

Predicament and Disabling Factors in Paule Marshall's Daughters

T.Ezhilarasi¹, Ph.D. Research Scholar (FT), P.G. & Research Department of English, Government Arts College (Autonomous), Salem: 636007

Dr.J.Jayakumar², Assistant Professor, P.G. & Research Department of English, Government Arts College (Autonomous), Salem: 636007

Article Received: 08/06/2022, Article Accepted: 13/07/2022, Published online: 14/07/2022, DOI:10.36993/RJOE.2022.7.3.10

Abstract

In the fiction of Paule Marshall as a whole, she is concerned with the experiences of American people throughout the diaspora. Most basically, the theme of Paule Marshall is attempting to identify the identity, analyze and resolve the conflict between cultural laws, displacement, and cultural domination hegemony. This paper explores the predicaments and disabling factors in Paule Marshall's Daughters. Despite their varied age factors, Paule Marshall's women characters in Daughters counter the challenging stages of their life; their physical, mental, and spiritual aspects seek their contentment, one after the other, leading to an unpleasant odor to the story. The protagonist's concern is to bring the synthesis between the black and white cultures. She faces defeat as the black or victimized by a political system those terms with corruption. This novel represents predicaments in myriad ways. This is a graphic novel. Five female characters in Daughters are conscious of their existence. Marshall emphasizes the need for the protagonist to cut off the bond of both emotion and psychology. The novelist makes Ursa Beatrice think of the imposing power image of her father. Her predicament in life is being tied to her father. The black identity as individualistic cannot be segregated from group identity. Marshall exhibits that patriarchal and racial infliction

of operation can be avoided if there could be reliability and genuineness between black individual and group identities.

Keywords: American Experience, Hegemony, Racial inequality, Identity, Predicament.

Through the novel's opening, Paule Marshall accentuates the need for the protagonist to cut off the bondage of both emotion and psychology. In this context, the issue of the figure of the Umbilical cord arises. In Daughters, the novelist draws attention to the possibility of this tightness proving a disabling factor. It may even be constricting at the personal level. Besides these ties, there might arise another kind of bondage that of the psyche, the mind, and heart, the responsibility of the novelist to prove the latter point leads her to delineate the idol of Ursa Beatrice, who is also her nemesis. Here, it is the man. Paule Marshall makes Ursa Beatrice think of the imposing power image of her father.

He used to stand at the edge of the swimming pool. Everyone said he had installed more for her than the guests at the so-called hotel he owns, keeping an eye on her while she made like a bit of chocolate

Esther Williams in the water. His shoulders were in the shirt-jac suit he wore on Sundays-their day to go to the pool- would look a mile wide above her. His head with a high domed forehead. She had inherited, and That had earned him the nickname Paule Marshall when he was a boy, would appear more significant than the Sun. Sometimes, as she glanced up and found she couldn't see the Sun or even a blue patron of the sky Because of his being in the way, she'd do a sudden flip, annoyed, pull the water like a blanket Over her head and dive to the bottom of the pool and sit there. She just sat in wavers, blue sunlit Silence until the last bubble of air floated up from her lips and disappeared, and her lungs ached To breathe in anything, even the blue water. She did it to impress, tease and frighten him a little. She always surfaced with a grin and a wink. Then to get back into his good graces, she does More mini laps than they had agreed on for the day (P 9-10).

However, it is to be noticed that Ursa Beatrice is independent, and the annoyance, as explicit from the above quote, together with her desire to please, affects her independent spirit. Ursa struggles to be free from the bondage of her father. But the inextricable relationship with her father prevents her from venting her emotional connection and identification with the woman she is dear to. There is the regular communication from Primus. Ursa Beatrice reserves an exclusive place for his contact on her headboard. Her affiliations, political in nature, complicate Ursa Beatrice's struggle.

Paule Marshall exposes black women's reinforced consciousness of morality, which supports black men of political leadership potential. It is suffocation utilizing marginalization that is

because of race or gender. This torments Estelle Mackenzie and Mae Rylawd, and other black women. Their purpose is to bring about a change. Estelle, a school teacher earlier, has her concerns for women. She takes to kindle racial pride and its culture to better the black women's working conditions, resulting in her initiating several projects in Mainlands. She is vociferous in voicing her views at political rallies. She unsettles government parties, protesting against the government's policies and plans of no value to the islanders.

But, ironically enough, despite Estelle's resolve to keep up the tightness of her hold over the reins, she stands thwarted owing to the greedy Macbethian personal ambitions. Besides, the Triunion still lingers backward and suffers from survival menace. In this context, what Primus Mackenzie says is of relevance:

Nobody realizes it, but those are some of the best business minds in the world. You see walking about these dark roads at night. Most of them have never been near a schoolhouse, yet the ladies can buy and sell you in a minute if you're not careful. They belong on Wall Street... What to do on here running the Ministry of Finance instead of the jackasses we now have? They were born the wrong color, the wrong sex, the wrong class, and everything else on a little two-by-four island that doesn't offer anybody any actual scope.(P 143).

