Chapter - 2

Memory and Myth
CHAPTER 2
MEMORY AND MYTH

2.1. SECTION OVERVIEW

The marginality of American blacks provides them with a heightened self consciousness. Like the other minorities, they want to present their plans, affirm their values and define their relations with the world. The black women's literary tradition reveals the transfigured values and mores that they nurtured and cultivated in order to survive the often-dehumanizing conditions of their lives and to challenge their disfigured images. Marshall, in her essays, identifies the passing on of the historical and cultural heritage of people of African descent as a major artistic goal. Marshall uses fiction, both as creative expression and as political tool, to discuss important issues involved in cross-cultural encounters. This chapter examines two of the techniques, memory and myth, the author employs to draw the reader into her world.

Section 2.2. discusses the African-American reality. It points out the disadvantaged position the blacks find themselves in, in racially segregated America and how the three major black institutions, the black church, the educational institutions and the family, cannot function effectively in such a racist climate, to help the blacks to build up positive images of themselves; so, the onus rests with the black writers, who believe in 'the
journey back', for positive image building. Section 2.3. describes the return to the past as a retelling of the past. Section 2.4.1. explains how memory functions variously in literate and oral cultures. It is pointed out that the whites and the blacks remember slavery differently. Section 2.4.2. points out that black writers use memory as an alternative means to come to terms with the past and reconstruct it. Section 2.4.2.1. examines collective memory or re-memory as both subjective and inter-subjective. Praisesong for the Widow (1983b) and The Chosen Place, The Timeless People (1969) are analysed and the healing and uniting power of this shared memory is pointed out. Section 2.4.2.2. analyses Marshall's novels, except Praisesong for the Widow (1983b), to show the vital part played by memory in the formation of cultural identity. Section 2.5.1. defines myth; it points out the association of sacredness with myth, in ancient times; it speaks about mankind's need for myth and it's secularization. Section 2.5.2. states that racial myths have been created with a vested interest by the colonizers; it speaks of the highly damaging and demoralizing effects of such myths on the blacks. Section 2.5.3. analyses the novels of Marshall and shows that either she has invented indigenous myths or subverted the Western myths to suit her purpose; it points out how Marshall utilizes myths to reveal to the people of African descent that they had been a people and to assure them that the direction for their future lies in their past.

2.2. AFRICAN-AMERICAN REALITY

2.2.1. The Present-Day Plight of Blacks

Historically, politically, and socially, African-Americans occupy a unique position within American society. Their history includes slavery
and segregation, the migration to North, the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements. Their political past involves voter disenfranchisement and separation from formal channels of power. Their economic life can be characterized as disadvantaged compared to European-Americans of comparative skills and training. African-American culture also is socially distinctive, including language/dialect, non-verbal and verbal style and patterns of interaction. Structural, cultural, and social distinctions define the African-American experience.

People of African descent share a common experience, struggle and origin. In their culture, resistance to assault upon traditional values are present. Their three traditional values are harmony with nature, humaneness, and rhythm; African way of knowing and interpreting the world is based on these. Some form of communalism or socialism is at work, in the way of producing, owning and distributing wealth. Pre-colonial Africa consisted of tribal nations. When brought to the United States, these groups were forcibly thrust together and they created an African culture. It has been shaped by the African past, the cruel vicissitudes of slavery and hard-to-accept reality of life in racially segregated America.

The socio-cultural and economic factors leading to the current status of African-Americans are: urbanization and Northern movement from 1940-1970, Civil Rights Movement, the opening of major institutions for African-American participation during 1940-1970; the unprecedented, high and sustained rate of national economic growth and a significant showdown in the United States economy since the early 1970s. “The
interaction of these events with institutional racism and the devastating psychological and material legacy of slavery has created a complex and diverse African American social reality…” (Hecht et.al.1993:6).

2.2.2. The Three Black Institutions

The three premier institutions that have been helping the African-Americans in their struggle to come up in life are the Black church, the educational institutions and the family (9). The Black church helped the blacks to lead a structured and organized social life; it provided them with the normal fabric of the society; it gave leadership training; it gave rise to the spirituals, the gospel music, rhythms, blues, and rock and roll; it brought about orators, like Martin Luther King, Jr., outstretch programmes to feed the homeless, and youth support groups.

The black colleges have been instrumental in improving the social and economic status of African-Americans. They came into existence as a response to racial segregation. African-Americans enact cultural rituals in schools, to forge ethnic identity. But, most of the blacks do not attend college. So, the difference between African-Americans and Euro-Americans is widening.

The primary and most important tradition in the African-American community has been the family. The enslaved Africans have utilized their cultural background to create family life in America. They keep group-specific traditions, while adapting to a mainstream society. Higher divorce rates and lower marriage rates are prevalently seen; they lead to economic consequences, like single earning in the family. Family is one of the
primary conduits of ethnic identity and cultural codes; here, the young begin to define and negotiate their worlds. Language acquisition and the identification of group symbols are essentials of this process; Black English, contemporary music etc. are a part of ethnic aspects.

The three premier institutions discussed could help the black people only to a certain extent, because “the environment is still not conducive to a strong, positive identity” (Hecht et.al.1993: 63) of African-Americans. The media often reinforce the negative identities created by the colonizers. The media and sociologists see African-Americans as an aberration. Here is where the black writer becomes very important. Marshall says in an interview that

> The writer feels the battle is the psychic; is that whole area of what people think of themselves, how they see themselves, what happens to them. It is the writer’s great contribution to create new images that will overcome the negative psychological images we have because of our history (Ogundipe- Leslie 1977:35).

Marshall sees writers as “image makers” (30). In an interview with Maryse Conde, Marshall speaks with conviction: “We (as people of African descent) must accept the task of ‘reinventing’ our own image, and the role which Africa will play in this process will be essential” (Williams 1986:53).

2.3. GOING BACK, TO MOVE FORWARD

Marshall’s works show her preoccupation with the need to celebrate the Black experience. She says in an interview:
History has been hidden from us especially in the Western hemisphere. I feel we have to go back and recreate the past so that we can use the lessons from that to aid us in the present struggle. I’m using the past in a way of existing us in the present and in the future (Ogundipe-Leslie 1977:37).

The two things that have the greatest priority in her work are “a reappraisal of our past and a celebration of the positive aspects of our experience” (Ibid.).

Marshall believes that black people, to define themselves on their own terms, must consciously engage their past. She also believes that “An oppressed people cannot overcome their oppressors and take control of their lives until they have a clear and truthful picture of all that has gone before, until they begin to use their history creatively” (Marshall 1973:107). When Marshall was the second guest of writers at Rudgers, she said: “History to me is an antidote to the lies” (Warren 2003: 1). So, she makes all her major characters to go back in their search for their black self, to their ancient heritage. This literary journey to Africa, literally or metaphorically, has its roots in the Negritude Movement. This return to the native land is the necessary prerequisite of a second return, return to the United States or Caribbean islands. After taking the journey back to Africa, Marshall’s women are confident of their non-European, yet, noble origins; they could finally undergo a process of ‘rebirth’ as black women who are proud of their blackness. Hope for the future lies in honouring the past and using it as the basis for unified action. History, in turn, is an active, creative
and moral process composed by human beings. In Marshall's work, the past and present are interdependent. Neither has precedence over the other. Return to the past is, actually, a re-telling of the past. This is a process which requires an imaginative recognition of both what existed and what one continually creates. In this process, the fundamentally important role is that of memory.

2.4. MEMORY

2.4.1. Memory in Literate Cultures

In literate cultures, memory is considered to be "a rational, intellectual process" (Lock 1995: 2). Literate, text-oriented cultures value empirical science and verifiable fact. They demand of memory that it adheres to rigorous standards of exactitude and verification. Lock remarks: "Because literates think in terms of a fixed original whose total recapitulation is not only possible but desirable, 'objective, deliberate, and exact recall' thus becomes the privileged definition of memory" (Ibid.). Recall is seldom exact; therefore, it is not valued by literate societies. Literate cultures conceive of time in linear terms. The past is experienced as a single fixed entity, repository of unchangeable facts or truth – a time irrevocably gone. The linear conception of time demands that the past remains static, never to be visited, reconfigured, or transcended.

2.4.2. Memory in Oral Cultures

Oral cultures conceive of time more in cyclical than linear terms; the past is not experienced as a single fixed entity. The past is recalled by memory into present consciousness, not by an objective process but by
creative construction. Access to the past, through memory, is effected by creativity, spontaneity, intuitiveness and subjectivity. The art of memory is "flexible, open to rearrangements, additions, deletions, in the light of cumulative feed back" (Sharrad 1995:101).

2.4.3. Slavery in Western Memory

Marcus Wood discusses the problem of remembering Atlantic slavery in Western culture, in his Blind Memory: Visual Representations of Slavery in England and America (2000). He calls the memory of slavery by the West as "blind memory" (Ibid: 304), because it turns away from its blinding reality. He suggests that blind memory has given rise to two discursive forms of commemorating memories of slavery in the West: 'abolitionist memory' and 'curatorial memory'. Abolitionist memory focuses on heroic deeds of white liberators; it is the political memory of slavery. Curatorial memory involves the displaying of the objects, tools, weapons, exhibits, images, texts, scenes and artifacts of African enslavement. Wood says that this memorial discourse reveals the obsession of the West to represent the memory of slave torture through objects; it also reveals a Western desire to come to curatorial terms with the horror of slavery. Wood argues that "the West has been misremembering and disremembering slavery for more than three centuries" (300). Wood insists that the enormity of the slavery resists total recall and it is impossible to give an adequate empirical representation of it. The alternative he suggests is 'aesthetic memory', which is art exploring questions of guilt. By the end of the twentieth century, whatever little public commemorations of slavery
in the West existed were articulated through either abolitionist, curatorial, or aesthetic invocations of memory.

