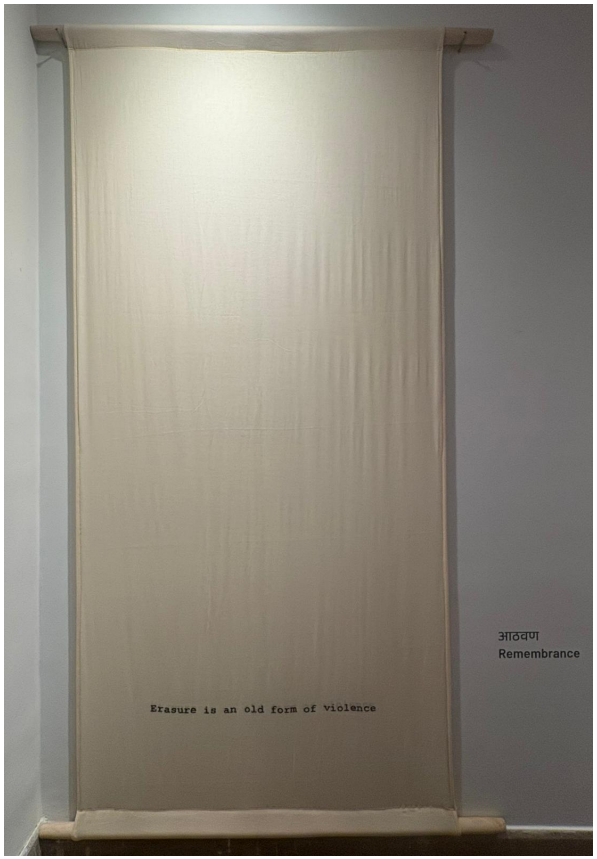
Velvet, fabric scraps, embroidery, assorted embellishments

12 x 4 x 4 inches

This work considers the pomegranate not merely as a fruit but as a site of labour: textual, emotional, and embodied. Crafted from velvet and reclaimed fabric, its form is soft, almost tender, yet its surface glimmers with the density of hand-sewn embellishment. Each bead, thread, and texture marks time: hours of attention, patience, repetition. It is a labour that is often unseen, dismissed as decorative, feminine, or domestic. Yet it is precisely through such labour that memory and care are preserved.

Traditionally associated with fertility and abundance, the pomegranate's symbolic generosity obscures the labour required to access it. The act of extracting its seeds becomes a metaphor for forms of care, maintenance, and emotional labour that are routinely undervalued. By foregrounding the material accumulation of touch, repetition, and time, the sculpture reframes domestic making as a site of knowledge and endurance. The fruit here is not simply consumed or admired; it registers the persistent and often invisible work that underpins nourishment, intimacy, and collective life.

In this sense, the pomegranate becomes an archive of labouring bodies. Particularly those whose work is absorbed into daily life without acknowledgement. The soft sculpture's tactile surface invites reflection on how value is assigned, who performs care, and how certain forms of labour are naturalized into silence. It gestures towards a broader feminist re-reading of material culture, where the domestic is not peripheral but central to understanding how societies are sustained, remembered, and reproduced.




आठवण / Remembrance 2025

Archival pigment ink on cotton Muslin

36 x 72 inches

आठवण / Remembrance unfolds as a meditation on erasure, silence, and endurance. The plain muslin fabric, modest and unadorned, becomes a vessel of remembrance; a skin that bears the weight of what has been muted across generations. Near its lower edge, the phrase “erasure is an old violence” stands as a quiet declaration that remembers what history has tried to forget.

The choice of muslin is intentional: it carries the residue of labour, colonial extraction, and women’s domestic work. Once woven by hand, it now becomes a surface of inscription, holding within its weave the tensions between visibility and disappearance. The text, sparse and restrained, unsettles the illusion of neutrality. The work functions as both a warning and a witness, asserting that memory is fragile not because it fades, but because it is silenced.

In reclaiming the language of fabric and domestic labour, आठवण / Remembrance transforms softness into critique. It reminds us that tenderness, repetition, and repair are not merely gestures of care, but radical methods of survival against historical amnesia

Let there be hope
Let there be warmth
Let there be light
THOU SHALT BE HEALED
(Set of three quilts)
Organza Fabric
36 x 48 inches

Throughout history, gender discrimination has relegated women to subordinate roles, often silencing them within dominant societal structures. Yet, women were never truly voiceless, they cultivated their own means of expression, crafting a language beyond words. This language found form in quilts, a medium akin to a mother tongue; one that carries memory, communicates resilience, and asserts identity.

