Chapter-1

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1.1 Introduction

Paule Marshall bloomed as the founding foremother of Black feminist aesthetics of the sixties. It was an age, when the black woman has to endure harsh economic and social conditions. They were also trapped within their emotional and psychological conditions. According to Black sociologist Joyce Ladner, the black woman was viewed as loose and immoral in society. This was the image of black women that prevailed in the American psyche.

The Black woman in America was denied her culture, history, roots and even selfhood. It was an era when most of the writers worked on major themes like history, colonialism, slavery and racism, that too from the male perspective. The literary panorama of America, at that age was dominated by James Baldwin, Ralph Ellison, Amira Baraka and various other black male writers, who depicted their female characters as stereotypes that white Americans had in mind about black women. Her life was governed by others; they told her how she was supposed to look, act or sound like. This stereotype of Black women by White Americans also by blacks was so deep rooted, that even the black women novelist, who preceded Paule Marshall, did not dare to ‘think’ of replacing these negative stereotypes with something too plaint. These helpless Black women never even pondered upon their self-definition or self-evaluation, which was so essential to create an image of their own, as the Blacks were hardly considered as human beings. They were considered as dehumanized creatures drifting through darkness without any specific center of existence. The view of Elevanda Inagram echoes the real scenario of the Black women of that age:
black women lived numb existence, unfulfilled wives and mothers racially and sexually oppressed. They have no relief from their burdens and responsibilities and the pain and violence that are often part of their lives. These powerless women lead lives of blind existence. Poor, overworked and tired from child bearing… So they stumble blindly through their lives… (The Suspended Black Women, Review, 20)

The Black woman thus lived in a trapped existence. They were no less than the shadow images of the whites. The blacks aspired to live like Whites and denied their own identity. None of the writers ever tried to examine Black women's lives in relation to their culture, their community and the complexities that they were going through in America. Nobody ever dreamt of exploring into the psychological aspects of Black women’s lives. Even the scopes and creative visions of the women writers of the age were caged. Thus, the Black woman was lawfully confined to these stereotypes as if it was the sole reality of her existence. Paule Marshall pens her view about the shattering existence of Black women and writes:

The Black women were denied from the complexities, the contradiction, and the ambiguities that make for a truly credible character in fiction… The purpose the intent was to deny the Negro woman her humanity so that all the atrocities and inhuman abuses inflicted on her could be justified. 19)

Paule Marshall is a unique writer from the Afro American literary galaxy. She is the first black novelist to go beyond tradition and present a realistic picture of ‘Black womanhood’. She attempts to capture their actual picture, sentiments, misfortunes, diversities and the complexities experienced by them. Paule Marshall reconstructed Black womanhood and introduced a new icon of the Black woman in African-American literature. Before plunging to the depths of Paule Marshall’s literary writing that makes her a pioneer of the
Black woman’s renaissance, we need to travel through the panorama of her birth, parentage and the social conditions that framed her mind and creativity.

1.2 Marshall’s Biographical Sketch

Paule Marshall, aka Valenza Burka was born on April 9, 1929 in Brooklyn Heights, New York. Her parents had migrated to New York, after World War-1. The migration of Blacks, into the land of whites, was considered as staining the white beach. It was at this time when she first faced ‘racial discrimination’. Her parents were the descendants of slaves, who were brought forcefully from Africa. Her ancestry, and migration into the land of whites from Barbados, gave her exposure to the traumatic experience, faced by the Black people. The agony of the Blacks who were brought to the white land is echoed in the lines:

“...brown legs… black as though mourning their own imminent deaths… life suddenly was nothing but this change…” (Marshall, Brown Girl Brown Stones, 46)

Marshall’s creativity was nurtured right from her childhood under the influence of her mother. She noticed how her mother and other Barbadian women gathered in the basement of the kitchen and expressed their creativity in the form of storytelling or poems. Paule would sit amongst these women and listen. This gradually enhanced her depth and knowledge about the different myths from Afro American and Caribbean cultures. Thus these innocent ordinary women sowed the sapling of creativity, aesthetic foundations and an inclination towards writing in Marshall. Hence Marshall’s initial works are based on the themes that she had inculcated from these women and specially her mother. Her works are a tribute to her mother and her mother’s friends.
Tribute should be paid to Marshall’s observant nature because her heart, mind and
“…eyes followed the mother… to know the mother in her innocence… she longed to understand the mother…” (124)