Paule Marshall portrays the confined spheres of these women wherein they exercise their autonomy. Estelle is aware of this and is determined to send her daughter Ursa Beatrice to America. There is in Estelle a desire to give Ursa and expose her to other options of emancipation and independence. Ursa must be endowed with

assertiveness to provide a fillip in her struggle for the progress of her community.

More opportunities come the way for Ursa to talk and walk the path of talking and walking, which is perceptible to Estelle. Eventually, Estelle finds it excited to see her daughter having new dimensions in her walk and gestures. She feels that she listens to her daughter more than words would mean. She notices in her daughter more wariness. Ursa also develops a change in her regard for her parents. On the other side, Estelle is careful not to let her daughter know of Primus Mackenzie's infidelity to her and the mental pangs that follow it. She does not inform Ursa about primus political learning. She tries to be stoic like Portia in Julius Caesar but she is too damaged at heart and is badly emotional. Her husband's ditching her and cultural isolation stands her in isolation. She cannot draw her husband's attention. While this is so, Ursa is beset by the uncertainties that have come upon those she loves. She there emanates a kind of protest dormant in it that stands against her father's corrupt practices and the behavior of puzzlement of mother.

In the course of the novel, the predicament of women is further projected through another female character Mz Ryland, also known as Miz Ryland, and their mother, Ryland. Sandy Lawson, the African-American Mayor, is provided with enough support by mother Ryland, the coalition lady. But, she is menaced when she finds an expressway directed through land belonging to the black population. Initially, she is supportive of Sandy Lawson, as is borne out by her speech encouraging her community to favor sandy Lawson:

Who else we got? I'm looking for you to be down to the polls came November

Eleventh, cause it isn't just sandy you gone be voting for, but all these hug and out here Look like they are trying to do away with themselves and us too. Think about it(P 281).

This positive outlook in mother Ryland turns problematic, best with Sandy lawson's corruption. It becomes the utmost concern of both mothers Ryland and Estelle to get geared up to severe the community for its goodness. There is remorse about Sandy Lawson's deviation. However, these two women embark on their good intent:

But if we find he can't learn and keeps on doing like he's doing-her, the tone has Suddenly changed; her face has tightened- it we see he isn't any use to kind a We'll vote his little gap-toothed self out here the same way we noted him. And find us another grand. And if that one doesn't do right either, we'll vote his butt too, and keep on till we find the right one..... (P 299).

These arguments buttress the fact that the middle class, as represented by mother Ryland and Estelle alone, are responsible for the betterment of the black community, ethically speaking. Paule Marshall delineates many female characters that turn benefactors out of the social struggles with political leanings during the fifties and sixties.

Paule Marshall employs images flashing in her description of the restlessness that emanates from the rabid lives of the middle-class community poised amidst the business civilization of New York City. Paule Marshall takes cognizance of the response of the blacks to the ethical and moral necessities or exigencies amidst their allurements and vulnerabilities. In this context, two aspects, sexism, and racism, figure prominently. There is implicit advice

that community progress has its leanings on togetherness and mutual help, which wires in struggle joint in nature. This is what both Ursa and Viney come to comprehend. Paule Marshall employs expressions and metaphoric to project Viney's relationship with one Willis Jenkins, who is vicious:

"The world is on fire out here," my granddaddy used to say, "and we need everybody. Can tote a bucket of water to come running". He used to say that all the time, talking about the situation of Black folks in this country, you know, and the need for all of us To stand up and be counted. To be useful. And one day, I took a good look at Willis Jenkins and knew he was not one of those folks. He might be right, talented, good to look at, great in bed, someone who knew how to talk the talk to get over, but he wasn't helpful. Because Willis Jenkins wasn't about to tote so much as a thimbleful of water anywhere, anybody, not even for himself if his patch of woods was on fire.(P 102).

Both Ursa and Viney, during abortion and pregnancy, respectively, remain devoted to each other and exchange psychological strength. This is their dire need of theirs amidst their predicament. There is a description in *Daughters* where Paule Marshall is poignant in her portrayal of Viney's attempt to commit suicide. One could find a parallel to this in *The Women Of Brewster Place*(1982) by Gloria Naylor. In this novel, Mattie Michael gives a bath to life after Ciel's child's death and her abandonment by her husband. In *Daughters*, Paule Marshall makes Ursa rock Viney; her heavy body dangles from a swimming pool ledge:

Ursa heard it then, a deep, racking sound that could have come only from The source of the river. Viney's head remained thrown back, her arms rigid Along the gutter, her

flooded gaze on the banked lights overhead, but her body had Begun to heave with a sound like the fearful raging of a mute...(P 78).

Ursa's persistence in holding is on until "the last river had dried."The river is known for its representation of heartache, with which Ursa is familiar but disavows.

Paule Marshall then proceeds to vivify the vulnerability of women. However, she does not deny the existence of female power. Marshall realizes that female predicament in life's situations should have support between black women and men, contextually speaking. Viney is undoubtedly conscious of her ability to manage herself but the imperative to fill in the "blank space" prevails upon her as an ideal. Her son Robson also undergoes the feeling of the male figure's absence. The female predicament highlighted here is the arrogance necessary for single mothers. Paule Marshall accentuates that the nurturing of love among women account for strength, and there is the implicit insistence that there is a dire need for mutual understanding and support between the males and females of the black community. The novelist does not in any way lessen this imperative. In the course of this development, there is to be noticed the interference of the tiding of the heart that small the positive reinforcement of man and women relationship, familial. Ursa is fixed in such a relationship.