Here, quilting transcends its domestic origins, emerging as a powerful tool for storytelling, activism, and resistance. The quilts of Thou Shalt Be Healed explore the emotional labor induced in sewing and stitching, transforming the fabric into vessels of refuge, warmth, and protection. These works function as living archives, blending personal narratives with collective histories, challenging traditional hierarchies of art a
nd craft.

By incorporating material memory, abstraction, and conceptual layering, the act of quilting speaks to themes of care, trauma, and survival. It moves beyond functionality to engage with socio-political discourse, reclaiming marginalized voices and recontextualizing labor as an act of radical agency. The stitched surfaces of these works speak of hope, light, and comfort; all metaphors for self-empowerment, courage, and trust. Through the work, quilting extends beyond craft; it becomes an act of resistance, a testimony to care, and a reclamation of agency in contemporary art.

**Reem Masri**

The Land and the Body Will Not Forget ينسيان لن والجسد االرض 2025
Acrylic on Canvas (Reprinted here on Archival Hannaemulle paper)
102 x 118 cm

The land breathes through the body, as if every cell were a vein bound to the soil, carrying within it the memory of thousands of years. From the depths of the land, a tree emerges - a buried tear, a hidden pulse. Its branches do not reach toward the sky but toward memory, toward what still lives in the veins of remembrance, toward every story buried in the land that never died. Soil and body intertwine, winding together between loss and belonging, until the land becomes living skin, trembling beneath the weight of bodies that fought to remain.

Loss continues, yet the dream cannot be killed. Memory becomes a sleepless bird, flies above the land, weaving the dream of resilience upon its wings, reviving everybody that gave its spirit to the homeland, every shadow that did not fade, every tear that has fallen. Here, nothing disappears - not the soil, nor the shadow, nor the trembling of the body. Everything lives, breathes, resists, and insists on remaining, whispering the secrets of land and sky, of the unseen and the known, of being and return.

## Biographical List of Women in the Paintings:

**1) Sant Soyarabai (17th century)**

Sant Soyarabai was a remarkable 17th-century Marathi poet-saint whose devotional verses challenged both caste and gender hierarchies within the Bhakti tradition. Little is known about her life with certainty, but tradition places her in the Varkari sant community in Maharashtra. Her poetry suggests she belonged to a marginalized caste and faced significant opposition for pursuing spiritual expression due to both caste and gender. Soyarabai's "abhangas" (devotional poems) are distinguished by their intense emotional directness and their critique of social restrictions placed on women devotees. She wrote of her deep longing for divine union with Vitthal (Krishna), expressing separation from the divine in visceral, embodied terms. She challenged male religious authorities who questioned women's devotion, asserting her equal right to pursue divine knowledge. Her inclusion in the Varkari sant tradition demonstrates the radical potential of Bhakti movements to challenge social hierarchies.

**2) Nangeli (19th century)**

Nangeli is a legendary figure from Kerala who, according to oral tradition, resisted the "breast tax" ("mulakkaram") imposed on lower-caste women in Travancore during the 19th century. This tax required women from Dalit and other oppressed caste communities to pay for the "privilege" of covering their breasts; a right reserved for upper-caste women. According to legend, when tax collectors came to Nangeli's home in Cherthala, she cut off her breasts and presented them on a plantain leaf, dying from the hemorrhage. Her husband reportedly jumped into her funeral pyre. This act of ultimate resistance reportedly shocked the community and contributed to the breast tax's eventual abolition, though historical documentation remains limited. Whether Nangeli was a specific individual or composite figure, her story powerfully symbolizes Dalit women's refusal to accept dehumanizing caste practices. Her story has been reclaimed by contemporary Dalit and feminist movements as testament to lower-caste women's historical resistance.