Her development as ‘a vanguardal voice’ started in her teens, when she learnt that her mother and her friends survived by performing menial jobs given to them by the white housewives. She also interacted with these ordinary women who not only talked about their domestic affairs, but also about war, about the condition of Blacks, about politics, national economy and Hitler, and Paule “sat in a corner along with her elder sister listening, absorbing the insight and… poet’s skill”. (38)

Despite the suffering and exploitation because of being black, these female descendants of slaves and foreigners maintained the humanity within themselves. They had the weapon of speech which they used skillfully, to overthrow their agency of poverty, colonial exploitation, and the evils of racism that they had to encounter in their day to day life. Paule learnt her initial lesson that she has a weapon -that of the oral expression like her mother and her mother’s friends, or writing medium, that would allow her to counter act or protest. Her childhood closeness with her mother created an impression in her mind. In her own words:

“…I was no less for being female and that I was no less for being black. And even though I would grow into a world which would try to deny my worth and my humanity that I had a responsibility to them and to myself to be my own person, to insist upon my right to be in the world…” (Marshall, a black woman writer thinks. Speech at University of Wisconsin)

The second stage of Marshall’s apprenticeship was her conventional American modes of education. She visited Brooklyn Public library at the Macon Street Branch, which is a few
blocks away from Brownstone. It is this place that provided her the keys to open the King’s treasure, just like Ruskin Bond’s Sesame and Lilies. Here she studied about the lives of Jane Austin, Thomas Mann, Joseph Conrad and many others. These writers influenced Marshall’s development and gave her an active insight into a particular approach to writing. She inscribed the art of character portrayals, with symbolical meaning and allowing them to exist as an individual identity as well as a symbol of principal. She learnt about narrative technique from these writers. Marshall was influenced by Mann. She admits that:

She was particularly influenced by the way Mann delineated human beings in all their ambivalences, with all their foibles, short-comings, with all their positive and negative traits. She was influenced also by the way the great novelist invested his characters with symbolic meaning making them to exist on two planes: to be people of their own right and to serve as symbols of principles… (41)

The influence of Mann, encircled Marshall so much that his novel *Buddenbrooks*, provided her with the material for her first novel, *Brown Girl Brownstones*. Joseph Conrad’s use of language influenced Marshall. Thus, in her early adolescence she developed and nurtured her skills under the influence of these writers.

The Macon Street library had treasures to nurture Marshall’s blooming creativity and outlook. One day she happened to encounter a large volume of poems written by Paul Laurence Dunbar. This happened to be her third stage of development, because the poems had opened a new horizon for her, which seemed she was missing, “it in a sense validated black experience in me” (Hariharan, 41)

Then started a phase, when Marshall started seeking out the works of Black Writers, so as to plunge into their depth. It was here that the truth flashed. She hardly found any Black
writers, who were mentioned in Brooklyn School. Thus she willingly searched out for poetry written by Dunbar, and acknowledged many realities about Blacks, the realities that were very close to her life, close to the surroundings where she was brought up. As Marshall acknowledges:

Dunbar made me reach out on my own to fill that gap. He gave me the courage to say, I’d like to have some books by Negro writers, it eased somewhat the light knot of sorrow and longing I carried around my chest that refused to go away... Marshall, Characterization of Black Women in American Novel, 76.

Thus a phase in Marshall’s life started, where she was accelerated from ignorance to knowledge. At the stage between late forties and early fifties, the Civil Rights Movement spread its claws. At this stage two Afro-American thinkers influenced her personality. Ralph Ellison and James Baldwin, gave a new direction to the wandering thoughts of Marshall. She considered Ralph’s book of essays called the *Shadow and Act* her literary bible. This book, which broadened her knowledge about the Black experiences, helped her to shade her literary sensibilities. Sharing her view about Ellison’s book, Marshall writes, that the book opened:

