Chapter -VI

Conclusion
This research work has attempted to explore the female psyche of diasporic Black Women as depicted in the works of Paule Marshall. Marshall’s works reflect the existential condition of diasporic Black Men and Women in the context of slavery, racism, colonialism and feminism. Black Woman in White society was an oppressed person with fractured psyche and in a powerless and dependent condition. The powerless dependent mutilated condition of Black Women was like an infant and or in words of Lacan her “condition was a mirror stage” dependent on the masters.

Marshall’s works are based on the Black Woman’s life from fractured psyche to the spiritual wholeness. Marshall was much concerned about Black Woman’s self recovery and claim of their cultural past. As a feminist writer, she takes a strong stand and doesn’t fight her cause by just crying aloud, rather she takes her characters through a journey that reconnects them with their true selves. Silla, Selina, Avey, Marle all have struggled in search of their true identity.

Black Women in preconquest of Africa experienced ‘Edenic’ blissfulness, peace and tranquility. But the blissfulness was lost when European slave traders entered the land of Africa and enslaved men and women for their business. The Africans were forced to exit from the garden. They were not treated as humans but as an object.

Marshall’s novel thus include Black Women’s triangular journey across the middle passage i.e. in America where they experienced horrifying treatment by the whites or ‘men without skin’ (Toni Morrison)
As a writer Marshall incorporates in her novels the theme of feminity, community and cultural past. All the protagonists move from their own individual growth to the community and collective identity growth.

In *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, Marshall portrays Selina, the protagonist, a young girl who understands her feminity, her mother and her community as she grows into her adolescence. She understands her parents Silla and Deighten, Miss Thompson, Guggie and Clive when she grew up. From her mother Silla she inherited the understanding of how the Barbadian Community tolerated the assaults of sexism and racism. Selina’s growth and journey from innocence to experience is completed only when she realizes, who she is. She understands what is to be black, poor in racist and classist America. Betrayed by Clive, Selina learns to be more independent and rely on herself. Marshall deconstructs the historical past for Selina to emerge with new consciousness. Her bitter sense of experiences changes into love, hope and unity. She realized that her own mother Silla whom she saw as Hitler was not so but a victim of racist and sexist. Her self realization is new beginning. She decides to return to her native place Barbados. She replaces her infantile consciousness by armed consciousness, and sense of emancipation. Marshall dramatizes Selina’s reverse journey to Barbados to make her learn more about her culture. Selina’s self rediscovery is like queens of pre-conquest of Africa. In Marshall’s second novel *The Chosen Place, The Timeless People*, Merle Kinbona’s return to Africa symbolizes the ‘Primal of Innocence’ that was lost when Americans invaded the land of Africa. Marshall ‘s other protagonists too travel the journey from innocence to experience. All of them reverse their journey to their homeland to gain knowledge to know their culture. They all are triumphant, empowered and autonomous women.
Paule Marshall’s women are mysterious, tragic and more often than not take us into the dark recesses of their souls. Yet they are strong in many ways. Daryl Pinckney (1983:26) writes:

Marshall insists that the woman with enough nerve can win even when the deck is stacked and the other players are hostile. Nerve, here, means making radical choices... and making up one’s mind to heed an inner voice.(26)

Silla Boyce, for instance, is the woman who has staked out a claim to power in white America in spite of all the odds that everyone including her husband has stacked against her face. She feels that: “People got to make their own way.

Selina Boyce is another Marshall woman who is equally assertive. She is psychologically strong and independent, articulate, and an intelligent young girl, who is not afraid of making radical choices in her life or being different from the established norms. Her experiences with men, with her community have helped her to develop a greater sense of self and she is psychologically equipped to reject or accept values of life in order to determine what type of life she wants for herself. Although Selina appreciates the strength of her American - Barbadian people, she still cannot accept their way of life, their inhumane code of ethics that demands self-centeredness and strict conformity. At the end of the novel Selina removes one of her bangles and hurls than back into the face of her community before she leaves for Barbados to find a larger identity for herself. Her act is a testimony that she is a dauntless woman who is now prepared to step out of centuries of molding and redirect her own destiny. It is Selina who initiates the archetypal journey back, a “kind of reverse Middle Passage” (Washington 1981a: 324), a journey that effects not only a reversal of the Middle Passage but the entire history of black, women in America.
Like Silla and Selina, Reena is one of the Marshall’s women who is equally strong and assertive.