Barnor Hesse (2002) makes use of the concept of Gilles Delueze’s (1994) ‘empirical memory’ and ‘transcendental memory’ to discuss the conventional Western styles of remembering slavery. According to Delueze, empirical memory “is addressed to those things which can and must be grasped: what is recalled must have been seen, heard, imagined or thought” (Qtd. in Hesse 2002:164). Hesse points out that remembering slavery in this way leads the black subject to remember slavery through trauma and the white subject through guilt. Empirical memory, also involves “empirical forgetting” (Ibid.), according to Delueze. Hesse lists the effacements effected by ‘forgetting’ within the empirical memory of slavery: i) the constitutive relation between Atlantic slavery, race and racism ii) the connection between plantation slavery and European imperial formation iii) the historical recurrence and impact of black anti-slavery movements and iv) the idea of the plantation complex as an early model of “globalizing capitalist barbarities” (Hesse 2002: 164). Delueze’s ‘transcendental memory’ refers to only that which can be recalled in the first instance. Hesse applies this to the study of memory of slavery in the West. He says that “a transcendental memory of slavery makes explicit the cultural economy of effacements established in empirical memory….it invites a questioning of the relation between what is forgotten and what is remembered” (Ibid.). The liberal democracy in the West has forgotten the political formations of ‘race’ and ‘racism’. The “just memory” (Ricouer 1999:11) emphasizes the remembrance of slavery and rectification of continuing injustices committed under racism. Hesse calls this memory
"postcolonial memory" (2002: 165). He explains that "postcolonial memory takes the form of a critical excavation and inventory of the marginalized, discounted, unrealized objects of decolonization and the political consequences of their social legacies" (Ibid.). He further explains:

.... postcolonial memory in the West is not concerned with the (colonial) past through an obsession with the past but through an engagement with the (liberal-democratic) present....In the ethics of postcolonial memory, remembering slavery can no more be experienced than generations of racism can be experienced. It is less a structure of feeling than a passionate intervention. (Ibid.)

Hesse asserts:

The oughtness of Atlantic slavery’s memory and the justness of its excavation reside in refusing to efface through forgetfulness the historical complicity and contemporary failures of Western liberal democracies. It is this which foregrounds the passage from ethics to politics, rather than the reverse. (Ibid.)

The same move from responsibility to questioning is vibrantly present in the works of diasporic black women writers.
2.4.4. Memory in Black Fiction

"Remembering occurs most profoundly where it is intensely contested and inescapably traumatic, and where a compelling desire to forget confronts the impossibility of doing so" (2002:143). It is clearly exemplified in black fiction. Marshall and other writers of the African diaspora use the process of memory as controlling narrative principle. They aim to reconstruct the absences and silences of oral history that are contained within the official written record; this, they try to achieve through memory, perceived in both oral and literate terms. They attempt to energize the dialectic between the literate and oral conception of memory. They reassert, through the medium of the written word, the value of an orally derived perception of the workings of memory. This powerful alternative means of negotiating with the past enables the writers to reconstruct and regenerate subjectively many kinds of truth.

According to Helen Lock, “This approach ultimately enables participation in, as well as preservation of, the past, and provides the potential for its transformation and the exorcism of its pain” (1995: 3).

2.4.4.1. Collective Memory

Marshall’s novels focus on the power of oral tradition and her women are oral translators of their culture. Memory, in her novels, appears as both collective memory and personal memory. Collective memory is what Toni Morrison calls “rememory”, in her novel Beloved (1987). Rememory is both subjective and inter-subjective. What Ashraf Rushdy says about memory in Toni Morrison’s novels is true of Marshall’s novels also. In Morrison’s novels, Rushdy writes:
...memory exists as a communal property of friends, of family, of a people. The magic of memory is that it is interpersonal, that it is the basis for constructing relationship with the other who also remembers. The reality of memory is that it must be experienced individually first, before it becomes communal property. In individual experience, memory is painful... In shared experience, memory is healing....(1990: 321-22)

In Marshall’s Praisesong for the Widow (1983b), ‘re-membering’ is reflected in the structure of the narrative itself. It is built upon fragments of memory. Avey Johnson, the protagonist, makes connections, under the guidance of others, among her fragmented memories; eventually, she reconstructs herself as Avatara—“an avatar of all the past and present consciousnesses that have contributed to the making of Avey Johnson” (Lock 1995: 5).

Avey’s transformation is set in motion by the ‘dream memory’ she has of Cuney, her father’s great-aunt. ‘Dream memory’ is an invention of Alice Walker; memory is an encyclopedia of stories and myths; it is an extension of the collective unconscious; it bridges the gap between the collective and the individual because it contains the personal element of dreams. In Praisesong for the Widow (1983b), Avey decides to leave the Caribbean cruise abruptly, due to two apparently unconnected occurrences—her inability to eat a deliciously rich parfait and the dream about her great-aunt Cuney. Avey, the comfortably middle-class, self-conscious, elderly widow “As a rule... seldom dreamed” (31). She stopped
dreaming, after her nightmare about the bomb that exploded in the Sunday school, killing her three children, in her dream. Now, in the middle of the cruise, the old habit has returned; her great-aunt Cuney has come to confront her in her sleep.

In Avey’s dream, Cuney appears before her at Ibo Landing in Tatem, South Carolina. She silently implores Avey to come with her to enact the ritual of their communal heritage and listen to the story of the Ibos. The presence of Cuney in her dream reminds Avey of her annual trip to Tatem every August, after her seventh year. Avey remembers how Cuney had filled her head, year after year, with some far-fetched story of people walking on water. In telling the story, the old woman had entrusted her with a mission which Avey felt duty-bound to fulfil. Avey has taken many years to rid herself of that notion. Now, in her dream, Avey refuses to follow Cuney. Cuney’s pleading becomes a demand; when Avey is about to turn and walk away, Cuney’s hand grips her wrist like a manacle and drags Avey forward in the direction of the Landing. Avey resists and hits her aunt; her great-aunt does not hesitate to hit her back. The tug-of-war suddenly becomes a bruising fist-fight. The fight rages on and the clothes are being torn from Avey’s body. Avey begins to hammer away at Cuney with renewed fury there on the road to the Landing, with the whole of North White Plains looking on. The battle is representative of a conflict of values – the material values of the dominant culture vs. the spiritual values of the oppressed group.

Avey’s dream has been strange and unsettling and equally disturbing has been the business of parfait she has had for dessert at the evening meal.
The parfait reflects all the overabundance on the cruise, leaving her with “the mysterious clogged and swollen feeling” (52). Her look becomes “troubled” and “disoriented” (58). In her dazed and shaken state, she fears that her eyes and ears might turn “the ordinary and familiar into something surreal…” (57). Her fear comes true; when an old man speaks to her on the deck, she sees him as “a skeleton in a pair of skimpy red- and -white striped trunks and a blue visored cap” (59). Unable to bear such physical and mental discomfort, Avey decides to leave the ship. When the ship docks for a few hours on the Caribbean island of Grenada, she disembarks and plans to fly back to her home, New York City.

The dream memory brings back Avey’s forgotten memories about her great-aunt Cuney, a representative of her ancestral past; it interrupts her journey. But, the interrupted journey gives her a chance to undertake an unexpected journey, which will make Avey a participant in collective memory or rememory. Avey, who disembarks at Grenada, is stranded there, because she misses the plane to New York. The Patois spoken by people in Martinique which she heard three days ago and the same spoken by people at Grenada now, calls to her mind the way people spoke in Tatem long ago. When she is waiting for the next plane to New York, she comes across the “out-island” people—people of the smaller island, Carriacou, who live and work in Grenada. They are on an annual excursion; this excursion back to their native land, according to Angelita Reyes, is “in fact their annual rite of rejuvenation, their rite of the eternal return, their trans-human communication with the African past and its sacred forces” (1992: 244). None of them seems to consider her a stranger, a visitor or a tourist. There is a familiarity, almost an intimacy, to their
gestures of greeting and the unintelligible words they call out. Someone elbows her into the crowd. She feels rattled and outdone. She engages a taxi and goes to stay in The Miramar Royale.

Avey is at ease, only after making the plane reservation and taxi arrangement for taking her to the airport. But, once she is inside the luxury hotel room, "the mysterious welling up in her stomach and under her heart which had plagued her off and on ever since the parfait" (PSW: 82) comes back. Sitting in the balcony, she goes into a reverie of her past life with Jay, her husband. In Book II, "Sleeper’s Wake," she evaluates their lives together; mourns the loss of Jay; acknowledges her own part in denying her heritage; estimates what has been lost; and begins to reconstruct her life.

The Caribbean seems to trigger personal as well as racial memories. Avey’s Middle Passage back begins in this environment. Book III “Lave Tete” brings about the meeting between Avey and Lebert Joseph, an ancestral figure. She meets him when she comes back from her very long walk away from the hotel, at the other end of the beach. Feeling dizzy, she enters into his rum shop. Lebert Joseph, “close to ninety perhaps” (161) is about to close the shop for the excursion. But, he has time to explain to her that each year this time the Long-time People, the Old Parents, “does look for us to come and give them their remembrance” (165); so, they go on their annual excursion to Carriacou. In turn, Avey, under a compulsion to talk, tells him of herself, her dream and its consequences. He gives her rum and coconut water. He finds out that she is one of those “People who can’t

* Praisesong for the Widow is hereafter cited in the thesis as PSW.
call their nation” (175). He insists on her coming on the excursion. After an initial hesitation, she agrees to go. The strange discomfort in her stomach and her headache, which she has experienced on the thought of her house in North White Plains, have stopped, as soon as she has decided to join the old man, on his trip to Carriacou.