...the painful experience of slavery and the aftermath, we have been able to mould a culture which is unique to us. That culture has to be made available to Black readers and it has to be celebrated... And I think that aspect of Ellison has been very helpful to me. I see it as one of the major influences on me as a center. (Paule, “Recreating Ourselves” an interview, In Davies, 25)

Gradually, she paved her path towards the Black writers, their conditions and sentiments. But the doors of knowledge were still closed to the Black women writers. These writers were neglected due to the textual and sexual politics of the Whites and even by the Black male
writers. Later Marshall, read the works of Zora Neale Hurston, Dorothy West and Gwendolyn Brooks. *Maud Martha* written by Brooks portrayed to her the finest image of an Afro American woman, thus making an influence on Marshall’s thoughts and works. All these literary artists, along with the unknown & uncelebrated ones about whom she had acknowledged silently in the kitchen, had made an influence on her mind. She also started to recognize the unfathomable talent which was inculcated in the poetesses, whose works remained enclosed under the walls of the kitchen basement. Thus she decided that Black women ‘can’ be writers.

Consequently, a period of her works began. At the age of twelve she penned down some poems. The literary giants had already opened up a world of fantasy and creativity for her. But at this phase she was struggling to channelize her thoughts, experiences and writings. Her initial creativity revolving around a childish imagination was now seeking an outlet. She composed poems celebrating the kings, queens, fairies and the whole world, which all summed up to the imagination of a child.

Marshall’s creativity and education progressed simultaneously. In 1948, she studied in Hunter College, a free city college in New York. It was an era when very few Black women thought of pursuing college education. Those who did pursue had only two options, from which they ‘had to’ choose their traits. They had to make a choice between English literature and social work. Marshall opted for the latter.

Marshall faced medical imbalance at this age as she was suffering from tuberculosis. She was sent to New York for her treatment. This proved to be a phase of disillusionment for her. All alone, in the hospital she felt homesick and deprived of love. She initiated the process of writing letters to her near and dear. Every letter poured out her feelings of loneliness, distress and agony, thus exhibiting her amateur stage of writing. She slowly got
engaged into writing, in her vital period. This transformed her illness into a writing practice. Eventually, one of her friends suggested her to take up writing as a career, and thereafter she got her first story *The Valley Between* was published.

After returning back to the college, Marshall changed her subject from social work to English literature. In 1950 she got married to a psychologist, Kenneth Marshall. She graduated from Brooklyn College in 1953. She planned to work for a magazine or newspaper.

Another phase began, when she started visiting the offices of newspapers, magazines and journals in search for a job. She realized the difficulty a Black woman had to face in order to get a job. Though the list of Black women writers was too short, still nobody was willing to offer her work. She even knocked the doors of some Black journals, but sadly enough had to face despair. But Marshall being a person of ‘strong determination’ hadn’t learnt to give up. She possessed a degree as well as determination, and equipped with these two she set out to make a position for herself. She went to each and every publishing house without hesitation. At times she had to counter the already closed doors. She kept on visiting these publishing houses again and again. The people had now started to recognize her and she gradually started to know all about the publishing houses. Her constant search and sincere efforts gave fruitful results, and she was given a small job in a black magazine called Our World.

Marshall worked as a researcher for the magazine, and hence had to travel along the Caribbean and South America. Later she also started writing for the magazine’s food and fashion sections. But this was not her ambition. She had something different in her heart. She couldn’t express the creativity that resided inside her through these. While working with the magazine, she came across many harsh realities of life. She came to realize how difficult it was for a ‘well educated’ Black woman to fit in. Moreover, she studied that the professional
circle was dominated by the males. A woman was looked at with peculiar eyes as if they were waiting for her to fail. She further realized that a woman’s talent and creativity was not praised. Everyone measured a woman’s potential only by her womb. Under such circumstances, very few black woman writers could have dared to establish themselves.

