

Psychological Dimensions Of Human Delineation In Octavia E. Butler's Mind Of My Mind

S. VINAYAGAMOORTHY¹ and Dr.K. THAYALAMURTHY²

¹Ph.D., Research Scholar, Department of English, Annamalai University, Chidambaram, Tamilnadu.

²Assistant professor, Department of English, Government Arts and Science college, Thiruvannamalai.

Abstract

This paper examines the psychological aspects of human behaviour, the social ties that humans have with one another and society, and the need for humanity to grow as a sentient being to coexist harmoniously with other living forms in the universe in Octavia E. Butler's *Mind of My Mind*. This novel centres on one of Doro's daughters, Mary, who is a young, courageous biracial woman. Mary is the result of thousands of years of labour and is Doro's near success. Her shift from a latent to an active telepath causes her to inadvertently establish a pattern, which ensnares six peculiar youths. They support her and come together as a family despite their initial animosity. They work together to gather in need individuals who are both latent telepaths and active telepaths. The figure hits one thousand and five hundred and two years later. Doro is forced to stop her endeavour because she perceives Mary's growing authority as a threat. However, Mary disobeys, which sparks a heated argument between them. In the end, she vanquishes and destroys him with the help of the telepaths and her unbreakable will.

Keywords: Psychology, Humanism, Mind, Society, Self-actualisation.

Introduction

Psychological Dimensions of Human Delineation in Octavia E. Butler's *Mind of My Mind*

Octavia E. Butler is one of the most prominent novelists of American literature. She is good at writing novels including science fiction, criminal fiction, and detective fiction. Butler

never fails to highlight man's duty to his fellow humans while demonstrating how he is driven to satisfy his psychological demands. She is a living example of why using force and violence to end oppression is never the answer. Butler is an African American woman who fully comprehends the sufferings caused by others. Therefore, she doesn't think using violence to take revenge or put a stop to injustice is a good idea. Her primary characters refrain from adopting a violent mindset or using violence. She brings out the compassionate side of her characters, who persevere through hardships without losing their humanity. Butler not only embodies the humanitarian spirit and need-based humanism towards fellow humans, but also demonstrates how the drive for self-actualization pushes people to behave pro-actively, which propels humanity to realise its full potential. Several of her characters aspire self-actualization and attest to its crucial role in a man's development as a human being with a humanistic outlook.

In her novels, Butler sheds light on the important role that a person's psychological needs, holistic development, and desire for self-actualization play a part that man has to play in fostering harmony in society. The second novel in the Patternist series is titled *Mind of My Mind*. It narrates the history of the formation of the Patternist society. In Forsyth, California, in the 1970s, the story opens. Those with telepathically enhanced sensibilities are the ones that Doro breeds and reproduces with.

Butler illustrates in *Mind of My Mind* the difficulties people face in the absence of acceptance, trust, and a sense of community, because her mother is a complete wastrel.

Mary, the main character, is robbed of the love and attention of a mother. As the near success of his several millennia of research in his breeding programme to develop beings with greater power. Her father, Doro, who visits her only seldom, values her highly. Butler claims that his primary goal upon knocking the door is to find out if his daughter is okay. Respect is innate in the human condition, just as important as the need for love is the need for respect. When Mary, Doro's treasure trove, finds out that, in Doro's eyes, she is just another breeder, much like her mother and Emma, she gets devastated. In addition, she is compelled to wed Karl, a white telepath, who not only refuses to wed her but also plans to live with his fiancée in the same home once they get married. Mary becomes distraught at this realisation and

lashes out, saying, "So I was going to marry a man who intended to keep his girlfriend right there in the same house with me, in addition to being a total stranger, a white man, and a telepath who wouldn't even let me think in private" (31).