**3) Artemisia Gentileschi (1593-1656)**

Artemisia Gentileschi overcame sexual violence and gender discrimination to become one of Baroque painting's most accomplished artists. Born in Rome to painter Orazio Gentileschi, she learned painting in her father's workshop. At seventeen, she was raped by Agostino Tassi, her father's collaborator. The subsequent trial was brutal and Artemisia endured torture to "verify" her testimony while Tassi faced minimal consequences. Yet this trauma seemed to fuel her artistic power. Her paintings are distinguished by their psychological intensity and centering of female subjects as active agents. Her multiple versions of "Judith Slaying Holofernes" depict the biblical heroine decapitating the enemy general with visceral realism. She was the first woman accepted into Florence's prestigious Accademia delle Arti del Disegno. She worked for major patrons throughout Italy and England, painting powerful women from biblical and mythological narratives with technical mastery equaling any male contemporary.

**4) Sojourner Truth (c. 1797-1883)**

Born into slavery as Isabella Baumfree in New York, Sojourner Truth became one of the most powerful voices for abolition and women's rights in nineteenth-century America. After escaping slavery in 1826, she renamed herself in 1843, dedicating her life to speaking truth about injustice. Though unable to read or write, her oratory skills were legendary. Her famous 1851 "Ain't I a Woman?" speech confronted the exclusion of Black women from both abolitionist and women's rights movements. Truth worked tirelessly for abolition, met with President Lincoln, helped recruit Black troops for the Union Army, and advocated for land grants for formerly enslaved people. She championed women's suffrage and prison reform, recognizing that freedom required economic justice and that women's rights movements must include Black women. Her legacy reminds us that the most marginalized voices often speak the most profound truths.

**5) Harriet Tubman (c. 1822-1913)**

Harriet Tubman was born Araminta Ross into slavery on Maryland's Eastern Shore, experiencing brutal violence that left permanent injuries, including traumatic brain injury causing lifelong seizures. Despite this, she escaped slavery in 1849 but returned South repeatedly, conducting approximately thirteen missions over a decade that freed around seventy enslaved people, including her family. Tubman's courage was extraordinary. She carried a pistol and used her knowledge of Maryland's landscape, traveling by night using the North Star for navigation. Slaveholders offered large rewards for her capture, but she was never caught and never lost a "passenger," earning the nickname "Moses." During the Civil War, she served the Union Army as scout, spy, and nurse. In 1863, she led the Combahee River Raid, freeing more than 700 enslaved people, the first woman to lead an armed expedition in the war. After the war, she became active in the women's suffrage movement, connecting Black liberation with women's rights. 6)

**Jyotiba Phule (1827-1890)**

Jyotirao Govindrao Phule, known as Jyotiba Phule, was a pioneering social reformer who challenged caste hierarchy, Brahminical supremacy, and gender oppression in 19th-century Maharashtra. Born into a Mali community considered lower caste, childhood experiences of caste discrimination shaped his lifelong commitment to equality. His 1873 book “Gulamgiri” (Slavery) argued that Brahmins had used religion to enslave lower-caste people, comparing caste oppression to slavery. Phule's reform work was inseparable from his wife Savitribai's partnership. Together they established schools for girls and lower-caste children, created shelters for widows and pregnant women, and organized agricultural workers. He established the Satyashodhak Samaj (Truth-Seekers' Society) in 1873, dedicated to caste annihilation and social equality. Crucially, Phule connected caste oppression with gender oppression, championing women's education and autonomy. His insistence that social reform must address both caste and gender simultaneously made him unusual among 19th-century reformers.

**7) Savitribai Phule (1831-1897)**

Savitribai Phule was India's first female teacher and a pioneering feminist who fought against caste discrimination, gender oppression, and religious orthodoxy in 19th-century Maharashtra. Born into a Mali community, she married Jyotirao Phule at nine. Unlike most men, Jyotirao educated Savitribai, and she became his equal partner in revolutionary social reform. In 1848, they established India's first school for girls in Pune, provoking violent opposition from orthodox Brahmins. Savitribai faced daily harassment; people threw stones, dung, and mud at her as she walked to school. She and Jyotirao eventually established eighteen schools. Savitribai's work extended beyond education. She established a shelter for widows, encouraged widow remarriage, and provided refuge for pregnant Brahmin widows facing violent punishment. She was also a poet, writing verses challenging caste hierarchy and advocating for women's dignity. She died in 1897 while nursing plague victims, contracting the disease herself.