Marshall was eager to spread the magic of her creativity. She was dissatisfied with the type of job she was performing at *Our World*. Thus she started writing at home in the nights, working hard for a novel. Finally, she produced her first novel *Brown Girl, Brown Stones*, about a young Caribbean-American girl Selina growing up in an Afro-Caribbean community. Selina’s mother wants to stay in Brooklyn and earn enough money to buy a Brownstone row house, but her father’s dreams were only to return back to his native island. Torn between a romantic nostalgia for the past and a driving ambition for the future, Selina also faces the everyday burden of poverty and racism. The story is about Selina’s struggle to find a place for herself, in a community that is desperately trying to keep their culture alive and differentiate themselves from the new environment that now surrounded them. It is a novel, which highlights the search for identity, which Marshall herself had struggled for.

### 1.3 As a “Vanguardal”

Thus, we have Paule Marshall standing as a “Vanguardal Voice”, as she is the first writer in the history of Afro-American women’s literature, who for the first time had comprehended the complexity of black women’s lives, their struggle for existence, their struggle to ensure a place for themselves, and their struggle to keep their culture and community alive. Marshall is a creative artist who examined her own experiences and transferred them into an art, to the society which had prohibited the Black women writers from articulating their experiences. She illustrated the trauma that Black women experienced in a society engulfed with racist sentiments. She stood as a landmark of a black woman writer
committed to black womanhood. She is the first black woman writer who not only raised her voice against a community which was responsible for the burden heaped on her, but also for the creation of a new world. Marshall, who strived all along for the betterment of the black woman also stood at the burning altar on behalf of the Black woman. She was strongly determined to counter the ignoring and humiliation heaped upon them by the white race. The kitchen poets who used to assemble at the basement of their house became her source of inspiration. Her burning aspiration to become a writer came into limelight, with the works of other creative artists, when she read in the library. Her life, her struggle to secure a position in the professional platform which was dominated by men (both white and black) and the patriarchal constraints of her husband, both contributed to ignite Paule Marshall’s strong determination. Thus Paule, standing as a Vanguardal Voice for Black woman, shattered the castle erected by both white and black male writers. She also smashed the misconceptions that society held about black women. She displayed to the world the capabilities, the unconquered talents, the unfathomable depth of creativity that existed in a Black woman, by means of which she can make her presence felt in the society. She proved that black women are not only capable of creativity, but also have the qualities to become liberated and stable personalities. Poet and playwright Alexis Deveaux writes about Paule Marshall;

“long before the woman’s movement, long before the current numbers of long overdue books by and about Black women, Paule Marshall was carving a respectable place for us in literature.”(123)

In her journey as a writer Marshall still remembers the hardships, the struggle and the humiliation that she had to encounter. Realizing that her work with the publishers of Our World will lead to no gain was she starts working on her own novel. The path of writing however was not without its own share of troubles. Marshall’s husband too did not approve
of her literary ambition for it would result in relegating the baby to care of a baby sitter. She records her husband’s view that also remembers her husband’s view that

“The mothers damage their children and family when they attempt to do something other than family affairs for their own self fulfillment.” (Cit, Kulkarni, 47)

Marshall also remembers the attitude of publishers at Random Publishing House, who had agreed to publish her novel. She thought they might have seen some merit in it, but they behaved as if they were doing a favor to her, by agreeing to publish her work. They didn’t even promote the book, which they generally did for other authors. Marshall puts her experiences in this way:

“The day I received my contract from Random house… I can’t tell you the feeling of exhilaration I had. And there coming down the stairs was Bennett Cerf who stopped to say a few words. He said… you know nothing usually happens with this kind of book. …for a minute or two the contract in my hand felt like a rejection slip… I found what it meant to be a woman in that society and also of course what it meant to be Black.” (‘Talk as a form of action’, Publisher’s Weekly, 90-91).

1.4 Literary Journey and contributions

Thus Marshall started her journey into the literary world, which promised commitment to the black womanhood. She stood with a voice which was so heroic that we are instantly impressed by her tenacity of purpose. Her character Selina, the protagonist, in Brown Girl

Brown Stones is what Marshall stated:
“…an answer to the prevailing image, to say that she was not a tropsy, she was not any of the… stereotypes… you get a type of Black woman who truthfully reflects the reality of most Black woman.” (An Interview with Sabina Brock, In Lenz, 194).