Mary and Karl, like Doro and Anyanwu, think highly of themselves. They become hostile to one another. As a result. Mary makes it clear that she is unhappy about her arrival and Karl, who is white but not racist, expresses his displeasure bluntly; "Well, I'm no happier to be here than you are to have me, but we are either going to get used to each other or we're going to have to keep out of each other's way a lot." which, even in a home this size, won't be simple" (37). Since Karl does not care for her in the slightest way and even the servants are taught to keep their mouths shut, she feels alone in his home. When Karl isn't around, the place she feels at ease are her closed-door room and the library. The opulence of the former becomes meaningless, and the ugliness of the latter becomes soothing, as she experiences loneliness in Karl's house and warmth in Emma's.

Mary's craving for independence is strengthened by the frustration that comes with being alone. Mary, in distraught, blurts out, "I rode the bus here, though. Going that way again doesn't bother me. Anyhow, I've never been one to rely on other people and their vehicles. I travelled whenever and wherever I pleased when I took the bus" (40). She also dreams of the day when she will no longer be one of the owned, but one of the owners. She calls Karl back after they spend some time together in her room before he leaves. Karl hurries to help her in the early stages of her transition. She is also relieved to know that she does not go through the toughest time in her life by herself, as much as Karl when he had Emma by his side during his transition. Vivian, Karl's girlfriend, understands Mary's loneliness more than Karl. During the shift, while Mary is in mental agony, her kind heart keeps her by her side. She plans to depart later after realising how outsider she has become.

During the final phase of Mary's transition, a pattern is created that entangles other actives such as Jan Sholto, Jesse Bernarr, Ada Dragen, Rachel, and Seth Dana. Doro's boys are Seth Dana and a latent Clay. Seth purchases a piece of land in the desert with the hope that his brother can lead a tranquil existence there, as he is more susceptible to the psychological suffering of others if he lives in a place full of people. Despite being a year older, Seth protects him from harm for almost a

decade. Clay has a painless death, as Doro proposes, but Seth is determined to give him a lovely afterlife. With this goal in mind, he exhorts him to locate a woman to spend the rest of his life with someone who will never desert him, no matter he intends to take Clay with him when he is drawn telepathically by an unidentified source since he cannot risk losing his life by letting Clay independent.

Ada Dragan suffers without moral support, in contrast to Clay. The spouse physically abuses her without any fault on her part. She merely moves in with him so that she would have someone to confide in. She works very hard to find her types and longs to be free of her long-term, agonising loneliness.

Butler's novels are all about acceptance. Mary and Karl forget their animosity towards each other following her change, just as Doro and Anyanwu accept and understand each other before the new telepaths join them. They can communicate better since he has stopped acting as though she does not exist and feel now comparatively easy to talk with. Mary, too, lets go of her grudge against him. She depends on him. However, it is fleeting. Knowing that Mary's pattern controls him makes Karl furious. He vents his frustrations on Vivian, treating her like a pet whose backlash shocks him. When Butler states, "A pet," (97) she highlights the reality that people feel sorry for those who are beneath them and assume they will stay in their miserable situation. Pet owners intend to accept their pets' free will if they think it is funny. Afterwards, he becomes resentful upon realising that his condition is no better than Vivian's. Although Vivian is invisible, she is the embodiment of unwavering love. She manipulates Karl into programming her to embrace every aspect of him. Later, she still does not leave him, even when he begs her to.

The gang of telepaths that joins them with an equal level of animosity claims that Mary has drawn them to her location by some sort of mental process. They hold resentment and animosity towards Mary because they believe she oversees their life. Mary is fortified by their deep hatred and responds to them with grace and calm:

I was settling in, though. I was learning not to be afraid of any of them. Not even Karl. They were all older than I was and they were all physically bigger. For a while, I had to keep telling myself I couldn't afford to let that

matter. If I went on letting them scare me, I'd never be able to scare them. (113)

As they get settled in, the actives worry that they grow accustomed to Mary's leadership and succumb to her as they begin to realise the advantages of following her lead. They are terrified that they feel being giving to them in the same way that regular people did.