**8) Tarabai Shinde (1850-1910)**

Tarabai Shinde shattered patriarchal conventions in nineteenth-century Maharashtra with her revolutionary feminist treatise “Stri Purush Tulana” (“A Comparison Between Women and Men”), published in 1882. Born into a progressive family connected to social reformer Jyotirao Phule, she received a rare education for women of her era. Her pamphlet emerged as a fierce response to the condemnation of a young widow sentenced to death for infanticide while her upper-caste male partner faced no consequences. Shinde dismantled patriarchal hypocrisy with devastating logic and sarcasm, questioning why men who committed countless transgressions dared judge women. Her intersectional analysis connected gender oppression with caste discrimination. Though her work faced significant backlash and she published little afterward, “Stri Purush Tulana” remains a foundational text in Indian feminism, remarkable for its radical, unapologetic vision.

**9) Sulochanabai Dongre (1920-2003)**

Sulochanabai Dongre dedicated her life to education and empowerment of Dalit communities in Maharashtra, carrying forward Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's transformative vision. Born into a Mahar community in Nagpur, she pursued education despite discrimination, becoming a teacher and principal, positions rarely held by Dalit women of her generation. Dongre established schools specifically for Dalit children, particularly girls facing double discrimination. She combined teaching with social activism, organizing women's groups, teaching adult literacy, and working to eradicate caste practices. She was a vocal advocate for reproductive rights, supporting women's access to family planning and abortion services as essential to their autonomy and dignity. As a public speaker, she traveled throughout Maharashtra addressing caste annihilation, women's rights, and social reform. She participated actively in Buddhist conversion ceremonies, seeing religious conversion as essential to escaping Hinduism's caste system. Her leadership inspired countless Dalit women to pursue education and challenge their prescribed social positions.

**10) Dr. B.R. Ambedkar (1891-1956)**

Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar was the principal architect of India's Constitution and the most important leader in the struggle against caste oppression. Born into a Mahar community, he experienced caste discrimination's brutal realities from childhood. Through extraordinary determination, he earned doctorates from Columbia University and the London School of Economics. Ambedkar used his education to dismantle the caste system's ideological foundations, exposing how Hindu scriptures sanctified inequality. His 1936 speech "Annihilation of Caste" insisted that caste could not be reformed but must be destroyed entirely. As independent India's first Law Minister and chairman of the Constitution Drafting Committee, he ensured constitutional protections for Dalits and marginalized communities, abolishing untouchability and establishing reservations (affirmative action). In 1956, shortly before his death, he led mass conversions to Buddhism, arguing that escaping Hinduism was necessary for Dalit liberation. His legacy extends beyond specific policies to his vision of social democracy.

**11) Ramabai Ambedkar (1898-1935)**

Ramabai Ambedkar was Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's first wife and a crucial partner in his anti-caste work, though her contributions have often been overshadowed. Born Ramabai Bhimrao into a Dalit family, she married Ambedkar in 1906 when she was nine. While Ambedkar pursued education abroad, Ramabai managed household responsibilities and endured economic hardship and social ostracism due to their caste status. Her support enabled Ambedkar's educational pursuits and political work. She maintained their home despite poverty, managed family affairs during his long absences, and endured criticism from relatives. Beyond domestic support, Ramabai participated in anti-caste activism, attending meetings, helping organize women in the Dalit community, and supporting her husband's political campaigns. Her health suffered from years of poverty and stress. She died in 1935 at thirty-seven, shortly before Ambedkar's career reached its peak. Ramabai's story reminds us that behind every great leader stand countless women whose contributions to liberation struggles deserve recognition.

**12) Billie Holiday (1915-1959)**

Billie Holiday transformed jazz singing into an art of profound emotional depth and political resistance. Born Eleanora Fagan in Philadelphia, she endured a childhood marked by poverty and assault. By her teens, she was singing in Harlem nightclubs, developing a unique style that treated her voice like a jazz instrument. Her 1939 recording of "Strange Fruit" - a haunting protest song about lynching, became one of the most important political statements in American music history. Despite threats and opposition, she continued performing the song, forcing white audiences to confront racial terrorism's brutal reality. Holiday's personal life was marked by struggles with addiction and abusive relationships, inseparable from the racism and sexism she faced. She was underpaid compared to white performers, refused service at venues where she performed, and arrested for drug possession in ways that destroyed her career opportunities. Yet she continued creating transcendent art. She died at forty-four, but her legacy endures.

