

## REFLECTION OF SOCIAL REALISM IN NADINE GORDIMER'S JULY'S PEOPLE AND MY SON'S STORY

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Nadine Gordimer was one of the prominent writers of world literature. She was a South African writer, political activist and recipient of Nobel Prize for Literature in 1991. In 1974, she was the joint winner of Booker Prize with Stanley Middleton. Her writings dealt with political censorship and racism in South Africa. As a young girl she has seen the racial discrimination and atrocities faced by the black people and white people. She also saw black people fighting for the basic rights of all human beings irrespective of race. She began her writing career at the age of nine. She took some of the writers from Russia for her readings such as Tolstoy, Turgenev and Dostoevsky and she considered them as masters. She started writing short stories before novels. At the age of fifteen she published a story for children titled *The Quest for Seen Gold* (1937) in children's Sunday Express. Her first adult fiction was published in *Forum*, a Johannesburg magazine and it was entitled *Come Again Tomorrow*.

Power is not a means; it is an end. One does not establish a dictatorship in order to safeguard a revolution; one makes the revolution; One makes the revolution in order to establish the dictatorship. The object of perception is persecution is persecution. The object of torture is torture. The object of power is power.

-George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty Four*

According to Mineke Schipper "Realism does not just mean true to the hard fact. It is not possible to determine it quantitatively in the sense -of the - more facts in a text, the more realistic the text will be. What is true is not always probable in the sense of credible -and therefore realistic- in the eyes of the reader, who uses his own experience of reality as a touchstone". (1) As the same that is evident in Nadine Gordimer novels. Realism compacts with the habitual events of the world. The events that occur in the society are well packed in Gordimer's novels. Predominantly in *My Son's Story* and *July's People*, Gordimer presented the extant situations and problems like apartheid; both race and class; and violence. The humans experience becomes reality. It may be either positive or negative. Overall realism portrays the problems resisted by people and life in a certain period. Realism

invites people to move towards attaining something positive in life.

Gordimer has treated her novels with general themes, such as apartheid both division of class and race, Sufferings of women in the society and social and political life of Africa. Particularly in these two novels *My Son's Story* and *July's People* she reflected the society in her way. She has committed herself for the people, for the need of freedom in their society. These novels mainly concerned with two important things in the society.

Gordimer, as she herself registers, "is not a politically minded person." Howbeit she was able to assimilate the notion of politics through the lives of individual behavior. She conceded man as political animal and the political conditions of her land had always affected her. The political reality of her results manifestly from her preoccupations with social reality. She relinquished the connections between the private lives and public lives. In South Africa context, political reality cannot be separated. Gordimer herself stated about her view on politics and as a writer as "I am a writer. But, because the society in which I live is so permeated with politics, my work has become intimately connected with the translation of political events, of the way politics affect the lives of the people". (114).

Realism validates the perspective that veracity can be determined by perceptions; material world is real and perceptions bring a real investigation of it. Realism also has the perspective that expression of creative skill and imagination of human must arrive to be real to the readers and delineate life. Realism is attained by the formations and works with different rudiments of life. Realism brings something more about the world and its perspectives. M.H Abrams states Realism is applied by literary critics in two diverse ways: "to identify a movement in the writing of novels during the nineteenth century that included ...to designate a recurrent mode, in various eras and literary forms, of representing human life and experience in literature." (Abrams 333) The realist chooses the general features of the contemporary world.

