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# Nadine Gordimer's Novels as Criticism of Life

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**Abstract:** ***Nadine Gordimer got Nobel Prize for literature though some of her novels were bitterly criticized by the supporters of White Community and their cruelty towards Blacks of South Africa. Being the staunch supporter of Karl Marx, William Wordsworth, Sigmund Freud, Alfred Adler, James Joyce, W. H. Auden, Virginia Woolf etc., she supported the efforts of environmentalists of her age. She fought boldly for the fundamental rights of Blacks as mankind had moved many steps ahead in the fields of industrialization and Information Revolution. Like Sigmund Freud, she attached due importance to the dreams and inner psychology of her characters. She is to be greatly admired for her sympathy for the poor and wretched blacks who were badly exploited and harassed even in 20th century in South African cities and villages. There is no denying the fact that she was the herald of new age of communal love, liberty, equality, democratic socialism, economic regeneration and social reconstruction.***

**Keywords:** Herald, Democratic Socialism, Probable, Humanitarian Outlook, Apartheid, Regeneration, Intellectual degeneration etc.

## 1. Introduction

Major novels of Nadine Gordimer confirm that she followed the popular theory of novel. She accepted the fact that novel is a portrait of life and hence didn't write romances on fairies, witches and demons to create sense of wonder. She concentrated on real people of earth that she had observed in her routine life. She survived at the most critical time of African history because Blacks were victims of whimsical Whites. The Black women failed to get education and ate dirty food. They lived in slums without getting clean water to drink. Since the white authorities were careless towards them, they died without getting proper medical treatment. In the novel *The Lying Days* Helen observed all these miseries of black people and felt pity for them.

Being the follower of the theory of Henry Fielding and Charles Dickens, she painted probable people as she met them daily. Needless to say, that she didn't paint Kings, Dukes, Princes, Princesses, Queens and great military generals in her novels. Of course, she was bold supporter of humanitarian ideals of Nelson Mandela and she supported the fundamental rights of blacks too. But then it must be properly understood that she had no desire to torture the Whites. Just she wanted that more opportunities and jobs should be created for Blacks too. In other words, she knew the causes of growing unemployment in South Africa. Secondly, there was no security of job for Black labourers. As a result, the Blacks like July were badly underpaid and exploited.

In the novel *The Pickup* she described the miseries of unemployed immigrants like Abdu. Due to joblessness in many Muslim countries, young men secretly migrated to U. S. A., U. K., Australia, South Africa etc. for jobs. A lot of legal complications were born as these illegal migrants had no visa and hence no rights to work. Often, they were arrested and punished for 'illegal living'. Here Nadine Gordimer shows her mercy and compassion for unlucky and unlicenced workers like Abdu. There is no denying the fact that immigrants like Abdu lived in large quantity in advanced countries and their work permit limit was commonly increased.

As a student she studied Marx's *Das Capital* and *The Communist Manifesto* and accepted that the black labourers and farmers had so far been exploited by the white farmers. She also studied Marxian theories of dialectical materialism, four stages of human history, ways and means to remove capitalism, need for a bloody revolution as a last resort, the withering away of capitalism and the dictatorship of the Proletariat. But basically, she fought boldly for equality, liberty and fraternity-the democratic rights so essential for the solution of economic problems in South African towns.

She had the strong belief that Whites won't give up the political and economic powers that they had possessed for many years. Revolutionaries were needed to raise their voice against exploitation and miserable conditions of blacks as a whole. The economic changes were to be brought in rural as well as urban areas and she regarded education as the best tool for that.

Unfortunately, the poor blacks failed to understand the complicated and complex relations between education and upliftment, between consumption and production, between a degraded life and a life of self-dignity. Unfortunately, the poor blacks didn't feel inspired for a grand pattern of life as they were not broad-minded. They were just interested in getting food twice a day and if they had some surplus money, they bought alcohol with that and enjoyed drinks of third-rate quality. This social scenario suited the white authorities and they never bothered to upgrade the blacks with right kind of education. Blacks were happy just as labourers and never planned for intellectual gains. In such atmosphere Nadine Gordimer fought bravely against poverty, illiteracy, orthodoxy, superstitions, rigidity, intellectual degeneration etc.

So, she was a great writer as she asked the blacks to light the lamp of knowledge to come out of intellectual darkness. Towards the end of *The Lying Days,* she follows the pattern


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of Charles Dickens and laments for the black ladies that live in the slums without any clean water and proper medical aid.

Being a prudent and practical artist, she realized that it was too big to hope for the total elimination of capitalism in South Africa. She knew with her experience that there would never be a classless society in the country. She never dreamt of the dictatorship of Proletariat there. Yet she hoped for betterment of the labourers, farmers, rural people, uneducated and orthodox masses with the help of new municipal corporations, establishment of schools and colleges, constitution of new factories, improvement in road and rail transport system, new seeds and fertilizers for the farmers etc. So, as an artist she never lived in any utopian world.

In her early youth she studied the causes and horrible results of two world wars and felt sympathy for the soldiers who had died due to the political whims of leaders of U. K., U. S. A., France, Russia, Italy, Germany, Austria etc. Many crore rupees were wasted and more than one crore soldiers died in First World War. In 1919 the major politicians of the world met in Versallies (France) to solve the political disputes by peaceful means. The U. S. President Woodrow Wilson proposed the idea for the formation of League of Nations. Unfortunately, U. S. A. didn't join League of Nations but then this world organization came into existence. Due to lack of strong political authority and deficiency of money this organization failed.