Marshall’s significant contribution lies in her refusal to portray the black woman as a stereotype. The stereotype image was that of a loose, immoral, primitive, pleasure seeking and sinful woman. Marshall standing as a vanguardal voice overthrows these negative images. She believed that making a positive image was necessary for Black women, so as to reconstruct history and bring about a cultural revolution. She presumed that being a writer her first duty was that of:

…an image maker, and we can begin offering images of ourselves which truly reflects us, which begin to throw off the negative images that the west has imposed on us is to begin having out literature offer to the Black reader the image of himself that is positive and creative. I don’t think people can really progress until they think positively of themselves (‘Recreating Ourselves All over the World’ In Davies, 25)

Marshall stands as a voice for those Black women who were innocent, uncelebrated, unrecognized, tortured and humiliated. She thinks that the major concern of the Black women writers should be to shed off the distorted images of themselves, and to create a personality which would be positive and facilitate them towards forming a new society and a new position for them. Through her works, she wanted to change the fixed image of the Black woman, who due to long years of suffering, did not dare to cross the margins and raise her head. Through her works she wanted to modulate the thoughts of Black woman and portray them in positive terms. She also believed that along with the modulation in the thoughts of
the Black woman, a change in the psyche of the universe had to be brought. Thus, with the coordination of these two changes an effective change, i.e. a new thinking can be initiated for the Black woman. Marshall could understand the terror that was being implanted in the minds of Black women, due to displacement, colonization and racial discrimination. She sparked off a revolution for the first time in bringing about a psychological change in the political, cultural and social scenario. She also believed that, in bringing this change, one must be strong and determined from within. The Black women should understand her internal strength and talent. She should first of all strengthen herself so as to face the cyclone of protests bravely. The novelist Toni Cade Bambara supports the thoughts of Marshall and writes:

Revolution begins with self, in the self. The individual, the basic revolutionary unit must be punged of poison and lies that assault the ego… we make many false starts, because we have been programmed to depend on white models or white interpretations (‘on the issues of Rales’, In Cade, 101)

Marshall was determined to portray the real self of the Black woman, and thereby negate the white man’s interpretation of her. Thus she thought that standing as a voice of the thousands, firstly her duty was to develop a self recognition; secondly to portray the real self of Black women, which would be based on truthfulness, depth and complexity that is present in them; and thirdly to shake off all the misconceptions, stereotypes, images and myths that had been constructed for the Black woman in the society. So, the protagonists may it be Selina, Reena, Marie, Ursa or others, all of them represent a woman who are rebels, who efficiently demolish the social misconceptions about them, with their great strength and power. These are the women, who show that they are not meant to be abused or subjected to pain. These lines from *Brown Girl Brown Stones* echo the sentiments:
…Selina!... at least tell us your impression of our association… then with her hands relaxed on her crossed knees and her eyes like deep pits which hid her venom, she said, … I think it stinks, …it is the result of living by the most shameful codes possible- dog eat dog- exploitation the strong over the weak, the end justifies the means- the whole kit and caboodle… it is a band of small frightened people. Clannish. Narrow minded. Selfish… Prejudiced, pitiful-because who out in that white world you are so feverishly country gives one damn, whether you change the word Barbadian to Negro? Provincial! That’s your Association (194-195).

Marshall not only raises her voice, but also illuminates her people by her works. Her protagonist stands as a major threat to the powerful structures. She had created a new definition for Black woman, breaking those stereotyped structures. Her characters are neither queens who rule, nor helpless crawling creatures. So to bring about a change, she portrays the Black women’s life and her complexities. She paints her characters as a mixture of beautiful and ugly, flowed persons and saints. She believes that if we have to reveal the truth, we cannot go away from dualism, as every person is made of it. In Brown Girl, Brown Stones we have Silla, whose character is wrapped with gentleness and harshness, love and wrath, attraction and repulsion, pines and passivity, which make her a real person. She is a woman who loves her children but cannot express it. She craves for the caring arms and affection of her husband but cannot forgive him. She goes through an intermingling of love and revenge. Commenting in the character of Silla Boyce, Marshall expresses:

“….the mother is complex. Strong yes. Determined to make her way and yet, at the same time, weak, as well all are weak. Loving and yet at the same time quite capable of destroying those she loves. Reaching out to her children, yet
at the same time driving them away. (Marshall ‘The Negro Women in Literature’ In Exum 19)

