Abstract
ABSTRACT

The present thesis is an attempt by this researcher to examine how Paule Marshall, a post-colonial African-American writer with a West Indian background, uses various appropriated narrative techniques to present an insider's perception of black life. Marshall writes in the post-colonial mode, which proposes a break with past academic ways of categorizing the human activities in this world through linear historicity. The term 'post-colonial' is employed as a theoretical construct, as a manoeuvre to unearth people's lives from structural constraints and to free their stories from the weight of history. Marshall's post-colonial approach enables her to trace the history of black people from the time of slavery to the present day; from the state of acquiescence to that of assertion.

This dissertation analyses the five novels written by Marshall till date: Brown Girl, Brownstones (1959), The Chosen Place, The Timeless People (1969), Praisesong for the Widow (1983), Daughters (1991) and The Fisher King (2000). It examines Marshall's novels in the light of post-colonial assertion, focusing on the close nexus between the narrative mode and themes. Among the various strategies appropriated by Marshall, the following are closely examined: i) memory and myth, ii) use of colours, and iii) songs, music and dance.

This thesis is divided into five chapters. The first chapter has two parts: chapter 1 and chapter 1A. Chapter 1, Introduction, speaks of the significance of liberation of post-colonial writing, presents the literary
biography of Marshall and points out the symbiotic relationship that exists between her post-colonial themes and narrative technique. Chapter 1A, Narrative Technique – An Analysis, analyses Marshall’s masterly handling of the elements of fiction and shows how Marshall’s narrative technique defines her themes.

The second chapter discusses memory and myth as controlling narrative principles. It argues that Marshall reasserts through the medium of the written word the value of an orally derived perception of the workings of memory. It is shown that the myth-making of Marshall derives, almost exclusively, from African, African-American and African-Caribbean contexts. It is pointed out that Marshall’s aim is to speak to the psycho-cultural situation of people of African descent; and that Marshall seeks to give voice to a previously voiceless past. She creates representative female characters whose experiences embody the history of women in their culture. Marshall asserts that for the black people, reclamation of their past is an act at once, of survival and of affirmation; and it enables them to define their own identities, both as members of their ethnic group and as women.

The third chapter examines how Marshall reverses the connotations attached to colours, black and white, to present positive images of Africa and the black diaspora. She highlights the negative traits in Western culture and the positive features of African culture, and thus makes white look black and black white.

The fourth chapter of the thesis points out that songs, music and dance are presented in Marshall’s novels as the means of preservation of history and celebration of identity. It is shown that by synthesizing literary,
historical, musical and dance elements, Marshall has created a hybrid genre, which expands the perimeters of the universal themes and forms present in canonical American fiction.

The final and fifth chapter, Conclusion, sums up the findings of the foregoing chapters, pointing out how the post-colonial mode of writing has enabled Marshall to sculpt the complex forms of her African heritage. By balancing the white and male-centred view of history with the black woman's perspective, Marshall seeks simultaneously to affirm her culture and to transform it.