**13) Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986)**

Simone de Beauvoir transformed feminist thought with her declaration that "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman. Her 1949 masterwork “The Second Sex” provided the philosophical foundation for modern feminism by analyzing how women have been constructed as "the Other" throughout history. Born into a Parisian bourgeois family, she excelled academically, becoming the youngest person to pass the agrégation in philosophy. “The Second Sex” examined women's oppression through biology, psychoanalysis, historical materialism, literature, and mythology, demonstrating how every institution positioned women as secondary to men. De Beauvoir's own life embodied her philosophy; she refused marriage, maintained independence while in relationship with Jean-Paul Sartre, traveled extensively, and pursued writing with discipline. She actively supported Algerian independence, opposed the Vietnam War, and in later years became directly involved in France's women's liberation movement, using her celebrity to advance feminist causes.

**14) Frida Kahlo (1907-1954)**

Frida Kahlo transformed personal pain into powerful art that challenged conventions about beauty, suffering, gender, and Mexican identity. Born in Coyoacán, Mexico, childhood polio left one leg shorter; at eighteen, a catastrophic bus accident shattered her spine, pelvis, and legs. During recovery, she began painting, using a mirror to create unflinching self-portraits. Kahlo's paintings are intensely autobiographical, depicting physical suffering, emotional turbulence, and her complicated relationship with Diego Rivera. But her work transcended personal narrative to address gender construction, Mexican versus European identity, and indigenous culture's significance. Her self-portraits depicted her with facial hair and unibrows, refusing conventional feminine beauty standards. She wore traditional Tehuana dresses, asserting Mexican indigenous identity. Politically active, she joined the Mexican Communist Party and supported leftist causes. Though she sold few paintings during her lifetime, Kahlo has become a global icon whose art endures as testament to transforming suffering into beauty.

**15) Ismat Chughtai (1915-1991)**

Ismat Chughtai fearlessly challenged patriarchal and sexual taboos in Urdu literature, writing about female desire, homosexuality, and women's inner lives with unprecedented frankness. Born in Uttar Pradesh into a progressive Muslim family, she received an education that enabled her to become one of the most important Urdu writers of the twentieth century. Her 1942 story "Lihaaf" ("The Quilt"), depicting a homosexual relationship between women, led to obscenity charges in 1945. Chughtai defended herself brilliantly, arguing that if the story was obscene, so was society itself. She continued writing stories exposing middle-class Muslim society's hypocrisies; arranged marriage, domestic violence, women's sexual frustration, and double standards. Her protagonists were complex, flawed women who desired, schemed, and rebelled. After Partition, she moved to Bombay and worked as a screenwriter. Her legacy lies in insisting women's sexuality, anger, and complexity deserved literary representation.

**16) Faith Ringgold (1930-2024)**

Faith Ringgold revolutionized American art by combining painting, quilting, and storytelling to address racism, sexism, and social justice. Born in Harlem, she grew up surrounded by Black cultural creativity. During the 1960s, she created politically charged paintings challenging white male art world dominance. Her "American People Series" confronted racism and violence with unflinching directness. Frustrated by galleries excluding women's art, she co-founded Women Students and Artists for Black Art Liberation and organized museum protests. Ringgold's most celebrated works are her story quilts: narrative paintings on fabric bordered by quilted fabric and text, combining African American quilting traditions with contemporary art. Her "Tar Beach" series depicts a young Black girl dreaming of freedom on her Harlem rooftop. Throughout her career, Ringgold insisted art must be accessible, politically engaged, and reflective of Black women's experiences, successfully demanding recognition for Black women artists.

**17) Toni Morrison (1931-2019)**

Toni Morrison transformed American literature through her unflinching exploration of Black identity and the legacy of slavery. Born Chloe Ardelia Wofford in Ohio, she became an editor at Random House, championing Black writers before establishing herself as a novelist. Her works: “The Bluest Eye”, “Sula”,”Song of Solomon”, and the Pulitzer Prize-winning “Beloved”, centered Black women's experiences with unprecedented depth. Morrison refused to write for the white gaze, crafting narratives that spoke directly to Black communities. In 1993, she became the first Black woman to receive the Nobel Prize in Literature. As a Princeton professor, she mentored generations of writers while her essays examined how race shaped American literature. Morrison's insistence that Black lives and stories deserve central placement in literature created space for countless writers to follow, fundamentally reshaping what American literature could be.