These personalities, who are the mixture of love, hate, acceptance, rejection, aspiration and defeat, are the protagonists of Marshall, who is the real mirror image of the Black woman. These are the women, who are the voice of the voiceless, as Marshall herself is the voice of the voiceless Black women. While voicing these voices of the voiceless, Marshall puts that pain, fear, terror, humiliation as a part of life. It doesn’t come into life to lead us astray, rather we must learn a lesson from these and pave our way to a better situation. Silla’s expression in Brown Girl Brown Stones, echoes the same sentiments:

…Their small uncomfortable silence held in the midst of all the hubbub, until Silla said in a very low, pained voice… people got to make their own way. And early always to make your own way in this Christ world, you got to be hard and sometimes misuse others, even your own. Oh, nobody will admit it. We don’t talk about it, but we does live by it, - each in his own way… we would like to be different. That what’s does hurt and shame us so. But the way things arrange we can’t, if not we lose out. (192)

This is what Marshall wanted to shout out, that the Black woman’s are not losers, through they may be silenced by the circumstances. They are genuine human beings some time strong and weak too. These Black women are in search of an autonomous survival against the power, which has victimized them. Thus Marshall bravely comments, “…rise, No, power is a thing that don’t really have nothing to do with co’or… take this world. It will always be white…” (192-193)

Sailing through Marshall’s literary journey, we see that her first novel Brown Girl Brownstones, voiced the black woman’s psyche, but it did not prove to be a commercial
success. The novel was again reissued by the Feminist Press, due to a wave of Feminist thrust in 1970, and only then the world could recognize Marshall. They now could acknowledge the message that a Black woman writer wanted to convey the world. Thus Marshall puts her emotions in her interview with Joyce Pettice and says that *Brown Girl Brown Stones*, acted in “…the sense of a large canvas that would like a family and trace its experience over a period of time through a couple of generations… they certainly are based on the life and experience of that community in which I grew up.”

(Melus, 117)

It was after the publication of her first novel that Paule started socializing with the creative artists. She joined a group of Black writers Guild. It was a literary group, who met and discussed literary works.

She received Guggenheim Fellowship in 1960, after which she started writing her second book. Her second work, a collection of short novellas, called *Soul Clap Hands and Sing* was published in 1961. This work of her’s, brought laurels, in form of National Institute Arts Award. The circumstances that she faced at home, i.e. hiring a baby sitter, so as to find time to write, got reflected in her works. The annoyance of her husband in hiring baby a sitter also gets expressed in her stories. But Marshall, a figure with strong determination, and an extreme inner urge to write, succeeds to write. Dr. Kulkarni says that Paule Marshall really deserves to be crowned as a vanguardal voice for the Black writers as:

…She preached and practiced this deconstructive and reconstructive ideology at least twenty years before the upsurge of black feminist group in literature. Tillie Olsen’s *Silences* and Alice Walker’s *One child of Own* and *In Search of our Mother’s Garden*, propelled into discussions the issue of relationship
between woman’s artistic creativity and the creativity of womb, the issue which Paule Marshall had raised in the 1960. (48)

Marshall raised her voice of a Black woman, but her emotions were not noticed in her house. She was divorced in 1963. She published her second novel, *The Chosen Place, The Timeless People* around this time. She dedicated the second novel to her son Evan Keith, for whom she was the only one to look after and care for. Though emotionally void, she did not have voids in honour, prestige or finance. *Her The Chosen Place, The Timeless People* was deemed the best novel to be written by an American Black Woman, and also, one of the two important black novels of the 1960s, and one of the four or five most important novels ever written by a Black-American. Awards started flowing in for her second novel too. She received Richard and Hilda Rosenthal Foundation Award, Ford Foundation Grant in 1964-65, and a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship in 1967. These awards gave her recognition and also a certain financial support.