When Avey is waiting for the boat, she finds the scene on the wharf less strange than the day before. “The milling, moving tide of bodies, the colors and sounds, the pageantry of the umbrellas” (187) bring to her memory a home movie, Marion, one of her daughters, had made during her last trip to Ghana. She also remembers Marion’s description of “a New Yam, of a golden stool that descended from the sky, and of ancestors who were to be fed’ (188). The surging crowd, the rapidly filling boats and the sheen of sunlight on the water bring back to her, her childhood memory of the annual boat ride up the Hudson river to the Bear Mountain. Avey remembers the strange sensation she used to experience, when she was waiting with her family amid the growing crowd on the pier for Robert Fulton to heave into sight. At that time, Avey

would feel what seemed to be hundreds of slender threads streaming out from her navel and from the place where her heart was to enter those around her. And the threads went out not only to people she recognized from the neighbourhood but to those she didn’t know as well…. (190)

The same strange sensation she used to feel when she stood beside her great-aunt outside the church in Tatem, watching the performance of the
Ring Shout by the elderly folk inside. “While the impression lasted she would cease being herself.... instead, for those moments, she became part of, indeed the center of, a huge wide confraternity” (191). It is these connections, these 'slender threads', that have been reaching out of the past to tug at her visceral memory; they were prompted by her subconscious need to 're-member' both her individual and her communal identity. Her need is to reconnect not only with others in her immediate past, but also with all the earlier consciousnesses that dwell inside herself.

The boat they have been waiting for, to go to Carriacou, has come. It is aptly named *Imanuel C*. Avey’s journey back towards the past starts. Avey, who is seated between the old women, stirs fitfully, because she is seized by the bewildering events of the last few days. The women soothe her with their “lilting words full of maternal solicitude” (197). Her mind becomes unburdened; “she began to float down through the gaping hole, floating, looking, searching for whatever memories were to be found there” (Ibid.). She 're-members' the Easter sermon given by Reverend Morrissey, when she was a little girl. There is a violent heaving of her stomach. Under the guidance of the old ladies, Avey expels all the toxins of her past life. She vomits violently and loses control over her bowels; thus, her body purges itself. Her memory takes her back to the time when she was seven or eight years old. She 're-members' another time in the past, when she soiled her pants. Now, when her body purges itself, Avey’s mind is healed “through the reopening of a collective wound - the Middle Passage...” (Wilentz 1990: 11). Avey is taken to the deckhouse, for rest. She is alone there.
Yet she had the impression as her mind flickered on briefly of other bodies lying crowded in with her in the hot, airless dark. A multitude it felt like lay packed around her in the filth and stench of themselves, just as she was. Their moans, rising and falling with each rise and plunge of the schooner, enlarged upon the one filling her head. Their suffering—the depth of it, the weight of it in the cramped space—made hers of no consequence. (PSW: 209)

Thus, Avey's body has become the site of memory.

Book IV "Beg Pardon" marks "the final stage in the growth process of awareness, when the cultural prodigal comes home to beg pardon of her offended ancestors" (Eko 1992:233). In Carriacou, Avey is put up in Lebert Joseph's daughter Rosalie Parvay's house. She gives Avey the ritual cleansing, "a proper wash-down" (PSW: 217). When Avey sees the galvanized bathtub in Rosalie Parvay's place, "another memory" comes "drifting up out of the void" (221). Avey is reminded of a similar bathtub out in back of the house in Tatem: "The memory took over, and for long minutes she was the child in the washtub again" (Ibid.). Avey is washed clean and dressed. Now, she is ready to take part in the Beg Pardon. Avey enters the Nation Dance, in remembrance of the ancestors. She has taken the first step towards wholeness, by acknowledging her place in the diaspora. She feels again the 'slender threads' of connection; she feels reborn; "she re-becomes the Avatara of her past, but in a new, revitalized form" (Lock 1995:6).
Rememory is transformative in *Praisesong for the Widow* (1983b), as in Morrison’s *Beloved* (1987). Avey leaves Carriacou with plans of leading a different life. She resolves to renew her ties with her ancestral and spiritual home, Tatem. She decides to tell her story to those “lacking memory” (255). Rememory enables Avey, as is pointed out by Helen Lock, “to reconstruct the past, recover and reconnect with what is important, reject mistakes and injustices, and finally re-make herself differently—not just as an individual, but as a feeling part of ‘the collective heart’” (Lock 1995:6). The intuitive, non-rational memory is used by Marshall to reconstruct a past that the rational memory chooses not to confront due to its trauma and pain. The narrative does not aim at the exact, accurate rendition of the past. Rather, it illustrates how the memory process of creative reconstruction ‘re-members’ the fragments, transforms the past and its implications, and gives it a new life in the present. As in the shaping of the past, in its reshaping also, many are involved; they become “active participants in stories resurrected from the grave of history” (8). This resurrection is made possible by the liberation of the oral memory process as literary narrative principle; “the written text can serve to evoke all the many potential ‘truths’ of all the unwritten stories” (Ibid.). It enables the black people to grapple with “the meaning and legacy of slavery”, to recognize finally “the temporality of the institution” and to “begin to transcend it” (Rampersad 1989:123).

When the process of memory is a controlling narrative principle in *Praisesong for the Widow* (1983b), collective memory in *The Chosen Place, The Timeless People* (1969), is presented in the form of the story of
Cuffee Ned’s slave revolt. The story is staged every year at the Carnival, with near-universal participation. This interest in the past is a means for alternative cultures to oppose and subvert the dominant culture that has historically both repressed and assimilated them. Ethnic writers valorize the subjectivity of narratives and underline the very nature of hegemonic constructions of history and culture. Memory in this context, shapes narrative forms and strategies toward redeeming a suppressed past and helps the process of re-visioning that is essential to gaining control over one’s life and future. (Singh et al. 1994:18-19)

The story of Cuffee Ned’s act of resistance is used in the novel, The Chosen Place, The Timeless People (1969), to inform and recreate the lives of the people of Bournehills, who seek to define themselves on their own terms.

The people of Bournehills are timeless, because they are and have always been at one with the collective memory. They are closely connected to the past; they hold the key both to the present and future. They appear to be “endowed with a two-fold vision: of not only being able to see backward in time so that, unlike most people, they [have] a clear memory of events long past, but, by some extraordinary prescience, forward also” (385). Since it is the memory of an oppressed people, their collective memory has empowered them so. They are the survivors and loving embodiment of those millions drowned and dead. There is Ferguson, the
cane factory mechanic who keeps the memory of the ancestral dead alive, with his rehearsal of the tale of Cuffee Ned; Delbert, the shopkeeper and truck driver, who reminds one of an Ashanti chief; Leesy, the old prophetess; old Mr. Douglin, who keeps the grave faithfully; and Stinger, the cane cutter who, at the Carnival, undergoes his “yearly apotheosis into Cuffee Ned himself” (Brathwaite 1992:215). As Enid says to Harriet, these people are “another breed altogether” (CPTP: 70).

Not only the people but also the chosen place, Bournehills, reminds one of slavery. The basement of the former barracoon-turned nightclub contains “the rusted remains of iron manacles that had been fitted around the ankles and wrists, around the dark throats” (82). The island’s only factory, the sugar-cane factory, reminds Saul of “the dark hold of a ship set on some interminable voyage” (221). In Merle’s bedroom, there is the picture of figures bound “to each other in the packed, airless hold of the ship in the drawing” (402). Even the marauding sea around Bournehills has a sound like that of the combined voices of the drowned slaves: the sea seems to mourn them. The Bournehills people join with the sea to mourn their loss, grieving over “an exile bitter and irreversible in which all memory of the former life and of the self as it had once been had been destroyed” (282). But, they are strengthened by their memories of Bourne Island’s own story of the Cuffee Ned Rebellion; by the memory of a time when “They had been a people!” (287). Like the Out -islander’s return to Carriacou from Grenada, the re-enactment of the story of Cuffee Ned is an annual event. This rememory reminds them of their past and provides them with guide-lines for living in the present and for looking to the future.

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The Chosen Place, The Timeless People is hereafter cited as CPTP in the thesis.
When rememory brings about a new mind-set in a single woman, Avey, in *Praisesong for the Widow* (1983b) it speaks of the possibility of change for the better, in the life of a people, the people of Bournehills, in *The Chosen Place, The Timeless People* (1969).

### 2.4.4.2. Personal Memory

For all human beings who wish to be whole, the strength of one’s memory, both as an individual and as a member of a certain hereditary group, is fundamentally important. But, it is more important for the members of marginalized groups. As Marshall explains in “Shaping the World of My Art”, the “knowledge of one’s culture, one’s history, serves as an ideological underpinning for the political, social, and economic battles they must wage. It is the base upon which they must build” (1973:107). In his conversation with Merle, Saul Amron in *The Chosen Place, The Timeless People* expresses a similar view: “people... who’ve been wronged... must at some point, if they mean to come into their own, start using their history to their advantage. Turn it to their own good” (315). Saul Amron is a Jew and his words make it clear that not only for blacks but also for members of all ethnic and minority groups, memory is crucial. Amron’s wife, Harriet, a WASP, proves that memory is equally important for the oppressors. Adam Meyer has rightly pointed that *The Chosen Place, The Timeless People* can be seen as “a compendium of perspectives on the various ways that memory, one’s personal and collective past, can influence one’s life” (1995:3).