**18) Nina Simone (1933-2003)**

Nina Simone was a musical revolutionary who transformed popular music into a vehicle for civil rights activism and Black liberation. Born Eunice Kathleen Waymon in North Carolina, she was a classical piano prodigy whose dreams of becoming the first Black concert pianist were destroyed by racial discrimination. She began performing in nightclubs, adopting the stage name "Nina Simone." Her music defied categorization, blending classical technique, jazz improvisation, gospel fervor, and blues feeling. During the 1960s, she increasingly focused on songs addressing racial injustice. After the 1963 Birmingham church bombing, she wrote "Mississippi Goddam," followed by anthems like "To Be Young, Gifted and Black" and "Four Women." Her activism came with professional costs, banned music, cancelled performances, FBI surveillance. Disillusioned by America's persistent racism and facing undiagnosed bipolar disorder, she moved to Africa and then Europe. Her artistic and political legacy remains immense.

**19) Angela Davis (1944)**

Angela Davis became an international symbol of resistance to racism, capitalism, and state repression through her activism, scholarship, and political imprisonment. Born in Birmingham, Alabama, during Jim Crow, she grew up experiencing violence that shaped her political consciousness. She pursued philosophy academically, studying with Herbert Marcuse and earning a doctorate. Her Communist Party membership and Black Panther support led to her firing from UCLA. In 1970, she was charged with conspiracy, kidnapping, and murder after guns registered in her name were used in a courtroom takeover, though she was not present. She went underground, landing on the FBI's Ten Most Wanted list before capture. Her 1972 acquittal was a major victory. Davis's subsequent work has focused on prison abolition, arguing the prison-industrial complex continues slavery. Her books have shaped contemporary understanding of intersectional oppression and abolitionist politics. She continues organizing, connecting historical struggles to movements like Black Lives Matter.

**20) Mahasweta Devi (1926-2016)**

Mahasweta Devi used literature and activism to champion India's most marginalized communities, particularly Adivasis (indigenous peoples) and Dalits. Born into an elite Bengali literary family, she chose instead to live and work among tribal communities, documenting their exploitation and fighting for their rights. Her novels and short stories portrayed Adivasi and Dalit characters with complexity, agency, and dignity. Works like “Hajar Churashir Maa”, “Aranyer Adhikar”, and “Chotti Munda and His Arrow” chronicled tribal communities' struggles against displacement, land theft, and cultural genocide. Her activism was inseparable from her writing. She investigated atrocities against tribal communities, campaigned for land rights, organized labor movements, and advocated for victims of state violence. She worked to secure government compensation for victims of injustice. Devi received India's highest literary honors but lived simply and used prize money to support tribal welfare organizations. She continued working until her death at ninety.

**21) Audre Lorde (1934-1992)**

Audre Lorde was a Black lesbian feminist poet and theorist whose work insisted that acknowledging and using difference; rather than denying it, was essential for liberation. Born in New York City to Caribbean immigrant parents, she navigated multiple marginalizations from childhood, shaping her conviction that liberation movements must address intersecting oppressions simultaneously. Lorde's poetry combined lyrical beauty with political urgency. Collections like “The Black Unicorn” celebrated Black women's power while confronting racism and sexism. Her essays provided foundational texts for intersectional feminism. "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House" argued that oppressive systems cannot be dismantled using their own logic. "Uses of the Erotic" reclaimed female pleasure as a political force. Lorde co-founded Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, creating publishing space for marginalized voices. She challenged white feminists' racism, male-dominated Black movements' sexism, and lesbian communities' racism. Her legacy is insisting we must use our differences as sources of creative power and solidarity.

**22) Ana Mendieta (1948-1985)**

Ana Mendieta created art exploring violence against women, displacement, identity, and the body's relationship to earth and landscape. Born in Havana, Cuba, she was sent at age twelve to the United States through Operation Peter Pan, a traumatic separation from family and homeland that profoundly shaped her artistic practice addressing themes of belonging, rootedness, and exile. At the University of Iowa, she began creating radical performance art and "earth-body" works. In her “Silueta Series” (1973-1980), she created silhouettes of her body using earth, sand, grass, fire, blood, and other materials in landscapes throughout Mexico and the United States, exploring connections between body and earth. Her 1973 "Rape Scene" performance responded to a student's rape and murder, confronting viewers with violence against women. Throughout her career, Mendieta used her body as primary material. She died at thirty-six, falling from her apartment window during an argument with her husband, sculptor Carl Andre, who was tried for murder but acquitted.