Marshall’s creative flow now took a steady speed. She published three short stories namely *Reena* in 1962, *To Da-duh, In Memoriam* in 1967 and *Some Get Wasted* in 1968. *Reena*, deals with the incidents and issues Marshall, faced during her college days. It illustrates the failure in love and the struggle that Marshall endured in her younger days. Her short story *To Dah-duh, In Memoriam* is autobiographical. They relate to her maternal grandmother, who lived in Barbados. Marshall had visited her grandmother in Barbados, when she was nine years old. To quote Marshall herself, in an interview to Joyee Pettis:

I don’t remember that much from that first trip, but some things stand out in memory. There is the image of this old woman who came to meet us… The image of her walking through it to meet us- a very small, dry, wiry, quick stepping, very black old woman, the grandmother. There was something so
purposeful and so straight back about her walk that she became a very
important figure to me… So when I started to write, there was always that
presence…( 119)

The presence of memory, of the Black’s struggle and the Civil Rights were always ruling her
mind. It got expressed in her third collection of short stories namely *Some Get Wasted*. It
satirizes the issue of black leadership, and how due to lack of opportunity the Black youths,
turn against each other and are killed, thus illustrating the dissipation of young energy.

Marshall herself was drifting her energy towards political activities. She became
associated with groups like ‘American Youth for Democracy’ and ‘The Association of Artist
for Freedom’. Marshall who is a true voice of the Black women, started working together
with other Black artist such as John Killens, James Baldwin, Ruby Lee and Ossie Davis.
They spread the message against racial discrimination, and unity amongst the Negros. A
symposium was also performed to put weight on their arguments. Paule also protested
strongly against the killing of four Black Girls, in the bomb-blast at Alabama Church, which
was used for Civil Rights. All these political turmoils, and upheavals, get expressed in
Marshall’s novels. Thus commenting on her novel *The Chosen Place, The Timeless People*,
Marshall says:

I hope that the novel would not solely be seen as a novel about the West
Indies, even though it is set there. But as a novel that reflects what is
happening to all of us in the Diaspora in our encounter with these
metropolitical powers, the power of Europe and the power of America.

(Melus, 124).

Marshall not only acknowledged the metro political power, but also the power and need of a
partner. She remarried a businessman, Nourry Menard in 1970. This marriage was based on
mutual understanding. Marshall started voicing her views in favour of the Black women to make people understand her plight. Her marriage provided her this opportunity. Both the partners were financially independent and were thus free to dedicate themselves to their own life style and career. He like her insisted that the Black woman should be given a life of her own; she herself secured such a life from her second marriage. It was at this time, she also started teaching at The University of Iowa, Writer’s workshop, University of Massachusetts, University of Columbia and Yale University. So, it was an era of stability for Marshall. She had been pondering since her childhood, when she had heard those ‘Kitchen Poets’ in the basement of the kitchen about the day she would become a writer. Since then she wanted to secure a position and recognition for them and also for herself. Black feminists and literature on blacks were being explored at the time, and so were Marshall’s creative works. There were frequent studies, articles, analyses of Black feminist literature and also of Marshall’s work in books and journals. In her personal life, she had gained her stability which she wanted, in her second marriage. Critic Darwin Turner correctly remarks about her that:

Marshall inhales the spirit of her times, until it becomes a part of her. Then she crafts a narrative which includes the spirit of times diastole, systole… In doing so, she has grown with the spirit of the era… (Introduction, 11)

Marshall’s creativity started soaring high. She brought out her third novel *Praise Song for The Widow* in 1983. This book established her reputation and gave her new heights on the literary platform of that period. This book brought her the Columbus Foundation Book Award. This book too, was written in honour of her ancestors and is dedicated to her grandmother. It holds an important place in her life and struggle as it signifies the end of an odyssey and a mission well accomplished. The novel deals with healing of a fractured psyche i.e. the old, shattered, broken psyche of the Black Women, and simultaneously leading to
rediscovery and recovery of the lost identity. At this time Marshall personally was drifting towards maturity of age. She was quite aware of the fact that the American the Society was all about youth. Marshall was against that notion and she believed that one cannot be locked in the bars of age if one had the enthusiasm and energy even at a mature age. This again reflects Marshall’s protestant nature, where she would not readily accept the society meekly, which she considered was wrong. The protagonist of the novel Avey Johnson, proved this even at the age of sixty four just like Marshall. She still had the same zeal as she had when writing her first novel at the tender age. These lives from the novels display the juvenile spirit of Avey Johnson the protagonist of the novel, which is similar to that of Marshall:

The names ‘Avey’ and ‘Avatara’ were those someone who was no longer present, and she had become Avey Johnson even in her thoughts, a woman whose face reflected in a window or mirror (Praise Song for the Widow, 141)

Marshall, a woman whose fame spread across the world, joined Virginia Commonwealth University in 1984 as a professor of English and creative writing. Paule’s fame, recognition, stability and awards all gave her a position for which she strived and wanted to prove that a Black woman was not behind. She was honoured with Langstorn Hughes Award Medallion in 1986, New York State Governor’s Arts Award for literature in 1987, Neustadt International Prize for literature in 1988, The Don Passos Award for literature in 1989 and Pen/ Faulkner Award in 1990.

Marshall, basically doesn’t believe in hasting things, but walks steadily and slowly, with confidence until a firmer foothold is achieved. Thus, after a gap of eight years, Marshall published her fourth novel Daughters. It is a very personal novel which surrounds, her own relationship with her father Samuel Burke, to whom she dedicates this novel. The novel visualizes the picture of a Black Woman in crisis and how this crisis offers her the
opportunity to come to terms with the racial and feminine self. The protagonist Ursa Beatrice frees herself from the shackles of paternal bondage and creates a place where she can claim it to be her own self, and also redeem the lives of other members of her community. This was in consonance with what Marshall was doing and with what she stood for. The lives from the novel *Daughters* echoes the sentiments that the need of the hour is to come forward, stand together, hand in hand and to raise one’s voice:

I’m gonna tell you the woods are on fire out here… and we need everybody that can take a bucket of water to come running... you know… the need for you all of us is stand up and be counted. To be useful. (102)

Thus the novel is another combat that Marshall had started in favour of Black women. The novel has an inclusion of an array of women who influence the protagonist Ursa’s life, similar to those groups of women, the kitchen poets like her grandmother, who shaped and groomed Marshall’s life. The literary odyssey for Paule still went on, and she penned down her experiences into a novel form. Each of her work showed her creative power, her feminine consciousness and her concern for the Black woman community.

### 1.5 Conclusion

Marshall published her next novel, *The Fisher King* in the year 2000. This novel demonstrates the universality of Marshall’s characters, which is a dominant theme in her works. Paule Marshall deals with several major themes, but all these basically reflect her own issues, the obstacles of time, the agony of black woman and the clutches of racial discrimination, that were engulfed in them. Her works are not only her inner passion, but a vehicle to fight for her people, to bring out their sentiments to the world. It is a weapon to show her affinity towards her culture, heritage, ancestors and people. She writes to spread the message of empowerment which alone can bring upliftment. Thus, Marshall’s women are
never portrayed to be losers. They may be grounded temporarily but ultimately they much
towards victory. Daryl Pinckney observes:

> Paule Marshall does not let the Black Women in her fiction lose. While they
lose friends, lovers, husband, homes or jobs, they always find themselves…
Marshall insists that the woman with enough nerve can win even when the
deck is stacked and the other players are hostile. (“Roots” The New York
Review of Books, 26)

Paule Marshall thus made a significant contribution in a world dominated by men. The
pressures that she received from the patriarchal world could not diminish the fire within her.
Today at a mature age, she still charts out her own odyssey. The spark that got ignited in the
basement of the kitchen, nurtured into a volcano, which took the form of her novels. Though
she prefers intense private life with her son Evan Keith, Naval Architect. The novel
*Daughters* is dedicated to her brother Frank Burke who died in 1990. But her life is not
private, she writes for her people, her community and about the painful conflicts faced by the
Black women. She fights for them and voices their distress, being their ‘Vanguardal Voice’.
To quote Marshall herself:

> The flight was on… the desire, the hope, was to gain acceptance in the white
world, or if not acceptance, the acknowledgement at least that they were
different from others, the darker others and better… the hope… Oh! God, all I
want is a chance to show them how… I am (“The Negro Woman in American
Literature”, The Exum, 19)

Marshall still continues, with her literary activism, fighting steadily for the Black woman, as
she is their Vanguardal Voice.
Works cited