The novel, *The Chosen Place, The Timeless People* (1969), is set in the post-colonial period; it foregrounds a clash in cultural values which
occurs when an American group headed by Saul Amron, an anthropologist, arrives on Bourne Island, to do research work for a development project. But, besides the obvious portrayal of imperialism and racism in the novel, there is a complex treatment of suffering, guilt and personal empowerment. Saul Amron, one of the three main characters of the novel, is an aging but still active research worker. He is a committed intellectual; he has worked all his life in underdeveloped countries; he has real sympathy for people and their problems. He has come to Bournehills, believing that ceremonies of reconciliation can set a great wrong right. In his search for links between the traditions of past and the needs of the people, Saul does not discover what he needs to know through the usual methods of research; he enters into the work of cutting sugarcane and spends time to get to know the place and people.

Saul’s struggle with his past is initially triggered by watching Gwen and Stinger transformed daily through arduous labour from living beings to Zombie-like creatures. One particular day, Saul stays with them till the afternoon; he sees Stinger becoming like a wounded wrestler to be defeated and the pregnant Gwen becoming less sure of her footing, due to sheer exhaustion. They are yoked to an exploitative system that works them to death and steals the fruits of their labour. Saul flees the scene, struck by a double memory. The first memory is that of his mother. As Shepardi Jews, Saul’s mother and her people had wandered through the two continents of America, from South America through the Caribbean to New York. He remembers the tales of suffering told by his mother. She used to often tell them of their ancestors’ flight, privations and wandering, speaking of it as though it were the one outstanding example of all the suffering
known to man. It has become the means by which he understands the suffering of others; it includes within its wide meaning what he has just witnessed on the hill. This memory is coupled with another; the image of an old Jewish man who used to sit all day in the window above the candy store he had passed on his way to and from school, beating his chest with a frail fist. The old man turned everyday into Yom Kippur, atoning not only for his sins but for those of the world as well. Saul confronts his past, both as a Jew and as an individual. Saul’s Jewish heritage, with his own personal past, fuses in his mind with the faces and the past of the Bournehills people.

Then Saul begins to see Merle as a “large figure in whose person was summed up both Bournehills and its people” (260). He becomes involved with Merle, when he recognizes their similar kinds of loneliness. Carnival, a time of collective memory, gives them a chance to become close, by sharing their personal memories about their troubling past. Saul tells Merle about his desertion of a Peruvian public health nurse who became his mistress. He speaks to Merle about his first wife, Sosha, a survivor of the Nazi concentration camps, who died of a miscarriage while out on field work with him in Honduras. For years, Saul has been anguishing at his first wife’s deathbed. His self-assessed guilt for her death has kept him away from field work altogether, until he meets and marries Harriet. By telling him that he does not fail everyone, Merle helps Saul to transcend these moments of the past and enables him to act in the present. He understands that the deeper he goes in re-examining the communal memories that he had all but forgotten about, the more sympathetic he becomes to the situation in Bournehills. He realizes that he has to go back
to the root of his own life, if any change is to occur in places like Boumehills. Without that understanding of the past, “Outsiders just complicate the picture” (467). His time on Bourne Island brings back his Jewish past to him and provides him with a stronger sense of identity; “...in remembering his wife’s death he is brought finally, after having avoided it for so long, to the fact of that tragedy” (218). He begins to come to terms with himself; he attempts to compensate for his past actions, through his help to the people of Bournehills. But Harriet has him removed from the project, on knowing about the liaison between Saul and Merle and after failing in her attempt to buy Merle off. He decides to return to America and there he would continue to fight for the rights of the oppressed.

Of the three main characters, Saul, Merle and Harriet, Merle is the closest to the people of Bournehills, as she is one of them. She is a tense and eccentric middle-aged black woman, rather a Mulatta; her father, Ashton Vaughan is a white landowner. She is deeply troubled and lonely. She describes herself as “A slightly daft, middle-aged woman with history on the brain” (467). At two, Merle has seen her mother killed before her own eyes, by one of her father’s women. She blames herself for not remembering the face of the killer. Her father has never acknowledged her, even though he provides her with money to go to England for her studies. She stays in England for fifteen years. After coming back from England, she chooses to live in Bournehills, rather than in the city, like the rest of the middle class; drinks rum, not whiskey; speaks the dialect, rather than the Queen’s English; and dares to teach school children about their very own revolutionary hero, Cuffee Ned. She is the “spokeswoman of the island’s
self-respect” (Brathwaite 1992:212). She is the challenge and testing ground for the white characters; the bridge between the West symbolized by the Amrons, and Africa represented by the peasants of Bournehills. She is “fiercely, petulantly, frustratedly committed to her little ‘rock’ and yet essentially rootless” (Ibid.). In the words of Adam Meyer, “She is, in fact, like Avey, a broken woman in need of healing and renewal” (1995:5).

Barbara Christian remarksMerle is “restricted by a moment of

the past” (1980:131). She refuses to face this dark secret which plagues her. The prominent characteristic of Merle is that “she is noisy—her voice, her movements, her jewelry” (Olmsted 1997:253). Her constant banter works as a defence mechanism. Such avoidance on Merle’s part leads to both physical and psychological problems. To quote Mary Jane Schenck: “Merle has been rendered almost dysfunctional” (1994:51) by her past. She is subjected to fits of catatonia, a form of schizophrenia; she experiences periods of over-activity or unconsciousness. She can be cured only when she re-examines the past and uses it to her advantage. She must transcend the crippling moment of the past, before she begins to live in the present. She successfully does it, late on the Carnival night; she tells Saul of her relationship with a white woman in England, which shattered her life. When Merle was a student in England, she got involved with a wild crowd; its ring leader was an upper class white lady. Merle was her “kept woman” (CPTP: 327). When she met Ketu, her Kenyan husband, Merle tried to end her relationship with the lady. The spumed woman informed Ketu of his wife’s previous sordid relationship. He took their daughter to Africa, leaving Merle lonely. She returned to Bournehills; since her return, she has been searching for “Coherence and vision” (229).
Merle looks back on the episode and she understands that her personal memory of her self-willed subjugation to the West, parallels and even merges, with her people's historical memory (Harris 1981:70). She realizes that she has to “try and learn from all that's gone before... from both the good and the bad” (CPTP: 315). She uses her history as her guide. Her active involvement in the folk culture of Bournehills provides her with the guidelines for values she must use to find herself. Merle begins to look at her past squarely through her symbiotic relationship with Saul. She vehemently rejects what both Harriet and the English woman represent. In her confrontation with Harriet, Merle breaks the chains of psychological dependency. She tells Harriet: “I don’t like people ordering me about like I’m still the little colonial. I’ve had too much of that” (442). Refusing to be a slave again, she completes her bid for freedom. Her effort to define herself, her commitment and her refusal to be dehumanized, place her in the Cuffee Ned tradition. Like Cuffee Ned, she frees herself. Since, freedom means a choice of responsibility and commitment, Merle plans to visit her husband and her child. Freedom ultimately means a conscious recommitment; Merle will come back, as she knows fully well that “A person can run for years but sooner or later he has to take a stand in the place which, for better or worse, he calls home, do what he can to change things there” (468). Through Merle’s development, Marshall asserts that Bournehills must undergo a similar process; personal and social changes are inextricably linked; one is virtually impossible without the other.

Of the three main characters, Harriet Amron “is the one who seems to remain furthest from it [Bournehills]” (Meyer 1995:6). She stands as a
symbol of the spirit of the white world. She is a descendant of the mainline Philadelphian, a long line of oppressors. Her family has made its money through investments in the slave trade. Susan Harbin, an early forebear of Harriet, dealt in small scale speculation in the West Indies trade in flour, salted cod, cornmeal, candles and slaves. Harriet is “heir to the widow’s questionable legacy” (CPTP: 38). This personal past of Harriet merges with the collective past of Bourne Island. In her desire to blot out her past, Harriet has stopped seeing, even talking about, her two brothers living with large families, and a host of uncles and aunts, except uncle Chessie. She does not want to be held responsible for what “all those Harbins and Shippens... did and didn’t do” (47). Her avoidance of a confrontation with her past makes her broken and alienated. The fact that one cannot wish away her past is revealed in her natural instincts to control everything, including the lives of people. She has decided to marry Saul and succeeded; she has had her way in coming to Bournehills, against the misgivings of Saul. Harriet’s visit to the Caribbean is a kind of pilgrimage into her own history. Her first reaction to Bournehills is as much part of her ethnic as well as her personal history:

It struck her as being another world altogether. Because of the shadows Bournehills scarcely seemed a physical place to her, but some mysterious and obscured region of the mind which ordinary consciousness did not dare to admit to light. Suddenly for a single unnerving moment, she had the sensation of being borne backward in time rather than forward in space.(21)
The plane seems to take her back to the past which she has always sought to avoid.

The island society threatens Harriet’s order of things and she begins to remember childhood events that she has pushed into her unconscious. The cook at the guesthouse reminds Harriet of Alberta—Alberta Lee Grant—her mother’s black maid. She imagines the children on the beach to be Alberta’s many nieces and nephews to whom she refused to donate one of her used toys, because “she had felt she was being asked to give too much” (169). She tries to assuage her guilt-stricken conscience by asking uncle Chessie, in one of her letters, to increase Alberta’s pension. She does not want to recognize the connection between her memories of black Alberta and the oppressed Bournehills society, as it reinforces her status on the side of the oppressors.