**23) Alice Walker (1944)**

Alice Walker transformed American literature through her exploration of Black women's lives, giving voice to those long silenced by racism and sexism. Born in Georgia, the youngest of eight children of sharecroppers, Walker was blinded in one eye at age eight, driving her to reading and writing. She participated in Civil Rights Movement activism while studying. She coined the term "womanist" to describe Black feminism centered on Black women's strength, culture, and perspectives. Her 1982 novel “The Color Purple” won both the Pulitzer Prize and National Book Award, making Walker the first Black woman to win the Pulitzer for fiction. The novel's exploration of sexual violence, incest, lesbianism, and Black women's resilience sparked controversy but transformed readers' understanding. Walker championed Zora Neale Hurston's forgotten work, finding and marking Hurston's unmarked grave and bringing “Their Eyes Were Watching God” back into print. Her legacy lies in insisting Black women's stories deserve central placement in American culture.

**24) Urmila Pawar (1945)**

Urmila Pawar brought Dalit feminist perspectives to Marathi literature through autobiographical writing chronicling intergenerational trauma and transformation. Born into a Mahar community in Maharashtra's Konkan region, she experienced both untouchability's degradation and hope generated by Dr. Ambedkar's movement. Her autobiography “आयदान” (The Weave of My Life), published in 2003, is a landmark text in Dalit women's writing. Unlike male Dalit autobiographies focusing on public political struggles, Pawar centered women's experiences, domestic labor sustaining families, sexual violence Dalit women faced, complex mother-daughter relationships, and everyday negotiations required to survive caste oppression. She wrote about rarely discussed issues: menstruation taboos, reproductive health, marital sexuality, and how caste created particular vulnerabilities for Dalit women. Her intergenerational narrative traced three generations of women in her family, documenting how education and Ambedkarite consciousness transformed possibilities while acknowledging persistence of trauma and patriarchy within Dalit communities.å

**25) Bama Faustina (1958)**

Bama revolutionized Tamil literature with her autobiographical novel “Karukku” (1992), exposing the brutal realities of caste oppression from a Dalit Christian woman's perspective. Born Faustina Mary Fatima Rani in Tamil Nadu, she witnessed how caste discrimination persisted even within Christian institutions claiming to preach equality. “Karukku”, meaning "saw-edged palmyra leaves," described humiliating caste practices with visceral detail—how Dalits were forced into subservient body language, forbidden from drawing water from common wells, and expected to serve upper-caste Christians without question. Her narrative voice was raw, angry, and unapologetic. Her subsequent works, including “Sangati” and “Vanmam”, centered Dalit women's experiences: their labor, sexuality, resilience, and resistance. She documented how Dalit women faced violence from both upper-caste men and patriarchy within their own communities. Bama's insistence on writing in Tamil, rather than English, also challenged linguistic hierarchies in Indian literature.

**26) Phoolan Devi (1963-2001)**

Phoolan Devi's life embodied the violence of caste, class, and gender oppression in rural India and the possibility of resistance. Born into a poor Mallah (boatperson) community in Uttar Pradesh, she experienced sexual abuse from childhood. Married at eleven to a man who raped her, she eventually fled, becoming involved with bandits. Phoolan's time as a bandit became legendary, particularly after the 1981 Behmai massacre, where her gang allegedly killed twenty upper-caste Thakur men in revenge for her gang rape. Whether she ordered the killings remains disputed, but she became a symbol to some, a Robin Hood figure; to others, a criminal. After years evading capture, she negotiated surrender in 1983 and spent eleven years in prison without trial. Upon release in 1994, she entered politics, winning election to Parliament in 1996, advocating for Dalits, women, and the poor. In 2001, Phoolan was assassinated, likely by men seeking revenge for Behmai. She was thirty-seven.

