



### RACISM IN NADINE GORDIMER'S *MY SON'S STORY*

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### ABSTRACT

*Racism is the belief in the superiority of one race over another, which often results in discrimination and prejudice towards people based on their race. The term 'racism' usually denotes race-based prejudice, violence, dislike, discrimination or oppression. As an ideology, racism existed during the 19th century, which attempted to provide a racial classification of humanity.*

**Keywords:** Color, Identity, racism, culture, liberation, Multicultural, Power, Apartheid, Black-White.

### INTRODUCTION

South Africa's twentieth century witnessed a rise of the Apartheid regime movement. It was based on the separation and made apart the races of the South African society. It caused a lot of, if not a complete, destruction and suddenness on the lives of masses of people of all the races. However, these issues of racism and other sub-issues such as black identity, which might seem less important in the eyes of some writers and historians, were the mere interest of many writers and thinkers. Among them, we found Nadine Gordimer. Nadine Gordimer is a famous satirist and social reformer. She wants behind most of her novels social change and reform, and the for social ills, which are known as racism. Novelist, play writer, short story writer, polemicist and activist Nadine Gordimer emerged as the most resourceful, versatile writer in South Africa. She is the notable exponent who writes on the philosophical ideas on interracial experiences. Nadine Gordimer was born on 20 Nov. 1923 for a family of white minorities. Her father was of Jewish decent and her mother was of English decent. This

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would influence and inspire her after that when dealing with the Apartheid system and the relation between racial groups in South Africa. She was eminent author of South Africa as well as political activist. She is honored by the Nobel Prize in 1991. Gordimer is the first South African, the third African and the first woman in twenty five years who wins Nobel Prize. Throughout her career she utilizes her language and experiences and successfully outlet her thoughts through her pen. She has become a focal spokes person and symbol for a white minority. She has earned critical and popular acclaim as a major South African writer. Fourteen novels, more than two hundred shortstories, number of essays on political and literary issues made her the acute sentimental writer of her times. Her varieties of writing explored social as well as political consciousness and reflect her dream about future of South Africa. Her attitude towards life made her more sharp and lively, which shows her increasing concern with social issues like racism, rootlessness and identity crisis. Her writing reflects the multicultural heritage of South Africa.

The gifted writer Nadine Gordimer sensitively expressed impact of contemporary South African apartheid when Black Africans and other oppressed protest against the cruel, uneven, unjust social system of the country. The writer expresses the social, political, economical and racial context of referred country in the aesthetic sense. The tenth novel of Nadine Gordimer is 'My Son's Story' published in October 1990. It shows her consciousness about history as well as present social situation in the country which evokes the political-social vision of Nadine Gordimer. In those days the citizens are classified as per their colour and are allowed to live in their own race. The categorization of the race makes the community to face the problematic awkward special identity due to their biological differentiation.

The novel opens with the narration of Will, the son of a coloured school teacher, Sonny. Will sees his father out of the movie theatre with an unknown white woman. The novel has five main characters, two men and remaining three are women. Both males are the representatives of the mixed heritage, near about white but not totally white or equal to white. Being coloured persons both face the rootlessness as they are neither 'real black' and nor 'real white'. Sonny, the protagonist has been presented throughout of the novel emphasizing his wish of liberation. Sonny is the son of the upholsterer and is originally from Benoni. His people are proud of him as he is the only person educated in the family. He becomes a teacher. His wife Aila is a good natured mature woman presented nicely by Nadine Gordimer. Being the coloured he has to face the problem and hardship because of the laws of apartheid. When he visits somewhere with his wife and children he has to stand in the separate queue in the shops and only railway station lavatories they can use. The presentation of Sonny's hardship is nothing but the crucial role of the political race. It shows their in-betweenness and rootlessness in the South African society. Being a common teacher he does



not show much interest in the oppression of the black. He is totally wanted to omniscient from these social affairs. Gordimer writes: "...if he had been really black? He might have joined, waved a fist. Admiring the real blacks from this sort of distancing, he left it to them. It seemed more their affair" (Gordimer 23).