The other memory that Harriet has been working hard to suppress is that of her first husband, Andrew Westerman, a physicist at the Atomic Proving Ground at Aberdeen. Once he has become firmly established in his field, their marriage has “gone flat”, has “become hollow at the center” (39). She has started having nightmares about an explosion. When she realizes, to her consternation, that not only Andrew’s hand is on the lever which triggered the holocaust but also hers guiding it, she divorces him. This image of “her own complicity, her own culpability in the oppression of many of the world’s people... she has been trying to avoid by blocking out both her personal and her ancestral memories…” (Meyer 1995:9).

Harriet, like the absentee landlord Kingsley or the head of the sugar refinery, Sir John, represents the neo-colonial presence in the Third World.
She becomes to Merle, merely another incarnation of her English benefactress. With the arrogance of her class, Harriet tries to buy Merle off by offering money to leave Bournehills. Merle refuses to be bought or bribed. Harriet wants to make Bournehills in her own image, her own order. But Bournehills cannot change for the better, unless she changes and she refuses to give up her sense of superiority. She also fails to remake Saul in her own image. Her womanhood and the power of her status receive a fatal blow. Her final act reveals the rigidity of her order. As usual, she goes for her early morning swim and is never seen again.

Both Merle and Harriet go back to their pasts, in their attempt to find their selves. As is summed up by Adam Meyer,

Merle, rediscovering Cuffee Ned, is reborn, while Harriet, rediscovering Susan Harbin, is killed. Merle’s history is as one of the oppressed, and her memories are therefore a source of strength. For Harriet, on the other hand, whose history is as one of the oppressors, memories do not affirm freedom and therefore cannot be life sustaining. (1995:9)

When Merle’s ancestral past has a positive influence on her, that of Harriet teaches her a negative lesson. In the case of Saul, the reinvestigation of his past gives him the strength to find a new meaning in life, when he returns to America. Irrespective of their heritage, for these three main characters in The Chosen Place, The Timeless People (1969), the process of recovering both communal and personal memory is the same, but the results are different, because of their history as the oppressors and the oppressed.
In *Brown Girl, Brownstones* (1959), memory plays an important role in Selina’s struggle for self-discovery. When the story begins, Selina, aged ten, is found in a dreamy mood. She is thinking of the old white family which lived in their brownstone house before: “As they crowded around, fusing with her, she was no longer a dark girl alone and dreaming at the top of an old house, but one of them, invested with their beauty and gentility” (9). But, when she looks at herself in the mirror, she is brought back to reality, which is very hard to accept. The white world’s definition of ‘beauty’ makes her view herself as ugly. Whenever Silla looks at the frail frame of Selina, she is reminded of her dead son and she cautions her about falling ill. This memory of Silla makes Selina assert herself for the first time, by telling Silla, “I keep telling you I’m not him. I’m me. Selina. And there is nothing wrong with my heart” (43). The stunned Silla is reminded of her own girlhood.

Even one year after the death of her father, Selina is in a depressed mood. Her father’s memory makes her feel guilty. She thinks that her father’s death “would never have happened if she had loved him more” (157). There is an inward and spiritual desolation; this shows that she is very much her father’s daughter. But, later on, she comes to identify herself with her mother. When Selina decides to leave for West Indies, she is reminded of what Silla did when she was young. She assures her mother, before she leaves: “I’m truly your child. Remember how you used to talk about how you left home and came here alone as a girl of 18 and was your own woman? I used to love hearing that. And that’s what I want. I want it!” (252). Selina’s memory of what she has learnt from all the lives that
touched hers bequeaths her a small strength. Armed with this strength, she goes in search of peace, love and a clearer vision.

Memories of the same place, for different people who have come from that place, may be different, according to their experiences there and their expectations. While Deighton Boyce and Suggie Skeete carry pleasant memories about Barbados, Silla has bitter memories about that place. Deighton talks about his boyhood days in Barbados, nostalgically, and he wants to go back. He says: “Barbados is poor—poor but sweet enough—That’s why I going back” (14). When he inherits two acres of land from his sister, he wants to go back to Bimshire and build a big house there, out of good Bajan coral stone and paint everything in white. He does not want to buy a brownstone house in Brooklyn. He declares: “…I got big plans or nothing a-tall. That’s the way a man does do things!” (71). But, unfortunately he has to leave the United States as an illegal alien and he has either jumped or fallen overboard and drowned at a point within sight of the Barbados coast.

Suggie Skeete, like Deighton, thinks of Barbados, her home, its yam patch, mango trees and sugarcane fields, in wistfulness. Old Miss Mary, “holding firm to the thin rotted thread of her life” (21), always lives in her comforting past, because the present for her is bitter. In contrast to these people around her, Silla prefers to live in the present and plan for the future. She does not have any endearing memories to hark back to. When Silla was ten, she had to pick grass, along with a set of little children, from sunrise to sunset, under the supervision of a driver with a whip. She sold basket of mangoes. Being a strong-willed woman, having a mind of her
own, she saw to that she came to the United States. In Brooklyn, every morning, Silla, with her friends, takes the train to Flatbush and Sheepshead Bay to scrub floors and returns home with throw-offs. Their only thought is to buy a brownstone house. Silla’s pragmatism, which is characteristic of her people, clashes with Deighton’s dreamy approach to life. Silla’s formidable aspect is the culmination of all that she had suffered. Seeing the love-hate relationship between her parents, Selina is afraid that the clashing memories of Silla will kill her finally. But, Silla emerges stronger for all her sufferings. She ultimately buys a brownstone house, but at the cost of human relationships. Another person for whom the memories of her past are unsavory is Miss Thompson, as they smack of Southern racism. Marshall deftly uses these flashes of memory to show what have made these characters what they are at the present. Some of them have benefited by using what they have learnt from the past; the others have failed to do so.

Daughters (1991), like The Chosen Place, The Timeless People (1969), has a post-colonial setting. In the novel, familial relationships, character locus, and memory constitute the primary components through which the author explores a persistently debilitating postcolonial mentality in the communities on the island of Triunion, as well as its curious reflection in American urban cities. (Pettis 93:2)

The entire novel takes place within the span of two months. But, Marshall, by using both personal and communal memory, by weaving time back and
forth within these two months, goes back to the times of slavery. Marshall says in an interview that in *Daughters* (1991), “The characters are all daughters who are in some way connected one with the other, back to the slave woman who figures as a symbol in the novel” (Baer 1992: 254). One of the ‘daughters’, Ursa Mackenzie, undergoes an abortion in a New York clinic, at the outset of the novel, and comes home to find a letter from her father, Primus Mackenzie. The letter from Triunion sends her into a reverie of her past. She recalls her frequent trips to the swimming pool and to the sea with her father, when she was a little girl; these trips speak of the close relationship between Ursa and her father. Made conscious of this relationship by her lover, Carruthers, she is trying to come out of her emotional dependency on her father, for whom she is an obsession. Her attempt becomes successful, at the end of the novel, when she helps her father’s rival, Justin Beaufils, to win the election, because her father is involved in building a community-unfriendly resort. This places her squarely in the Congo Jane tradition.

The Mt.H.Alumni Newsletter in her mail box brings back to Ursa her bitter experience with Prof. Crowder. When in college, Ursa wanted to write her senior thesis on the relationship of Congo Jane and Will Cudjoe, the island rebels, and her professor refused to approve her topic. Her thoughts of the professor trigger her childhood memories of her visit to the monument. She remembers her mother helping her to touch Congo Jane’s toes: “*Stretch all the way up and touch Congo Jane’s toes .... Go ahead. Stretch! I’m not going to let you fall!... And make sure to touch Will Cudjoe’s toes while you’re at it. You can’t leave him out...*” (*Daughters* 13-14). As Moira Ferguson comments, “Estelle’s focus on cross-
gender revolutionary activism reverberates throughout Daughters” (1999:4). Ursa has inherited the revolutionary couple’s strength—the will to survive and to overcome. Inspite of the professor’s rejection, Ursa privately plans to conduct a self-directed study of the

relatively egalitarian, mutually supportive relations that existed between the bondmen and women and their significance for and contribution to the various forms of resistance to enslavement found in the United States and the Caribbean. (Daughters: 11)

When Ursa starts a second research project, she comes to know that Sandy Lawson, another former ringtail boy, had already bowed down to the white power structure; he has agreed on the construction of an expressway that bypasses and isolates the black community in the area known as the South Wards. Lawson’s activities in America, parallel Mackenzie’s co-optation in Triunion. They enable the white elite to perpetuate themselves as a political and economic power. But resistance is ubiquitous; the daughters of the title, the heirs of Congo Jane—Ursa, Mae Ryland, Viney Daniels, Estelle Mackenzie—swing into action, representing individual sites of resistance. They all work for the welfare of the black community.

The individual stories of the women in Daughters are told in flashbacks and reminiscences in time present. Marshall allows her major characters to narrate the tale of themselves. Estelle’s story is told largely through letters she writes to her homefolk and through the reminiscences of Celestine about Estelle. Celestine’s reverie informs the readers, also about
Mackenzie’s childhood, her closeness to him, Miss Mack, Mackenzie’s now dead mother and Celestine’s disapproval of “the wife the PM went and find in America” (165). Reminiscences of different people tell the readers about Mackenzie’s hunger after power, his political ambition, his corruption by power, his long-standing affair with Astral Forde, his love for his daughter and his life with Estelle; they also tell the readers about Estelle’s ‘slides’, her deep love for Mackenzie, her healthy friendship with Dr. Roy, the birth of Ursa and her upbringing, Ursa’s closeness to Viney and Carruthers, the friendship between Astral Forde and Malvern and the oppressed condition of blacks, both in the United States and the Caribbean. Thus, the use of memory helps Marshall in furthering the plot, making her characters come alive on the page, covering long distances, taking the readers back to the individual and ancestral past of her characters, speaking of the bond between and among women, discussing the problems of the Third world and asserting the positive influence of African cultural heritage.