Another female character that stands out distinctly in the fictional landscape of Paule Marshall is Merle Kinbona, the protagonist of The Chosen Place, The Timeless People. “Merle remains the most alive of my characters” says Marshall (1983b: 109). To read the novel is primarily to meet Merle Kinbona. In her, Marshall has created a timeless character, “a creation worthy of Camus” (Bone 1969:54). From her very first appearance on the first page to her last words, she is real; she is alive; a complex, rounded character. She talks, talks endlessly (her way of fighting against loneliness and despair), she cries, screams, smiles, drinks, carries, nay, drags everyone and everything along with her in her headlong race forward. But what is really nearest to her heart is Bournehills and its people. “She is the queen, the primeval Goddess of the island, a life-force, an-earth mother who is the island - its past, present, and future (Talmor 1987:126). To Saul Amaron, the WASP leader and the American anthropologist

it seemed that her dark face, ... mirrored not only the faces of the children and those of the men and women in Delbert’s yard as well. She appeared to contain them all. So that for a moment, ... he didn’t see her simply as Merle, ... but some larger figure in whose person was summed up both Bournehills and its people (Marshall 1969:260).

“She somehow is Bournehills”, remarks Allen Fuso, one of the characters in the novel. She is a symbol, or even more, an archetype. Linda Pannill (1985-68) remarks that “Merle is a colossal figure, almost always in motion, while the roads seem to twitch under her. It is this force that frustrates the plans of the colonial lords from America. She is intensely committed to Bournehill. Merle Kinbona is a catalyst of change for herself and her
black community and for the oppressed people but an agent of destruction for the colonizer and the oppressor. She carnivalizes the island life, brings resurrection for herself and Saul, the Jewish scientist but drives Harriet Amaron, the brain behind the WASP organization, to death through suicide.

Paule Marshall’s women are not only the social and political actors and revolutionaries but even extenders of Afrocentric myths and transmitters of black culture. Avey Johnson, the sixty four year old protagonist of *Praisesong for the Widow*, for instance, is such a black woman who, even at this age, capable of translating personal history into cultural metaphor through myths, rituals and dances. By using historical, personal and cultural metaphors, Avey Johnson implies that African - American need to connect those aspects of black heritage which are psychologically empowering.

Marshall insists on the reality of Black culture not only as an antidote to white racism but primarily as an inevitable property of people who, many thought, had no history, or culture of their own. She feels that

There is a whole culture, a whole field of manners about Black American life that has to be first of all acknowledged and celebrated. That we are not, as so many of our detractors would like to insist, a people without a culture. (195, cit. Kulkarni)

Marshall asserts that it is the black community which is the agent and arch bearer of this culture and it is this specific culture that provides strength, nourishment and sustenance back to that community making each one of them inseparable from each other. Marshall, therefore, stresses the importance of culture and community as context for understanding society’s definitions of black man and woman, as a prerequisite for comprehending those distinct contours of the black self. It is in this frame work of culture and community that Paule
Marshall portrays her characters. Barbara Christian (1985a:83) comments that it is “Marshall’s concern both to sculpt her characters in all their uniqueness and to probe the space of their cultural dimensions.”

Paule Marshall is the first black woman novelist to blend in her narrative scope all these elements into one unified whole. Her texts document lives of black women who insist on, what Toni Morrison (1990) calls, “speaking the unspeakable”, or what Michel Foucault (1973:11) calls “thinking the unthought.” Selina, Reena and Ursa Beatrice are some of the Marshall heroines who step out of the patriarchal or phallogocentric molds of ideology and in an unabashedly loud tone name “the problem that has no name” (Friedan 1974:11). Marshall is a woman writer and celebrates “female culture’, which, to paraphrase Elaine Showalter (1985: 131), means a conscious acceptance of the relationships between women, as mothers, ‘daughter’ sisters and friends their sexuality-marriage, motherhood their idea bout female body etc. as the positive ingredients of woman’s existence.

Paule Marshall ended the era of patriarchal imperialism and the era of conscious foregrounding of black women really began. She challenged the masculine economy of representation and hegemonic dominance by introducing black women, the triply invisible persons, as the central actors in her fictional drama. In her unpublished interview with Daryl Dance, Marshall (1991a:3,) says:

‘From the time I started writing, women have been central to my stories. There are a couple of reasons for this. One is that women were central to my world growing up.... The other reason that women are central to my work is that they were seldom the principal characters in the books.... and they were almost never Black.(33)
All Marshall women are the wild-zone dwellers. In Silla’s kitchen the Barbadian American women folk enjoy large “wild zone” in which free-wheeling talk covers a wide range of affairs, from child-birth marriage, pregnancy, and weddings to obeah (conjuring) and politics. A similarly unrestrained atmosphere prevails during light-time conversation between Reena and Pauline at their Aunt Vi’s wake. They discuss the issues related to the “wild zone”: their college years, their love affairs, their search for job, marriage and divorce. As college educated, middle class and relatively dark skinned black women, Reena and Pauline give vent to a familiar litany of accusations black men heap on them: Castrating, conservative, too independent, sexually inhibited and unimaginative etc. “The story”, as Gloria T. Hull (1978:6) sees it, “is presented so symbolically that this particular woman’s trials and joys assume general applicability.”