In their combat against Mary, the actives also battle with themselves. The embarrassment they have for being unable to conceal their fear from her balances their pride, which drives them to challenge her authority. Mary discovers that she depletes the telepaths' energy due to the mental leash that links them. When she breaks the metal leash and depletes Jesse and Rachel's energy, she realises it. She is pleasantly surprised by this effective interception. She desires to relish this sensation. Butler captures the emotion of a person who has only ever known misery, suffering, anger, and humiliation via Mary as she experiences victory for the first time. She is successful in highlighting the deep sense of guilt that carries haughty people down until their demise.

Rachel experiences what she caused other people to endure. She disregards Eli's trauma, but now that she is lost, she mopes bitterly. Mary continues, "I went to her and took her arm, to further illustrate the anguish of losing. She wanted to be apart from us, and I knew it. Tears were personal things, especially the tears of failure. She attempted to yank her arm away as she looked up and saw it was me" (130). Mary's feeling of accountability spares the lives of the actives. It is clear from the way she accepts and manages problems that she views herself as a capable individual who can handle conflict. In keeping with her conviction that flaws people cannot create a flawless society, Butler also does not present benevolent individuals. Mary, for example, exhibits authenticity in her appearance. She does not act phonily charitable. She is courageous in revealing her objectives. She acknowledges that using energy, even in small doses and unintentionally, makes her happy.

Butler remarks on the predicament in which the patternists find themselves unable to raise the children who are the future pillars of the race they are making now, saying that Mary, following Doro, establishes a new race that could not tolerate its own offspring. To raise them, mutes are a need. Even though their egos and haughtiness control them at first,

the actives understand her and work with her. The telepaths also understand that Mary is their owner, and they follow her instructions and help her in all the endeavours. They refer to themselves as Mary's "First Family" (168). The first family members, including Mary view things positively and resist giving off their negative feelings. For example, when Mary speaks disrespectfully to Jan, she chooses to hone her artistic abilities instead of acting on her first want to murder her.

Even though he is born a human, Doro, the emotionless monster in *Mind of My Mind*, appears more human in *Wild Seed* due to his masked dread, mistrust, and jealousy of Mary's accomplishments. He is consumed by a fear of losing control over Mary and her telepath community. Mary is first afraid, but the actives' moral support gives her the confidence to confront Doro, who takes care of others without difficulty. Mary feels more confident because the telepaths accept and trust her, even though she knows he can take her at any point during the fight. Sensing that their lives are in danger, she suggests that they leave. However, they do not leave her in a position of helplessness that almost kills her. They support Mary not only with their energy but also by giving her the opportunity to overcome the fully consumed Doro. Thus, the *Mind of My Mind* maintains the characteristics that are essential to humanity's continued existence on Earth.

Butler explores how commonplace the thought of killing others has become without morality by providing ample opportunity for Doro, Mary, and Karl to debate strategies to prevent killing the actives. This sounds like the meaning behind what she says in an interview with Frances M. Beal:

My attitude when I wrote the book was that TV and movies advertise killing as a very easy thing –how simple to blow somebody away. If it is that easy it shouldn't be, and I didn't want my character to be someone who felt the need to murder somebody. ("Octavia Butler with Frances M. Beal," 78)

The discrimination provokes the stoic Mary, who is compelled to demonstrate her value by imparting the lesson. Mary struggles whether to act brave and kind or to confront the aggressive people who curse her. She finds it difficult to work out how to make them comply.

Her poise is maintained by her perceptive and analytical mind.

She concedes that she does not enjoy binding the actives with her, even if Doro puts a lot of credit in her direction. She knows that the best way to gain their trust is to be honest with them and open her mind. She thus gives them permission even if it could put her privacy at risk. When Mary daringly decides to open her mind, Butler does a good job of explaining how she feels; "Like I'd suddenly found myself stark naked in front of a lot of strangers, all of whom were taking a good look" (121).

There are two types of self-actualization; good and negative. When it is beneficial, all humanity stands to gain. When it is unfavourable, the one exhibiting such a tendency could pose a risk to the same. Butler, who disapproves of idealising things, gives her characters both good and bad inclinations. Doro self-centres motivations and constantly looks to further his own agenda. She projects how dangerous it is to become by giving it a bad tendency, and she projects how important it is in improving society by giving it a positive tendency, as shown in the case of Anyanwu and Doro.