Viney uses the phraseology "constipation stasis" (P 89) to refer to the love that floats between Ursa and Lowell Carruthers. This means that there is a statement in love's proceedings. There is stagnation, and love proceeds nowhere. Throughout the novel, the concept of the mother and her concern emanates. The

mother concept in the book pertains to the West African values of the culture around familial centrality and adjustments relating to oppression of race and gender. The concern of mother apart from their biological connections turns fluid as black women care for there are not America where they must do things different" (P 198).

Coming to terms is an essential and indispensable aspect of black women's life course. This is reflected in Paule Marshall's pointing out cultural differences in attitudinal dispensations and expectations of men and women. Estelle becomes ready to accept the "arrangement" made out consequent on her learning of her husband's extramarital affair. This is made easy by Ursa, who Questions: "why didn't you, why don't you just leave him. Nobody says and takes shit anymore. That's passe" (P 255). Immediately Ursa wonders, "And why goddammit, did you have to make me like you so I can't say later for Mr.Carruthers, never mind there're one or two things I still like about him. Just bless him and release him and split" (ibid). In this context, the reader also notices Paule Marshall's sympathetic portrait of the "outside women," utilizing which she investigates the outside women's involvement with males. This is to be seen through which she explores the outdoor women's participation with males. This is to be seen in the stubbornness of Astral Forde, who maintains her thirty years plus extramarital affair with the PM. The reader understands that Astral's single-mindedness and manner disguise her apprehensions of homelessness, of "finding herself out on the road." It becomes clear that Astral compromises herself by being the "other woman" in Paule Marshall's life despite the latter not spending a night with her and not taking her anywhere outside. This makes

Estelle a little bit surprising also. Estelle knows that Astral, like herself, is wedded to Paule Marshall's hotel. While Astral's compromise accounts for her tolerance, Estelle has her picture, which emerges out of her confession to her daughter towards the end of the novel:

What happened to my ego, my pride?
 Why is it that all I've felt for Miss Forde
 For years now, is sympathy and a little
 curiosity?
 What is the women's life? How could put
 up with
 Someone who's never taken her? I doubt if
 your father's
 Ever sat down and had a male with her?
 How could she take that?
 These are all psychological pangs that
 women in Daughters undergo.

Paule Marshall disapproves of polygamy. However, she suggests that there should be a little understanding of shared partnerships between men and women. Ursa's concern for her community ends in vain, coupled with her defeat in familial harmony. She does not like the ways of her father, and symbolically she cuts off her ties to her father. Finally, there is a situation wherein she finds that she is no more bound to remote control and is at liberty to categorize and navigate the stars that will make up her self-defined galaxy. This is just hope and what has been experienced is irreparable. The super irrelativeness of neglect and deprivation of harmony of Ursa accounts for her predicament. At the same time, harmony is signified by the North star symbol that indicates her physical and spiritual freedom. In this regard, it is befitting to quote Dorothy Hamer Denniston's views:

The novel...suggests that as self-contained entities, women may also be

inwardly Directed, determining their separate spheres of existence. The naming of the Separate spheres of existence. The naming of the protagonist is especially relevant In this regard. Ursa refers to Ursa Major with its prominent feature, the North star. The latter, of course, is a traditional symbol of physical and spiritual freedom in African-American literature. Beatrice, a name That connotes blessedness, underscores the nature of the protagonist's transformation. Together the terms honor maternal for bears and simultaneously Claim a dual heritage. And jointly, the names announce the re-creation of a more significant Female identity. For Marshall, these recreation telescopes take to a communal, specifically Women-centred African source. Geographically and temporal positioning is Important to this re-creation, signaling both symbolic rootedness and soil for growth. Though the author's development of Ursa is instrumental in the political change hoped

For by the novel's end, Marshall perhaps projects a new focus for her fiction to come. In *Daughters*, she unquestionably augurs new notes for modern women-perhaps as stars inThe politically and culturally changing universe. In any event, Ursa's story celebrates a shared past even as it looks forward to a shared future.

References

- Marshall Paule. *Daughters*, New York, Atheneum, 1961; London W.H. Allen, 1962.
- Dennison Dorothy Hamer. *The fiction of Paule Marshall*. Detroit: Gale Research, 1990. Print
- Hull, Gloria, *To Be a Black Women in America: A fading of Paule Marshals Obsidian*, 1978. Print.
- Rewriting Afro-American Literature: A Case for (Black Women Writers.)* Radical Teacher, 1979. Print.

How to cite this article?

T.Ezhilarasi & Dr.J.Jayakumar“ Predicament and Disabling Factors in Paule Marshall's *Daughters*”, *Research Journal Of English(RJOE)* 7 (3), PP: 70-75,2022, DOI: <http://doi.org/10.36993/RJOE.2022.7.3.10>