All Marshall’s women hold center stage in their lives. Through their speech, and acts they create a definite place for themselves. They speak and see the same speech is followed by action. They chart out their own course of action and they redirect their own destinies. Sabine Brock (1987:85) argues that “To control some space of your own means to have the power to control your existence.” Marshall has empowered all her heroines to exercise such a “power.” Silla, Selina, Avey Johnson, Ursa Beatrice are basically committed to making radical choices so as to control definite space in their lives.

It is Paule Marshall who incorporated such a point of view in her texts as early as 1959. Her female characters like Selina Boyce learn to value the life-giving potential of her monthly bleeding and celebrate her body’s connection to nature. Cassie, Ursa, Reena and Miss Williams are the Marshall heroines who are deeply concerned with the problems of marriage, motherhood, abortion and sexual harassment. They are the ones who celebrate those old women who defied conventional roles. They celebrate also their connections with
other women and positively name them “sisterhood.” They celebrate this “wild zone” not in shame but in full pride.

Marshall gives voice to female sexuality in almost all her works. At time she offers a poignant description of what Cherrie Morga (1981 xviii) calls “hunger we feel between our hips when we long to be touched.” The following passage from *Praisesong for the Widow* describes graphically Avey Johnson’s “hunger”.

In the warm pool of light from the lamp beside the bed, the woman’s stomach was flat, smooth, a snow white plain, with the navel like a tiny signpost pointing to the silken forest below. Jay could not get over the flatness. Stroking it, he would tell her - his mouth against her ears, her lips - what it did to him, how it moved him.... until, under this caress and the quiet power of his voice, the woman would try out and pull him down between her arched, widespread legs (100-101).

Another theme that contributes to the feminist pattern of Marshall’s writing is the bond of sisterhood which constitutes a resilient, women centered network of relationships between daughters, bloodmothers, othermothers, grandmothers, sisters and aunts. The most integral part of this bond is the relationship between black mothers and daughters.

Selina must learn not only from her biological mother but also from, what Rosalie Troester (1991:163) calls, “Othermothers.” Racism sexism, and poverty or what Marshall (1985b:2 1) calls “triple-headed hydra” often produces situation in which many black children will have othermothers, who care them and fill in for bloodmothers, who cannot be there. For black daughters, these women bring certain revelations in “female” art which the real mothers cannot. For Selina, Suggie Skeets, Miss Thompson, and Miss Mary are those othermothers who imbue Selina with an innate vision. Suggie teaches Selina the pleasures of
Miss Thompson, who comes from the American South tells Selina the implications of sexism and racism by nursing a male-inflicted wound that refuses to heal. Through Miss Mary, Selina learns that she has other, more global, contexts than the ones she currently experience. Marshall presents a similar design in her most recent novel *Daughters*. In the aftermath of the abortion, Ursa finds herself subjected to a virtual storm of memory, in which he summons up every mother. Celestine, the Creole woman who helped raise her, Astral Forde, her father’s mistress, Viney, her mother, friend sister alter ego, and, of course, her real mother, Estelle. From Celestine she learns the futility of living without a sense of self. From Forde she learns the vanity of living only for material gain. From Viney she learns what is to become the moral imperative of Daughters - that to be human, one must be of use. From her biological mother she learns that in order to be of use, men and women must work together - and that the relationship between the sexes is far more complicated than she has ever imagined.