_The Fisher King_ (2000), which tells the story of multiple generations of two Brooklyn families, is about going back home, reconciliation and healing. The story weaves in between characters’ memories and the current experiences, as in _Daughters_ (1991). The plot moves among decades; it also moves among locales in Paris and the antebellum Southern America; but, it always comes back to Brooklyn. As Rosamond S. King points out, “The story begins in a time close to the present and weaves between it and the 1920s, 1960s, and 1970s—even including a narrative from the 19th century” (2003: 543). Such a feat is made possible only by the presence of memory in the novel.
Hattie Carmichael brings Sonny, the grandson of the famous jazz player, Sonny-Rett, to Brooklyn to attend a memorial concert in honour of the musician. Memories are stirred by his presence. The eight-year-old brings a new lease of life to his two great-grand mothers. The memories of the bitter personal pasts and their ancestral pasts come back to the feuding old women. The struggles of the immigrants from the Caribbean and the migrants from the Southern America to establish themselves in the new place, unfold before the readers. The place and the preparations for the memorial concert induce in Hattie an urge to go back to her early days. She reminisces over her orphaned childhood, her special friendship with Cherisse, her admiration and love for the budding artist, Sonny-Rett, marriage of Cherisse with Sonny-Rett, their flight to Paris, their unconventional life together in Paris, the rise and fall of Sonny-Rett as a jazz player, the death of Sonny-Rett and Cherisse, their daughter, “Jojo, the run away” (FK:199), Jojo’s deserted son, Sonny, under her care, and their life of abject poverty at 130, rue Sauffroy, Paris. This reminiscing is done in bits and pieces; the reader has to put them together, to make a complete picture. Memory has a pivotal role to play in The Fisher King, since the focus of the novel is on the past and the characters, primarily live in the past. Sonny has got “all that Colored from all over creation” (36) in him. He is the hope for the future, a future without any intra-racial clashes; a future when all the different branches of African diaspora join hands showing their solidarity, to fight against their oppressors.

After the analysis of Marshall’s novels, with regards to the workings of the process of memory, it is understood that she has made an effective

*The Fisher King is hereafter cited as FK in the thesis.*
and creative use of this narrative device. It enables the writer and readers to enter into the interior life of people. Her novels reveal to the readers that remembering is a therapeutic act; it is a key to redemption and renewal; it leads to self-realization; memory links one with the others and ancestors; it establishes continuity. Memory plays a central role in the formation of cultural identity. Liberation for the oppressed ethnic minorities hinges upon the rediscovery or rehabilitation of their cultural identity, which European colonialism had disparaged and wrecked. Collective memory or 'rememory' brings in, the slave past; provides a history for the 'a-historical'; teaches the lessons of resistance, endurance, forgiveness and reconciliation. Marshall uses memory, the oral art of recalling, as a narrative device to tell the extraordinary stories of ordinary people, to keep a record of and to spread the wisdom of their ancestors.

2.5. MYTH

2.5.1. Definition and Function

2.5.1.1. What is Myth?

Northrop Frye views mythology as a vision of society:

In every age there is a structure of ideas, images, beliefs, assumptions, anxieties, and hopes which express the view of man's situation and destiny generally held at that time. I call this structure a mythology, and its units myths. A myth, in this sense, is an expression of man's concern about himself, about his place in the scheme of things,
about his relation to society and God, about the ultimate origin and ultimate fate, either of himself or of human species generally. A mythology is thus a product of human concern, of our involvement with ourselves, and it always looks at the world from a man-centred point of view. (Qtd. in Pandeya 1977: 151-52)

Myth, according to Mircea Eliade,

"reveals something as having been fully manifested, and this manifestation is at the same time creative and exemplary, since it is the foundation of a structure of reality as well as of kind of human behaviour. A myth always narrates something as having really happened, as an event that took place, in the plain sense of the term..." (1960: 14-15)

He says that myth reveals or unveils a mystery: "...it reveals the existence and activity of super-human beings behaving in an exemplary manner..." (16). It does not address man's intelligence or his imagination alone; it addresses his whole being. Alan Dundes defines myth as a "sacred narrative explaining how the world and man came to be in their present form.... The critical adjective sacred distinguishes myth from other forms of narrative such as folktales, which are ordinarily secular and fictional" (1984: 1). According to Theodor H. Gaster myth is "any presentation of the actual in terms of the ideal" (1984: 112). His view is that all things can be viewed at once under two aspects—temporal and immediate; eternal and transcendental. Myth presents a situation in its ideal, transcendental aspect.
2.5.1.2. Myth in Primitive Societies

In primitive or archaic societies, myth happens to be "the very foundation of social life and culture" (Eliade 1960: 23). In such societies, it is thought to express the "absolute truth", since it narrates a "sacred history" (Ibid.). Because it is real and sacred, it becomes exemplary, repeatable and a model for all human actions. "In imitating the exemplary acts, of a god or of a mythic hero, or simply by recounting their adventures, the man of an archaic society detaches himself from profane time and magically re-enters the Great Time, the sacred time" (Ibid.).

2.5.1.3. Need for Myth

In all human societies, myths are found to exist. Campbell argues that "Man, apparently, cannot maintain himself in the universe without belief in some arrangement of the general inheritance of myth. In fact, the fullness of his life would even seem to stand in a direct ratio to the depth and range, not of his rational thought, but of his local mythology" (1960:20). He believes that myths are "energy-releasing, life-motivating, and directing agents..." (Ibid.). As Kolakowski points out, "Most often the search for myth is an attempt to discover a caring authority which easily deals with ultimate questions, equips with stable hierarchies of value..." (1989:104).

2.5.1.4. Different Stages of Myth

According to Theodor H. Gaster (1984: 125-128) there are four stages in the evolution of the mythological story: 'the primitive', 'the
dramatic', 'the liturgical' and 'the literary'. Sacred myth, in the course of time has become secularized. “In the literary stage, the mythological story has become a mere tale...” (128). In these literary tales “the ancient content is very largely preserved, but there is also a marked degree of purely artistic elaboration...” (Ibid.).

2.5.2. Racial Myths

In American literature, racial myths, as well as, counter myth-making by black writers are at work. As Marshall says, “White America had a vested image and interest in terms of both its conscience and its economy in misrepresenting” (1974a: 77) the black people. The myths created about black people are responsible for the presentation of them in American literature as

one-sided characters—characters with no character, no substance: caricatures, stereotypes. The black man is lazy, sly, and cunning, willing to abandon his family, and more than willing to rape white women and kill other men—white or black—who are caught in the violence of his rage. The black child is rootless, dirty, rowdy, and deprived, chained to an environment which has been neatly labeled 'culturally impoverished’. The black home is no home at all and the black woman is a sensual, exotic wench, a cold, castrating matriarch, or a fat, jolly, but very wise and wonderful (and enduring) mammy. All in all, black life is generally primitive, unhealthy, and valueless.(Exum 1974:11)
The media and the sociologists see African-Americans as an “aberration” (Adisa 1995: 23). The black people are made to feel ashamed of their past; they avoid talking about it because their enslavement reflects their deficiency, not their enslavers’ inhumanity and greed.

2.5.3. Counter Myth-Making

... Opal Palmer Adisa says, “Patience is a curse word for a slave” (Ibid.). The “troublemaker[s]”—those who fight racism, such as the black writers—refuse to be “second-class ... or third class” (Ibid.). The black women writers, especially, have reached beyond the limitations of their roles assigned in American history, to record the struggles and triumphs of their people. These creative writers “have kept the faith by attempting to shatter racial myths and by being continually concerned with the survival of their men, their children, and their community” (Exum 1974:13).

Phillis Wheatley, a slave and a fine craftswoman, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, an internationally recognized creator of formal verse, and Charlotte Forten are some of the early black women writers who used their own unique creative skills to transcend the degradation of slavery and to make their audience, largely white, aware of the horrors of slavery. These women writers turned their resentment of racial prejudice into a positive creative force and their works stand as important chronicles of survival of the blacks. In the twentieth century, the list of these writers has become a long one, with such figures as Jessie Redmond Fauset, Zora Neale Hurston, Nella Larsen, Margaret Walker, Maya Angelou, Paule Marshall, Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, June Jordan, Sonia Sanchez and many, many
more. The primary concerns in their works are social consciousness and self-awareness; black survival and black unity. These contemporary black women writers are “attempting to counter long-standing social myths, to turn them around into positive and complete images” (15). They provide additional dimensions to the stereotypes of black people. These writers, in their distinctive and individual ways, address the wrongs that have been done to the blacks and the kinds of images that have been perpetrated over the centuries of literature in the United States.

Marshall uses myths, along with other narrative techniques, to show that the black man’s spirit may be bent, but not broken; that resistance is in their blood. In all her novels, mythical figures do appear. According to Linda Pannill, “The great achievement of Brown Girl, Brownstones is the character of the West Indian Woman Silla, ‘the mother’, a mythic figure” (1985:64). The Scylla of Greek mythology was a beautiful girl metamorphosed into a monster and then into a treacherous rock in the sea. She was one of the monsters that guarded the narrow passage through which Odysseus had to sail in his wanderings. On one shore was Scylla and on the other, Charybdis. Scylla was a monster with six heads, who reached out of her cave to seize and devour six of Odysseus’ companions.