Since Germany had not been offered membership of League of Nations and her mines were robbed by powerful nations, the Germans started organizing their forces to take revenge of the defeat of First World War. Economic resources of U. S. A., U. S., Russia, France etc. were tight after the war but then Italy was worst hit. So the Italians leader Mussolini joined hands with Nazi Party leader Hitler in the Second World War (1939-1945).

The Second World War ended with the explosion of atom bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki (1945) and all these events have been painted by Nadine Gordimer with hatred against Nazism, Fascism, Colonialism, Post-colonialism and of course capitalism allied with Imperialism. She raised her voice against such hateful political forces in almost all her novels. She passed bitter remarks at the nations who earned a lot of money with the production of inhuman weapons.

Alfred Nobel regarded her novels 'a great benefit to humanity' as a whole as she concentrated upon human nature on the pattern of William Shakespeare, Henry Fielding and Charles Dickens. Like John Milton, she was conscious of the choice of words and never used them carelessly. The title of each of her novel is suggestive and makes us think about contemporary people. Of course, she was bold enough to raise her voice against apartheid. There is no denying the fact that she felt shocked when the policy of censorship was imposed in South Africa. Being a true democrat, she supported seven fundamental rights of people i. e. let all people all sections of society get liberty to read and write what they like. Let there be no distinction between man and man and then between man and women. As Vice President International Pen Society, she asserted that society can't afford to enjoy good literature if liberty of expression was not granted to writers. Due to her satirical bent of mind some of her books were banned in South Africa and other countries.

Yet she had the courage to continue expressing her views on contemporary problems such as price rise, hoarding, boot-legging, prostitution, class distinctions, unemployment, corrupt physicians and above all racial discrimination. Of course, her pen was mightier than the sword of her opponents. This fact was well admired by Nelson Mandela when he was released from the prison after a long period. For her he was the symbol of equality, liberty and fraternity in the real sense.

As a follower of Henry Fielding's theory of realism and probability, Gordimer dealt with themes of love, passion, obsession, political differences, poverty, quest for self and identity, alienation, displaced people, victims of cancer and HIV-AIDS, unemployment, racial differences etc. In *Get A Life* she highlighted the problems of pollution, dirty water and global warming as she wanted to protect environment at every cost. She felt no hesitation in presenting the socio-economic problems of South Africa at the world level.

In *The Lying Days* she expressed her interest in the literary works of T. S. Eliot, W. H. Auden, Rubert Brook, Robert Bridges, Pablo Naruda, Virginia Woolf, E. M. Forster, James Joyce etc. Like James Joyce, she analyzed the subconscious and unconscious psychology of her people. In *The Lying Days* she described - What did Helen feel enjoying love with Ludi, Joel and Paul? What did she feel towards the end of the novel when she was left all alone? In the novel *The Pick Up* the loneliness, inner grief, desperateness and grief of Julia are depicted in real colours. At times Julia found herself all alone in Arabian sand. She found some consolation in the company of a goat and an unknown small girl. She had nobody to share her inner feelings as others didn't know much of English language and the culture in which she had been brought up. At last, she decided to be left alone to herself in this lonely country and asked Abdu to depart to California for job.

Her novel *Get A Life* was bitterly criticized by the supporters of industrialization and increased production. Here she raised many questions regarding industrial production and environmental pollution. She asserted that life is worth living if a man/woman has a positive approach to life. She asserted the value of hope, patience, restraint, faithfulness, integrity and righteousness. Of course she condemned greed, hypocrisy, affectation and cunningness. Parents of Paul remain faithful to their worthy son in spite of radiation that his body produces.

As a humanist Nadine Gordimer asserted the value of sincerity, dedication to official work, proper medical treatment, patience during period of quarantine and reconciliation as Paul's wife Bennie never thought of divorce when he was seriously ill.

As an ecologist Nadine Gordimer can be put in the category of William Wordsworth, P. B. Shelley, John Keats. S. T. Coleridge, H. D. Thoreau, R. W. Emerson, Emily Dickenson


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etc. as she wanted to protect people from industrial smoke and the dirty waste water that had been diverted towards rivers. When Paul rejoined his office duty, he felt shocked to see that his office friend Thapel and Darek were very enthusiastic about their plans for urban development and suggested the government to establish factories, picnic spots, resorts, developed transport system, sea-beach etc.

During the period of quarantine, he had developed gloomy thoughts and he thought of the future of his family - What will happen to his widow in case he dies of cancer? How will his son Nicke survive without his support? Who will take care of his parents in old age? His only solace is his worthy mother who takes care of him during this risky period of quarantine. She loves Nicke from the depth of her heart.

Thus, Nadine Gordimer's novels are a healthy criticism of life with emphasis upon content as well as language. She is popular for her novels even today and no dust has gathered upon her novels such as *The Lying Days, July's People, The Pick Up, No Time Like Present.* She deserves a rank with Nelson Mandela and Abraham Lincoln. Like Matthew Arnold, she pointed out the conflict between culture and anarchy, between rational and irrational, between kindness and brutality, between cruelty and politeness, between democratic socialism and autocracy.

Dr. Ninganna T. aptly remarks:
Gordimer does not see race as a moral category. She sees it just as the way state has used it. So, her novels expose how race as a political category affects the lives of the people. The private lives of the people were penetrated by the apartheid regime. The individual was the site on which the state held its play of power and knowledge, (70)

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