Included in the bond of sisterhood are also a few grandmothers. “the guardian of the generations”, who are the acknowledged story tellers who pass on the family history and who know who is kin to whom. Celestine in *Daughters*, Great-Aunt Cuney in *Praisesong*, Leesy Walkes in *Chosen Place*, Da-duh in *To Da-duh In Memoriam* and Miss Thompson in *Brown Girl* are those figures who stand as the preservers of the African-extended family, as the repositories and distributors of family history, wisdom and black lore and also as the retainers and communicators of values and ideals which support and enhance their families and their community. The role these mothers, othermothers, and grandmothers play is the role of what Carole Boyce Davies (1985:43) calls “mother-healers.” They not only nurture and provide emotional support to their daughters but even help them resolve ambiguities and aspirations of their sexuality. Selina, Ursa, and other ‘daughters’ in Marshall’s fiction acknowledge how their mothers provided road-maps and patterns which enabled them to create and define
themselves as they moved from childhood through adolescence to adulthood. Though these daughters forge an identity which is separate from their mothers, they frequently acknowledge that a part of themselves is truly of their mothers’. The nurturing female community of these grandmothers and othermothers often encircles their daughters in order to ensure some familiarity in their Journey into a world characterized by uncertainty and even hostility. All Paule Marshall’s ‘daughters’ seem to acknowledge: “What these mothers passed on would take you anywhere in the world you wanted to go” (Washington 1984:161).

In her interview with Daiyl Dance (199 la:32), Paule Marshall points out that “there’s been a... womanist perspective in my work from very early on.” Womanist vision, according to Alice Walker (1983:XI), is “committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female.” Though intensely committed to the cause of black womanhood, Marshall does not believe in separatist ideology that would fracture the black community. She insists that the black people must build a world of harmonious relationships and understanding without ever allowing self-erasing, self-surrendering homogeneity. She feels that the black community should not only survive but survive whole as well. She is frankly looking for a new value which would promulgate an aesthetics of unification by obliterating the artificial and excessively egotistic sexual polarization alienating black man from black woman. And herein lies Marshall’s ethnic feminism which differs considerably from the feminism of her sister novelists of the 1970s and 1980s. Unlike them, ‘Marshall presents not a dismissal of the male, but an affirmation of the female’ (Denniston 1983:45). The fictional world of Alice Walker, Toni Morison, Ntozake Shange and Gayle Jones dismisses black men by portraying them as brutalizers, rapists, sadists, and psychopathic descendants and heirs of Bigger Thomas. For instance, Grange Copeland in Alice Walker’s *The Third Life of Grange Copland* brutalizes his wife and neglects his son because he is abused by his white overseer, Brownfield, his son, also humiliates and finally kills his wife, Mem and leaving his new born
child outside in a chill wintry night, flies away. Celie in *The Color Purple* is raped by her stepfather and Pecola Breedlove in Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye* by her own father. Shalimar in *Song of Solomon* is a psychopath because he leaves his wife and twenty children behind, and lifting his arms skyward flies to Africa. Mutt Thomas in Gayle Jone’s *Corregidora* abuses his newly pregnant’ wife, Ursa and knocking her down destroys her womb, the temple of creation.

To Marshall, this reactionary gesture of negative male portrayal is no indication of that negation-for-affirmation ideology so very crucial to the making of feminist revolution but an “artistic tribalism” and blatant gender warfare leading the black community hopelessly as ever deeper in to the morass of distrust and fragmentation. Marshall (1984a:202) admits “that they [male brutalities] do exist but that it is not the total story of our community.” She feels that the sexist oppression of black women must be explored in literature but with utmost care. Marshall, a “meticulous” writer, is not prepared to dig the same holes which black male writers made for black women. Her meticulousness finds expression in almost all her works. For instance, in *Brown Girl*, Silla Boyce starts a fierce quarrel with her romantic husband, Deighton, but feels deeply tormented over his loss, She tells Selina “I did do it out of hate, it’s just that I can bear to see him suffering” (Marshall 1981:305). In “Reena” the title character comes in conflict with her husband, Dave, finds it hard to continue living with him but without making any compromise with her self-respect and self-pride. She walks coolly out of his life. In *Daughters* Ursa Beatrice engineers her father Primus Mackenzie loss at the pole, upsets his domestic life by destroying the configurations of polestar and constellation that involves other women, but such an action is designed not to defeat him but rather to restore him to his original commitment and values. Marshall (1991 a:34) tells us: “whatever feminist note is struck in the novels is not meant to obscure... the need for Black men and women to come together in wholeness and unity.” She does celebrate black womanhood but
does not accept the notions of polarization, antagonism, gender warfare and fragmentation. She accepts synthesis and balance and cultural solidarity but not self-glossing homogeneity or summarily totalizing concepts of gender, race, and subjectivity. She feels committed to bringing out the specificities of female experiences not through condemning the experiences of the other sex but through freeing female representation from hegemonizing phallocentric order. Luce Irigaray, in her book, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, writes:

…what is important is to disconcert the staging of representation according to phallocratic order. It is not a matter of topping that order so as to replace it - that amounts to the same thing in the end - but of disrupting and modifying it, starting from an “outside” that exempt, in part, from phallocratic law. (27).