Gordimer distinguishes the coloured and the blacks. Nadine Gordimer deals here with the philosophical idea of inter racial relationship. The coloured thinks that they are better than the blacks. It shows the cross cultural representation of Nadine Gordimer. But afterwards the views of Sonny change and he joins the liberation movement. When he goes in the procession as a mediator and banned from teaching, he gets imprisoned. It becomes the turning point of the life of Sonny. He becomes an orator and the leader of the revolutionary activity. He gets respect from the black community. During the imprisonment, Hannah Plowman, Agent of a human rights organization visits him in prison. Hannah is grown up in missionary. She desires to do something for blacks "For her the drive was to struggle against it (evil) for man-for humans" (Gordimer 88).

She helps the people who are in the struggle and in the same way she comes in contact with Sonny while imprisoned. Sonny finds good friend in her and afterwards falls in love with her. Their relationship symbolizes the multiracial relationship. It expresses Gordimer's wish to wash out the boundaries of the colour and race from South Africa and make the people live with love though not belong to the same race and class. It shows Sonny's plight towards liberation and wish to change his identity from becoming coloured weak race to white strong race. Sonny's involvement with Hannah disturbs the family. Will, the son of Sonny lost respect about his father. Baby, the daughter of Sonny tries to suicide as she cannot bear shame. She leaves the house and joined freedom fighters camp in Lusaka. Aila secretly joins the revolution activity. She becomes bold and independent person and works as the messenger of South Africa to Lusaka. Her involvement in political struggle creates a problem and she has been arrested due to some arms and explosives in her house. Every character of the novel tries to create their own identity. It symbolizes the movement of every character into the future of unpredictable ambiguities.

It shows South African political impact on the common people's life. Gordimer thus underlines the real picture of the disturbed family. It is a different way of assessment of South African experiences which makes these all to lead the liberation movement. She presents the political and social turmoil through these characters. Her writing expresses the revolutionary approach towards the uncertain social life of South Africa. These characters are the spokes person of Nadine Gordimer who expresses her urge to reflect the sensitive awareness about equality. Aila, though imprisoned does not allow her son, Will to be a



witness. She is released on bail. Hannah becomes very sad due to the arrest of Aila. Sonny feels guilty about his wife's imprisonment. With these examples Gordimer creates the world of human. Though all these are the victims of the social and political unrest they care and respect for each other. It makes the political commitment of the coloured protagonist a dynamic force of transformation in the whole family. The novel explores the growth of the family towards the revolutionary movement which signifies the liberation of the blacks from the centuries of oppression by the whites. It also expresses the sacrifices of the common people for their race. Hannah symbolizes the helping positive participation of the whites in the liberation struggle of the blacks. Gordimer seems to be the propagandist who wants to bring the needed change in the South African social unevenness by creating awareness in the white ruling community. It is her firm support to the oppressed. Hannah leaves Sonny when she joins the job of the High Commission's Regional Representative of Africa in Addis Ababa. She leaves Sonny expecting that the relation between Sonny and Aila can mend and lead to happy life. Aila and Hannah both are the representatives of their own race. Aila changes the stereotypical image of black woman. Gordimer wills to break down the victimized position of black female. She presents the needed replacement from personal to general, private to public sphere. The new direction and new approach of life bring the enormous changes in her family as well as social life. Gordimer provides her character more active and independent role to break down the fixed barriers of her gender and race. It seems that Gordimer wants to offer a wider space for Aila and make her bold and strong to change her place of caretaker and silent victim and shapes a new sphere of transformation. The rigid conventional roles of women are replaced by the bold, active and independent activists like Aila and her daughter Baby. Male characters of the novel no doubt are strong but the female world of Gordimer in 'My Son's Story' is really a revolutionary attempt of showing the strong cultural space. She expresses the possible liberal future of South Africa where women will have the independent personalities having their own important space not only in family but also in society.

Overall, all the characters in the world of Gordimer are the significant figures doing progressive attempt for their place in the apartheid South Africa. The novel reveals the personal sacrifices of the common people to change the social and political condition of the country. Gordimer is recognized all over the world as the representative of South Africa who outlets the rigid realities of her country about political turmoil and social segregation of the people. Her work shows her firm support to the freedom struggle of the oppressed class. Presenting Hannah Plowman, she depicts her wish about the support of whites in the liberation struggle of the blacks. In short, her novel expresses her dream about the ethical change of the basic rights of human beyond the boundaries of colour and race.



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