The realist proposes the fiction of habitual events of human beings and the world. Characters are soul of the novel with that the realist exhibits the characters as

working class and middle class. Realism reflects the reality and it fabricates the mentality of the human beings. It inspires them to implement to make the society in a new angle. Social realism reflects whole society and the people. In a critical book, *Soviet Socialist Realism: Origins and Theory* C. Vaughan James defines on Social realism as and it connects both the literature and politics:

It embraces a number of questions: the evolution of art – the organic relationship between the art of the past and the art of the present and future; the class nature of art, -its objective reflection of social relations; and the functions of art in society - the obligations of the artist in society in which he works; and hence the relationship between the artist and the politician. Moreover, it considers the didactic potential of art...(James, 9)

Gordimer directs that the entire society should be with freedom. According to Gordimer, She needs a change in the apartheid society, so she scrutinizes the society with techniques in her writing. In *July's People*, Gordimer showcased the middle-class whites who are living the society of blacks and it brings a connection between whites and blacks as well as the individual and the society. Gordimer applied the reality in a graphical manner and a critic remarked in the Observer on *July's People* (quoted on the back flap of the text), "Nadine Gordimer is the real thing: by which I mean a true writer of graphic power, palpating sensibility, and high and persistent emotional voltage".

The epigraph of the novel shows the reality and it was well absorbed by Gordimer and she has reflect it with the lines of Antonio Gramsci words as "The old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum there arises a great diversity of morbid symptoms." The current situation of her land she expressed in this novel. *July's People* unfurls with the Smales family in a shack provide to them by their servant July. July offers more for them and that supported their privilege. The novel revolved around the family relationship in the in the unstable situation between Bam and Maureen who think "they yearned to there to be no time left all, while there still was. They sickened at appalling thought that they might find they had lived out their whole lives as they were, born white pariah dogs in a black continent. In *July's People*, Maureen, the protagonist, depicts the negative image of the white liberals who appear dogmatic, not even willing to face reality.

Bam and Maureen owned many things and July can afford them a hire live. While coming to Maureen respond is totally slower to their environment than their children. But their Children Gina, Royce, and Victor are adapted

easily to the environment. In other words, it is not Maureen who is qualified for taking leading role in the new South Africa but it is her children, who have absorbed the African ideologies, traditions, values, language and emerge both consciously and unconsciously delving in the African society to be accepted by them that could do the job. These children succeeded in passing into the African black society because they have already constructed an identity that values sharing and redistributing wealth, skills, and emotions.

This shows the conflict that the whites cannot adapt easily to the environment and that is the reality which portrayed by Gordimer. From the beginning to the end the novel brings the relation between conflict between whites and blacks. Especially the two characters in this novel July and Maureen there is a battle and this battle divulges the racist clash between dishonest black servant and alien employer. Gordimer reflects the realism in an effective way and this chapter scrutinizes her approach to realism and brings out her view on the growth of the individual in the way of self conscious to change. *My Son's Story* novel brings the characters in a different view that each character has their own role in the society. The characters move in the way of personal assuming social responsibility to bring a powerful society with equality, morality and justice. The apartheid diminishes the self respect of black people in the society even they are in good in their wealth. And this system of apartheid made them to think on freedom and it takes the blacks to establish the societal values such as justice, equality and brotherhood in the society. Gordimer places this apartheid in the novel *My Son's Story* and with help of the characters such as Sonny, Aila and Baby but Will, the protagonist of the novel plays a vital role in the novel as a writer. *My Son's Story* is one of the most influential novels by Gordimer, in which she explored the political situation in South Africa.

Gordimer used a new kind of style in this novel. She focused mainly on the relationship between whites and blacks, with the personal life and political struggle. She brought the characters with importance which reflects the society and their culture. The complete portrayal of South African society can be identified in this novel. She was the perfect observer of the history which is evident in this novel. Society which was in the apartheid and the people who live in this system has no power to break this people adapted with fear of punishment by the ruling authority. They became powerless to get their essential needs in the apartheid society. *My Son's Story* plot *My Son's Story* reflects the issue of apartheid system perfectly

andsketches that the individual to question the apartheid in the Society and with the character Sonny, who helps the people in the society. The plot of the novel with an individual who involved well in the society for the people and it brings the involvement of whole family in the freedom struggle. Especially the characters in the novel struggle from the societal structures, traditions, apartheid system and which destroyed the entire family. While the novel opens the portrayal two divided society can be easily observed:

Cinemas had been open to us only a year or so; it was a double freedom I took: to bunk study and to sit in the maroon nylon velvet seat of a cinema in a suburb where the whites live. My father was not well off but my parents wanted my sister and me have a youth less stunted by the limits of an empty pocket they had, and my pocket money was more generous than their precarious position, at the time, warranted. (*My Son's Story*, 1)

The conflicts can be easily traced in the novel, *My Son's Story* which reveals the society in the form of apartheid. There is no consideration for the blacks in this society. Whites utilized this opportunity in a bad way and they used blacks in a severe way and they gave hard works to them. Which is well reflected in the novel as "Where is great-grandfather or grandfather had come from nobody had recorded- the rough hands of those generations did not write letter". These above lines may show the past life of the people especially from the black community and it was well expressed and at the same time you can find the reality of the people in the apartheid as "there was no car; his Sonny-boy bounced instead on the exposed springs of chairs and sofas, and had lint in his curls. The boy was the first in the family to leave earth, cement wood and kapok behind and take up the pen and book." (5) In this system of apartheid, the Blacks did not have any power and they could not access anything for themselves. Even they did not have the rights to enter into a library in the apartheid environment.

Gordimer hurts this system and she took it as a social sin which is followed by whites during the apartheid system and she brought out the loathsome experience of the blacks which she also experienced by facing the system in her life in her own land. And it was expressed in the novel how the people were treated in the system of apartheid "It was because of *them* whose pigment darkened the blood, procreated a murky dilution in the veins of the of the white town" and the people of black community suffered a lot and they were "disqualified for the birthright of the cinema,

the library, the lavatories and the coat of arms." Sonny was father of the protagonist, Will.

Sonny was a "schoolteacher in one of the towns that had grown up long ago along the reef of gold- bearing rock east of the city-Johannesburg." As from the separated community in the society he done many service for the people and the society and as an individual he fought for the rights in non- violence manner. The society did not accept his way, because the domination of whites and he took care of black people in safe way. Even he was in prison he done his service to the people of his community not only for his community and for the society. Sonny as an individual who fought for his people and took care of them as "always of the blacks in another way; well' this was nascent in that vague yet insistent sense of responsibility he had." The people of black community did not have powers like the whites in the society. Sonny's father was well identified by their community. They did not have powers like their authority and did not have powers as their authorities who were in the managerial jobs, attorneys and other high officials.

Sonny knew them better "there were local law-makers, proconsuls, gauleiters in the town's council chamber under the photographs of the past mayors and the motto CARPE DIEM." Sonny reveals that "he did things for other people the way did things for us\_ his family. That was it; to give came to him naturally, as it came to them to take. The blacks did not go for things such as dynamism and other higher ranks and their only need is self respect. Even Sonny was a teacher but: People saw him as one of themselves- powerless- who nevertheless had the special kind of self -respect (yes, that gain) that makes it possible influence others-take on responsibility for their lives in way different from that of those, the masters, in the administrative offices, courtrooms and police stations. (*My Son's Story*, 18)

The suppressed people expect something from the suppressed community. So, Gordimer revives the missing feature of self- respect of the black community was thing in them. Questioning the whites may be reaching a change in the society and life. Gordimer observes the whites consciousness as one of the greatest problem which separates the blacks from whites. Gordimer observes white people and their behavior in the society. Social realism insists a revolutionary change in their hearts and minds of the black people. Particularly in these two novels by *My Son's Story* and *July's People* she explained the society in her way. She has committed herself for the people and need of freedom in their society. These novels

mainly concerned with reality of the society with artistic and political situation. In an interview she gives "Social realist is my general outlook, though I am aware of the greatest failures of socialist experiments. I think that to be alive is an expression of belief in something.... I don't believe in perfection, I believe in limited goals" Social realism reveals Gordimer's works especially novels affect the society to reach more insight of reality on the social conditions of the blacks. Through reaching this insight of reality the division of class and race made them to think on themselves. Social realism reflects the problems of the society. The division of class and race is a perfect example of the problems in the society all over the world. Social realism may achieve responsibility in everyone for a new world with humanity.

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