As a writer black and female, Paule Marshall represents an exemption from “phallocratic law.” Her six books reflect a consciousness that she writes both from and about a zone that is “outside” of literary convention, that disrupts white ideological confines and modifies patriarchal Inscriptions. Marshall does write in difference, does inscribe the “wild zone” but not at the cost of cultural solidarity. She presents a zone in terms that emphasize rather than minimize cultural otherness. Herein lays Paule Marshall’s womanism, a base from which she proceeds to construct her texts.

To sum up, Paule Marshall reconstructed black womanhood and introduced a new iconography in African-American literature. She defined black female characters in relation to the community they lived in. Insisting on the relationship of woman as self and as part of a community, she “prefigured the major themes of black women’s fiction in the 1970s: the black woman’s potential as a full person and necessarily a major actor on the social, cultural and political issues of our times” (Christian 1985b: 105). She made the silent speak. She made the invisible visible and the repressed to make an explosive return. She set her women out to
claim the “wild zone”, an authentic black female space which they could use as the basis for reference and action. Without viewing gender and racial identity as mutually exclusive polarities, Marshall used them both as equally liberating points from which to construct a language or to create a literature that is political in form as well as in subject matter. She beat the fresh contours of womanhood when everyone subscribed to the rule of phallocracy, she emerged from a landscape where every signpost signified totalization and otherness of black female experience and culture. Marshall achieved this when, to borrow from Toni Morrison (1971:63),

> She had nothing to fall back on; not maleness, not whiteness, not ladyhood, not anything. And out of the profound desolation of her reality, she may very well have invented herself.

Marshall’s own words make this clear: “It was a very inhospitable climate in which I started writing. I had no mentors no one that I could turn to” (Marshall 199 lb: 15). Fellow poet and playwright Alexis DeVeaux (1979:7 1) praises Marshall as one “who went the road alone with no vehicle to make comfortable her journey.” Marshall’s works constitute a “praisesong” not only for her radiant heroines but also for herself because she made way out of no way, and like a phoenix, stepped out of sheer desolation and proceeded to actualize avant garde constructs into the canon of African-American literature.

Marshall is an unequaled writer, she is a revisionist and reconstructionist of Black Woman psyche which as fractured, tormented and mutilated. Marshall reconstructed their psyche as independent women.

Thus she is the pioneer of the black women’s enajssamee. The way she demolished the racism and sexism through her novelistic establishes her as a deconstructionist of negativity and reconstructionist of positivity. She portrays a true image of black women and
provides centrality to her main characters. She establishes the black females as victorious figures who can perform the tasks assigned to them. They have a potential to reclaim themselves and their cultural past.
Findings of my research work:-

1. The novelist through her writings has tried to capture the cultural heritage. It is noteworthy that the novelist’s attempts to give centrality to all the female protagonists were successful.

2. Traumatic experiences and prolonged hostile environment makes Black Diasporic women and other human beings the victims of such mental illness or schizophrenia. My study suggests that people who migrate, have tendency to became schizophrenic. Riding between two cultures leads to a bipolar behavior and an identity crisis. It is observed that the culture in which one lives plays an important role in the incidence of such mental illness. It varies from one culture to the other. My findings show that living in a state of oppression in United States has contributed to a disproportionately high incidence of mental illness among Black people as reflected in the novels of Marshall.

3. Diasporic Blacks have a common thread that links them with their ancestral past. Their history and culture establishes the underlying truth that links them all. The sense of homelessness can be replaced by the reconnection between their ancestral home and their current home.

4. In White America the Black were under the pressures of racism, slavery and colonialism, and were suffering from fractured psyches. The economic, political and social autonomy of the Diasporic men and women was disrupted.

5. It was found that all the works reveal the logics and that the writer at the end is a reconstructionist. Irrespective of psychological economical and political problems the main characters emerge triumphantly. Recovery of self and the claiming of cultural past is attained by reversing movement of decolonization.
6. Marshall has used journey / travel as a tool to explore the true identity of Black women which is again similar to Biblical quest of the Holy Grail.

7. Exploring several avenues to find identity the characters in Marshall’s novel are influenced by their African roots.

8. Having created works that grew in part from frustration of women in the American Literary Canon, Marshall rewrites women who are the epitome of Congo Jane and fulfill their roles equivalent to male thus giving Black women a voice.

9. More works can be done on Marshall’s novels.