**27) Irom Chanu Sharmila (1972)**

Irom Chanu Sharmila became known as the "Iron Lady of Manipur" for her sixteen-year hunger strike against the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA), one of history's longest hunger strikes. Born in Manipur, Northeast India, she grew up witnessing militarization's devastating effects on her community. On November 2, 2000, after Indian paramilitary forces killed ten civilians at a bus stop in Malom, the twenty-eight-year-old Sharmila began fasting, vowing not to eat until AFSPA was repealed. The government responded by arresting her for attempted suicide, force-feeding her through nasal tubes, and keeping her imprisoned in hospital for sixteen years. Her protest brought international attention to Northeast India's militarization and state violence. In 2016, Sharmila ended her fast, recognizing that protest alone couldn't achieve change without political power. She entered electoral politics, though unsuccessfully. Her courage brought visibility to Northeast India's struggles against militarization and state violence.

**28) Kadubai Kharat (1979)**

Kadubai Kharat was a pioneering Dalit activist and educator in Maharashtra who dedicated her life to empowering Dalit women through education and social reform. Born into a Mahar community, she experienced untouchability's degradation firsthand, fueling her determination to fight caste oppression. Deeply influenced by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's teachings, she became active in the anti-caste movement during its crucial years. Kharat recognized that Dalit liberation required women's education and mobilization. She worked tirelessly to establish educational institutions for Dalit children, particularly girls facing barriers based on both caste and gender. She traveled through villages, convincing parents to educate daughters despite economic hardships and social pressures. As an organizer, Kharat mobilized Dalit women for collective action, leading campaigns against caste discrimination in public spaces and organizing women's groups for mutual support. Her activism extended to Buddhist conversion movements, seeing religious transformation as essential for escaping Hinduism's caste system.

**29) Tarana Burke (1973)**

Tarana Burke founded the Me Too movement in 2006, creating a framework for survivors of sexual violence to find collective healing and political power. Born in the Bronx, New York, Burke understood how sexual violence disproportionately affected marginalized communities, particularly Black women and girls. As a youth worker in Alabama, she encountered a young girl who disclosed sexual abuse, and Burke's inability to respond adequately led her to create spaces where survivors could say "me too" and find solidarity. For over a decade, Burke worked at grassroots level, organizing Black and brown survivors, developing community - based healing practices, and advocating for resources in underserved areas. In 2017, when #MeToo went viral globally, many initial accounts failed to credit Burke's decade of groundwork. She used the platform to center survivors from marginalized communities often excluded from mainstream narratives, insisting the movement must address power dynamics beyond individual predators.

**30) Mikki Kendall (1976)**

Mikki Kendall is a contemporary writer and activist whose work examines how mainstream feminism has failed women of color and working-class women. Born and raised on Chicago's South Side, she experienced realities that privileged feminist discourse often ignores - poverty, violence, inadequate healthcare, and educational inequity. Kendall gained prominence through the #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen hashtag she created in 2013, which went viral as women of color shared experiences of racism within feminist spaces. Her 2020 book “Hood Feminism: Notes from the Women That a Movement Forgot” systematically critiqued mainstream feminism's failures, arguing that feminism focused on corporate boardroom access is meaningless to women struggling with food insecurity, gun violence, inadequate housing, or lack of healthcare. Kendall's work is characterized by sharp analysis, historical awareness, and refusal to prioritize civility over truth-telling. She challenges comfortable feminist narratives, insisting feminism must be accountable to the most vulnerable women.

**31) Babytai Kamble (1929-1986)**

Babytai Kamble was a pioneering Dalit writer whose autobiography Jina Amucha (The prisons we broke, 1986, translated by Maya Pandit) became one of the first published autobiographies by a Dalit woman in Marathi literature. Born into a Mahar community in Maharashtra, she experienced untouchability's harsh realities from childhood, denied access to water sources, forced into degrading labor, and subjected to constant caste-based humiliation. Despite minimal formal education, Kamble documented Dalit women's lived experiences systematically erased from historical narratives. Jina Amucha provided an unflinching account of daily violence, economic exploitation, and social exclusion. She wrote about taboo issues: menstruation, childbirth, sexuality, domestic violence within Dalit families, and specific oppressions Dalit women faced from both upper-caste society and patriarchy within their communities. Deeply influenced by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's movement, she participated in Buddhist conversion ceremonies and organized Dalit women throughout her life. Her autobiography inspired subsequent generations of Dalit women writers.