Marshall’s Silla also does terrifying things. But, like Scylla, she also had been a beautiful girl: “…she was handsome, as the women from the hills of Barbados sometimes are, a dark disquieting beauty, which broods in their eyes and flashes in their gestures, which underscores their atonal speech” (*BGBS:113). She seems to use this beauty “not to attract

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* Brown Girl, Brownstones is hereafter cited as BGBS in the thesis.
but to stave off all that might lessen [her] strength” (Ibid.). When in Bimshire, Silla came to know “what it is to work hard and still never make a headway.... It’s a terrible thing to know that you gon be poor all yuh life, no matter how hard you work. You does stop trying after a time.... You does kind of die inside...” (60). Silla, to escape from this living death, or death in life, manages to come to the United States on her own, since she has to make her own luck.

Silla finds out soon that in the racist America, luck is not on the side of the black people. Like the other West Indians in America, Silla also is obsessed with the idea of home ownership; it makes America more habitable. Donette A. Francis points out that “landownership is a value these black immigrants brought with them to America” (2000: 22). Silla wants her husband to sell “the piece of ground” (BGBS: 66) in Bimshire for the down payment on the house. When her husband refuses to do so she tells her friend Florrie: “Mark my words... I gon do it” (Ibid.). She decides to “steel [her] heart and bide [her] time” (111). One day she arranges to sell the land for nine hundred odd dollars, by forging Deighton’s signature. She tells Deighton how she did it: “Yes, Silla has done it. She has lied and feigned and forged. She has damned her soul but she did it!” (96). She has done “some of everything short of murder to get the money...” (100). When Deighton squanders that money on small nothings, Silla “weep without tears, without even a tremor” (112). Deighton begins to work in a mattress factory; he gets injured in the left arm; and he comes home from the hospital with a “dead peace” (133) hovering about him. He, soon, joins Father Peace, deserting his family. The enraged Silla says: “He don need nobody but Father? He’s happy? Well, let’s see how happy he gon be back
home” (150). She sees to that, that he is deported for illegal entry into the United States. The shattered Deighton ends his life, on nearing Barbados. Silla, like Judas, has betrayed Deighton and has Selina’s “Christ” (66) crucified.

Yet, Silla is not a monster, but a tragic figure. Everything she does is for the sake of her children, to protect them against racism and poverty. When she is hard on the others, she is harder on herself. She scrubs floors and works in a factory amidst smells of oil and noise, to buy a brownstone house that anchors their lives. This emphasis on homeownership “is not a reflection of the celebration of materialism, but rather of property as a strategic political response by West Indians” (Francis 2000: 23). For black immigrants, like the Deightons, mainstream corporate professions are beyond their reach. Their employment is concentrated in factories, small businesses and domestic service. So, the West Indians have built a small business and have become property-based lower-middle class. They have begun to develop a second-generation professional class during the interwar years. (Ibid.).

Mary Helen Washington points out that, to illuminate the meaning of the mother-daughter bond, white feminist writers often turn to Western myths—the myth of Demeter and Persephone as an example of generational continuity between women, variations of the Medusa myth as the terrible but powerful mother, mothers and stepmothers in fairy tales who predict an archetypal mother-daughter hostility. (1984:159)
Washington states that one of the sources for the characterization of Silla is the historical mythology of the slave mother:

The historical mythology of the slave mother as a way of envisioning and defining motherhood maintains the importance of understanding motherhood in its political context. It challenges the fiction of mother-daughter hostility and the traditional ways of seeing mothers as powerless in the world of men. (160)

Silla may be a bitter and enraged woman, but she is the only prop, the emotional mainstay of her family. The relationship between Silla and Selina is very complex with its mystery, passion and conflict. When the grown up Selina comes to the full knowledge of Silla, as Mary Helen Washington says,

she sees not just the mother but the wild teenager dancing herself into a frenzy, longing for a better life, the passionate and mysterious lover, the scorned wife, the community leader, and above all, that ancient African woman whom the entire western world has humiliated and despised. (1992: 224)

Silla represents her community; “She symbolizes its power, she reflects its values, she embodies its history. Her sorrow is the sorrow of the race” (Ibid.). Thus, Marshall has named the black mother after a mythical figure in Greek mythology, to underline the formidable strength and intimidating power Silla seems to possess. But, at the same time, Marshall highlights
other cultural definitions of womanhood, through the dramatization of Silla and her women friends and the description of Silla’s beauty. Silla’s skill with words helps her to speak her mind. In Christian’s words, “Silla’s persistent voice pronounces Marshall’s alternate perception of womanhood…. she is an actor, and she passes on her willfulness and womanishness to her daughter Selina” (2001:552). By presenting Silla as a complex, active and many-sided woman, Marshall has broken the myth of matriarchy.

In *The Chosen Place, The Timeless People* (1969), social conflicts are dramatized in a mythical setting. In the story of the slave insurrectionary, Cuffee Ned, Marshall has effected “the transformation of politics and history into ritual and myth” (Haydn 1970:2). A fitting locale for the enactment of this story is Bourne Island, a Caribbean island that seems to be imbued with the magical power and presence of myth. An aerial view gives the impression that the island may be “one more in the line of stepping stones that might have been placed there long ago by some giant race to span the distance between the Americas, North and South” (CPTP:13). The other islands are seen in an orderly procession; but Bourne Island seems to have “broken rank and stood off by itself to the right, almost out in the Atlantic…. And ever mindful of the responsibility placed upon it, it remained… facing east, the open sea, and across the sea, hidden beyond the horizon, the colossus of Africa” (Ibid.). The ‘timeless people’, the people of Bournehills, are the descendants of the original inhabitants of that island. They have an
unmistakable and transcendent affinity with their African past. Like the shape and location of the island, their collective spirit seems cosmologically attuned to and aligned with a mythic African presence.... they possess a mysterious unanimity which endows them with a virtually supernatural aspect and anchors them to a ‘timeless’ condition suggestive of the timelessness of myth. (Rahming 1993:3)

The children of Africa, the people of Bournehillls stand against the forces of Westernization. The Euro-Americans, Saul and his team are not sensitive to the Bournehillls temperament. Only Merle has an intuitive understanding of their psychical predisposition; she becomes a messenger to both worlds and a mediator. She has been influenced by both African and non- African cultures. So, she easily becomes a bridge between the Bourne Island bourgeoisie, who hold a Eurocentric world-view and the peasants of Bournehillls, who hold an Afrocentric world-view. She understands that nothing can be changed for the people at the bottom of the heap, if nothing is changed from the middle to the top. The whole system must be changed. For such a change, remembering one’s history is crucial.

In The Chosen Place, The Timeless People (1969), the slave past of black people is remembered every year in the re-enactment of the uprising of Cuffee Ned, the central figure of an indigenous myth. A permanent reminder of that revolt is the Pyre Hill, situated at the centre of Bournehillls. That is the scene of the slave revolt. The Pyre Hill reminds the Bournehillls people of one glorious moment in the history of their slave
past; a moment in which a slave holder was overthrown by the slaves. The story goes like this: Percy Bryam, the slave-holder, owned all of Bournehills and everyone in it in the beginning. His estate was on the top of the Pyre Hill. One night Cuffee Ned led the slaves and set fire to Percy Bryam’s castle; the castle and the hill burnt for five years. The rebels yoked Percy Bryam to the mill wheel where he suffered torture and death. Cuffee Ned and the others were free for three years, fighting off the white government; then, they were taken. Cuffee Ned was beheaded and his head was displayed on West Minster Low Road. Even after Cuffee Ned was dead and the revolution was put down, the old hill continued to burn.

Generations after the uprising, the history is alive. Bournehills people still argue what happened that night. They are people out of time, linked to the past; they remain frozen in their historical moment of resistance to change. History has not changed for the people of Bournehills. As in the slave past, they remain subservient to the overseer and the owner. They refuse to “develop”; they do not care for the gifts of television set and juke box. But they wait for their new Cuffee Ned, because, as Marshall explains, “Cuffee Ned, in his person and his life, epitomized revolution, complete overthrow, complete change in a sense...” (Haydn 1970:6). Merle may be their political leader but Cuffee is their spiritual hero. Ferguson’s astute belief in the second coming of Cuffee reminds one of the second coming of Christ. Ferguson tells his companions:

He’s goin’ come again I tell you.... Cuffee’s goin’ come.
Aint any of you ignoramuses ever heard of the second coming? Well, who the bloody Hell you think they was
talking about if not Cuffee? You think just because they cut off his head... that was the end of him?... He’s goin’ come again I say–Or he goin’ send somebody just like him.... (CPTP: 134-135)

Melvin assertively says that “Marshall finds the materials of Christian mythology useful in their potential for allegorical association to contemporary situations” (1993:7). She is extracting aspects of Christian mythology and combining them with aspects of Caribbean history “to produce a modern myth that gives meaning to twentieth-century life” (de Weever 1991:45). Marshall has transformed historical points of reference into imaginative points of reference. Her creation and utilization of the Cuffee myth holds implication for oppressed people everywhere: “The struggle on the hill was... but the experience through which any people who find themselves ill-used, dispossessed, at the mercy of the powerful, must pass. No more, no less” (CPTP: 287).