When Mary and Doro are considered as the creators of psychologically superior humans, their empathy and indifference are also revealed. Mary gathers latents for their betterment and quiet existence who, if left uncared for, would go insane and kill themselves or others in their crazy. However, Doro has self-centred intentions. Mary's actives travel the globe in search of the latents. Doro follows suit, but she demands that Mary stops engaging in any of these activities and calls each one of her actives back. She makes him more understanding, but he ignores her and shows her how monstrous he is by saying that he can't afford her if she doesn't comply. Although it is not unusual for him to kill his daughter, Mary is not her typical daughter. He loves her very much. She is the outcome of his millennia of dreams and labours. This highlights the disparity in their mindset and, consequently, their mental health, which is beneficial or detrimental.

The battle to maintain actualisation is evident in my mind as well. Nearly every character in this novel possesses dignity and self-actualisation. The narrative takes shape because all these characters are coming together and the consequences of it. Butler demonstrates how rational behaviour exhibited by those who have self-esteem and self-respect by marrying the main characters, Karl and Mary, in spite of their initial animosity towards one another and then allowing them to work things out to live as supportive partners.

According to Butler all human violence is incited by prejudice. The protagonists in *Mind of My Mind* frequently becomes violent because they believe that Mary used her pattern to intentionally entice them to her. They ask for no explanation. Led by their bias and blinded by their fury, they abuse her physically, verbally, and emotionally.

Man has had a moral conscience for thousands of years, and it is deeply rooted in the psyche. His ingrained moral principles set him apart from animals, which are motivated by impulses. He feels superior to the animals because of his moral sense and the ability to argue from it. He struggles mightily to control his overwhelming drive to resist if a condition or hormonal shift causes to increase his physiological needs.

Butler disapproves pretence. She supports being honest and opposes hiding one's identity. Her main characters are almost entirely fearless. To simplify things, they prudently decide to rely on the truth. They are not portrayed as the moral police. However, she does mould them into brave individuals who speak honestly even in the face of bad circumstances. Their genuine feelings are conveyed through both their spoken words and silence. They do not stage drama; they prefer to hit the nail on the head.

Man's psychological needs control his existence and require satisfaction. These fundamental and unavoidable wants include those for acceptance, company, love, closeness, hope, and trust. Since they are the things that give to purpose life, man spends most of his existence striving to get these needs. Butler, an African American woman living in America, sees life's harsh truths firsthand and overcome obstacles along the route of her arduous path. She has taken advantage of this to highlight the importance of man's basic wants and examines them in her novel, *Mind of My Mind*.

References

- Bates, Karen Grigsby. "Octavia Butler: Writing Herself into The Story." *Code Switch*, July 2017, <https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2017/07/10/535879364/octavia-butler-writing-herself-into-the-story>.
- Beal, Frances M. "Octavia Butler with Frances M. Beal." *Contemporary Literary Criticism: Criticism of the Works of Today's Novelists, Poets, Playwrights, Short Story Writers, and Other Creative Writers*. Gale Group. 2000, pp.77-80.

- Braxton, Joanne and Andree Mclaughlin. Wild Women in the Whirlwind: Afra-American Culture and Contemporary Literary Renaissance. Rutgers P, 1990.
- Butler, Octavia E. Mind of My Mind. New York :Warner Books, 1977.
- Card, Orson Scott. "A Review of Mind of My Mind, Patternmaster, and Survivor." Contemporary Literary Criticism: Criticism of the Works of Today's Novelists, Poets, Playwrights, Short Story Writers, and Other Creative Writers. Gale Group. 2000, pp.108-09.
- Muchenje, Tinotenda, and Shinn. "Analysis of The Writing Style of Octavia Butler." Bartleby Research, September 2017. <https://www.bartleby.com/essay/AnalysisOf-The-Writing-Style-Of-Octavia-FKAGC2TYSEFF>