Prasisesong for the Widow (1983b) has grown out of a haunting slave myth and the image of a middle aged, middle-class black woman. It dramatizes the links between the myths of African-American and African-Caribbean culture. These myths become the basis on which, Avey’s assessment of her life takes place. In a dream-encounter, Avey meets her dead great-aunt Cuney, who is calling her to their ritual walk. The object of their walks “during the Augusts she had spent as a girl on Tatem Island... on the South Carolina Tide water” (32) was Ibo Landing. According to the historians, it is here that a group of chained Ibos committed mass suicide
by leaping into the tidal river (Cartwright 2003:133). But a more marvellous version of Aunt Cuney runs like this:

...the minute those Ibos was brought on shore they just stopped, my gran’ said, and taken a look around. ...The kind can tell you ‘bout things happened long before they was born and things to come long after they’s dead.... And when they got through sizing up the place real good and seen what was to come, they turned, my gran’ said ... They just turned ... and walked on back down to the edge of the river here.... chains didn’t stop those Ibos none.... they just kept on walking like the water was solid ground. Left the white folks standin' back here with they mouth hung open and they taken off down the river on foot. Stepping,(PSW: 37-39)

As far as Cuney is concerned, this legendary walk of the Africans is no less believable than Christ’s miracle at the Sea of Galilee.

The Africans who escaped slavery through supernatural powers flew back to Africa in Toni Morrison’s Song of Solomon (1977); but the Ibos, in Praisesong for the Widow (1983b) walked on water, back to Africa. Whether the Africans flew or walked, the tale has been passed down through generations; it speaks of freedom from oppression and the passage back to Africa. The dream that brings back the memory of her aunt Cuney and their ritual walks to the Ibo Landing at Tatem, signals Avey’s first step towards the acknowledgement of her diaspora heritage.
Besides the reminiscences of the Gullah people about their ancestors walking back to Africa on water, Marshall utilizes two more African myths which function in the novel, *Praisesong for the Widow* (1983b), as culturally reconnective forces: the myth of the Ghanaian spider-trickster, Kwaku Ananse (Aunt Nancy in America) and the Yoruban myth of Esu Legba, god of the crossroads and trickster par excellence (Benjamin 2005). Scholars agree that Lebert Joseph in *Prasiesong for the Widow* represents Esu Legba; Benjamin points out that images of webs and weaving in the novel may be read as signs of Ananse’s or Aunt Nancy’s presence. He says: “Ghanaian Ananse and his descendants, in the tradition of the Nigerian trickster Esu Legba, deconstruct life’s binaries to challenge traditional perceptions of reality” (2005:52). According to Henry Louis Gates, Esu “embodies the ambiguity of figurative language” and serves as a metaphor “for the uncertainties of explication, for the open-endedness of every literary text” (1988:21). While Esu, the signifying monkey, critiques the opposing ideas and contradictory epistemologies, Nancy creates tangible bonds between them. Ananse, in Ghana, was a “creative culture hero”, in Jamaica, he became “a trickster-par-excellence” (Tanna 1984:77); and in the United States, he becomes a she - Aunt Nancy the healer, master mediator and revolutionary transitional life force. *Drums and Shadows: Survival Studies Among the Georgia Coastal Negroes* (1940) confirms Aunt Nancy’s presence on American shores. She is half woman and half spider. Her duality enables her to play in Twentieth-century literature, the role of mender of the mind-body disconnect among African-American women. Marshall conjures her symbolically through web and weaving imagery in *Praisesong for the Widow* (1983b).
Marshall conflates the mythic figures of Legba and Aunt Nancy within the character of Lebert, in Praisesong for the Widow. As said by Benjamin, "Legba helps Avey to navigate her spiritual crossroads while Aunt Nancy helps her to fashion connections that will unite her with her history" (2005:54). Lebert, as Legba, invites Avey on the excursion to Carriacou, when he comes to know that Avey is one of those "people who can't call their nation" (PSW :175). He "brings her to a symbolic crossroads between Grenada and Carriacou, a past of materialistic excess and a future of spiritual wealth" (Benjamin 2005:54). He, also empowers her to make the difficult choices. As Aunt Nancy, he helps Avey to visualize her relationship with her ancestors and reconcile herself with them. Lebert, having the visionary power of the Ibos, sees deep into Avey's spiritual journey; he encourages her to adopt a different outlook on life.

Aunt Cuney complements the work of Lebert Joseph. In her attempts to carry on the story of the Ibos and keep Avey linked to the past, Cuney behaves as Aunt Nancy figure. Avey's feelings of communal harmony reflect the reconciliatory energies of Aunt Nancy. At the end of the novel, Praisesong for the Widow (1983b), Avey is in a position to see herself in her ancestors; Avatara emerges as a singer of her own song, a singer of the praisesong of her ancestors; she becomes a contemporary Aunt Nancy, the weaver, who is a culturally, psychologically, and spiritually regenerative force for black women.

In Praisesong for the Widow, the mythic backdrop is created by the symbolic representation of the Ghanaian spider-trickster, Ananse, Yoruban God, Esu Legba and the story of Ibo Landing. But, in Daughters (1991), the mythical figures are the long-ago slave heroes, Congo Jane and Will
Cudjoe. They are inventions based on a number of black heroic figures in the United States and in the West Indies. Marshall says that she has drawn Congo Jane on “the famous Jamaican heroine, Nanny of Nanny Town, who founded the self-sustaining Maroon colony in the Blue Mountains of Jamaica back in the early eighteenth century” (Dance 1992:6). Congo Jane and Will Cudjoe stand for cross-gender revolutionary activism, the value of community and historical resistance. In Triunion, in honour of them, their statues are erected and the islanders pay homage to them, for their vision and sacrifice. The Monument of Heroes presents four statues: the statues of the old man, Pere Bossou, the boy-soldier from Spanish Bay, Alejandro, Congo Jane and Will Cudjoe. The last two are coleaders, coconspirators, consorts, lovers, friends: Jane, a Congo woman who loved the look and feel of pretty things, wearing the shawl of Alencon lace she had taken as the spoils of war and as compensation in part for the nub of a breast that had been left in shreds; and Will Cudjoe with a bandage made from the shawl binding up the gunshot wound on his forehead. (Daughters: 376)

They two were very close to each other. “You can’t call her name or his without calling or at least thinking of the other, they were so close” (377). Their statues remind the people of African descent that “their heritage is a continuum of defiance…” (Pettis 1993:6).

When Ursa, the protagonist of Daughters (1991) is three years old, her mother, Estelle, takes her to the Monument to touch Congo Jane’s toes; this journey assumes ritualistic importance. Ursa, in turn, takes her
African-American friend, Viney, there. The slave couple gives an impetus to Ursa’s resistance, when she decides to work against her father, Primus Mackenzie, in the elections. During the election rallies, the community assembles at the Monument of Heroes. Even though the government has located the monuments “all the way in the country, behind God’s back… far back from the road” (375), it has not deterred an insurgent ardour for cultural reclamation.

Primus Mackenzie has abandoned the spirit of Congo Jane and Will Cudjoe and has given into colonial powers. But, in the end, the collective negotiations of the “daughters” eclipse his authority; for these daughters, Congo Jane is their star. Marshall states that the slave heroes signify “the coming together, the working together not only of black men and women, but of the entire black community throughout the world” (Dance 1992:4). In Daughters (1991), as in The Chosen Place, The Timeless People (1969), Marshall uses invented myths that are based on slave heroes, to speak of collective resistance to injustice.

The title of Marshall’s fifth novel, The Fisher King (2000), comes from an Arthurian legend about a wounded king. According to the legend, the ‘Fisher King’ or the ‘wounded king’ is in charge of the Holy Grail. When he is injured, his kingdom also suffers; his impotence affects the fertility of his lands. Knights from many lands come to heal the Fisher King, in vain; only the chosen can do it. In the earlier versions, it is Percival, in the later stories, Galahad and Bors also join Percival. Ultimately, the Holy Grail is located; it brings back fertility to both the
king and the land. Percival turns out to be the Fisher King’s grandson; he has the power to heal and protect.

In Mashall’s *The Fisher King*, the eight-year-old Sonny, the grandson of the Jazz musician, Sonny-Rett, seems to be having the healing touch. The troubles with the people in *The Fisher King* are the divisions among Africans in the diaspora and their ambivalent attitude to their own culture. Sonny embodies in his person the theme of reconciliation. He becomes the connecting thread between the two warring families in Brooklyn: the Caribbean-American Paynes and the African-American McCullum Joneses. Using the universal myth of the Fisher King as a framework, Marshall tells a tale of reclamation, restoration and rebirth of black culture and music.

Marshall and her contemporaries have gone in for myth-making, with a social purpose in their mind—that is to counter the myth of black inferiority, and the erasure of their history. The use of myths gains them re-entry into the past, the sacred time; it enables them to write alternative histories. The original indigenous myths, invented in the African, African-American and African-Caribbean contexts, from the material of the region’s history, and the subverted Western myths help the black people in shaping an indigenous cultural identity. Usually, the myths, with their emphasis on resistance, are about male quest for identity; but in Marshall they speak of the quest for female identity. In her novels, myths are seen to provide the displaced and oppressed black people, with a sense of belonging. They help the blacks to assert that they are people; they also, awaken in them, the sense of obligation. Myths deal with ultimate
questions and provide people with stable hierarchies of value. Cult of ancestors is a social capital from which their descendants can freely draw. Thus, Marshall has used various myths, very effectively in her novels, to speak to the psycho-cultural situation of people of African descent.

The vital role played by memory and myth in the lives of Marshall’s fictional men and women clearly shows that “the past offers much instruction for the present struggle” (Marshall 1973:112). The next chapter discusses the nature of the black people’s present struggle and examines how Marshall presents positive images of Africa and diaspora by reversing the connotations attached to colours, black and white.