

Exploring the Historical Consciousness in Selected Fiction of Nadine Gordimer

Aparajita Dutta Hazarika¹ and Dr. Smita Devi²

¹Research Scholar, Department of English, Assam Don Bosco University, INDIA.

²Assistant Professor, Department of English, Assam Don Bosco University, INDIA.

¹Corresponding Author: aparajitadutta@nluassam.ac.in

ORCID

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7358-7207>



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ABSTRACT

The novels of Nadine Gordimer run parallel with the era of apartheid. They are a record of the realities of the period during the apartheid and also the interregnum period in South Africa in a chronological manner. In South Africa, Gordimer belonged to a minority within the minority. But contained within that small white world is another group of whites who are opposed to the system of racial discrimination known as apartheid and stand with the country's majority. Nadine Gordimer examines the nature of apartheid which according to her, changes depending on who was looking at the issue. Different people react differently to what apartheid meant to them. As a writer she took her commitment to the community at large quite seriously and this is amply reflected in her work and the interviews that were recorded. Gordimer vociferously denounced the discrimination and violence that followed in her fiction as in real life. The research paper shall focus on the idea of the construction of identity in the selected novels whose plots are a reflection of events and situations that were taking place in South Africa as well as the historical consciousness of Gordimer.

Keywords- apartheid, history, national identity.

I. INTRODUCTION

Towards the close of the nineteenth century, Southern Africa was divided into four areas with the British governing two areas and the Afrikaners governing the other two areas. The Cape of Good Hope is a peninsula on the Atlantic coast in South Africa. It is rocky and jagged. The Dutch colonists arrived at the Cape of Good Hope in 1652. They controlled South Africa's politics and its industrial farming industry until 1994. Segregation was already in full force in these four territories and the black people had no political rights. During the "Anglo-Boer War" of 1899–1902, the Afrikaners, rose up against the British and attempted to seize control of the other two colonies. An Afrikaner is a white person of Dutch descent

whose mother tongue is Afrikaans. In 1910, the British and the Afrikaner community created the Union of South Africa. The National Party was founded by the Afrikaners and the British established the South African Party. When the National Party won the general election, power was shared till 1948. The Apartheid system was quickly formed by the Afrikaners. The concept of apartheid was first discussed in the 1930s by the Dutch Reformed Church missionaries who came to South Africa from the Netherlands and the Dutch immigrant communities were their loyal followers, and the idea slowly gained political momentum in the 1940s. (Dutch Reformed Church Nelson Mandela is a well-known and prominent leader who effectively led the fight against apartheid, and was also imprisoned for a long time. Mandela, later became

South Africa's first black President in 1994 and remained President till 1999. According to him, apartheid was an indelible blight on human history. In his autobiography titled *Long Walk to Freedom*, Mandela recalled the reason why he decided to dedicate himself to the struggle for freedom from apartheid:

I cannot pinpoint a moment when I became politicised, when I knew that I would spend my life in the liberation struggle. To be an African in South Africa means that one is politicised from the moment of one's birth, whether one acknowledges it or not. An African child is born in an Africans Only hospital, taken home in an Africans Only bus, lives in an Africans Only area ...his life is circumscribed by racist laws and regulations that cripple his growth dim his potential and stunts his life. This was the reality and one could deal with it in a myriad of ways. [Mandela, 2008,109]

The text of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court dated 17 July 1998 has included in Part 2 titled Jurisdiction, Admissibility and Applicable Law under Article 7 called Crimes against humanity has listed the "crime of apartheid" as a crime against humanity which is defined as any act "when committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against any civilian population, with knowledge of the attack" and has also defined apartheid as inhumane acts committed in the context of an institutionalized regime of systematic oppression and domination by one racial group over any other racial group or groups and committed with the intention of maintaining that regime." [International Criminal Court, 2023] In his autobiography titled *Long Walk to Freedom*, Mandela states that the "lack of human dignity experienced by Africans is the direct result of the policy of white supremacy" and this white supremacy implies black inferiority. Legislation designed to preserve white supremacy entrenches this notion. Menial tasks in South Africa are invariably performed by Africans [Mandela, 2008, 437]. Yet at the end truth and justice prevailed and Mandela stated that though they were expected to destroy one another and themselves collectively in the "worst racial conflagration" they, as a people, chose the path of negotiation, compromise and peaceful settlement. As an alternative to hatred and revenge, they chose the path of reconciliation and nation-building [Mandela, 2008, 437].

Nadine Gordimer in her book *Telling Times Writing and Living, 1954-2008* enlightens the readers that:

If you want to know how Africans- black men-live in South Africa, you will get in return for your curiosity an exposition of apartheid in action, for in all of a black man's life- all his life- rejection by the white man has the last word. With this word of rejection apartheid began, long before it hardened into laws and

legislation, long before it became a theory of racial selectiveness and the policy of a government. [Gordimer, 2010]

Saul Dubow in his book called *Racial Segregation and the Origins of Apartheid in South Africa, 1919-36*, defines apartheid as the state of being 'apart' or 'separate' [Dubow, 1989]. The *Oxford Dictionary* defines Apartheid as the former South African policy of racial segregation of other groups from the white inhabitants. During the apartheid era, in South Africa, only the white people had full political rights and others, especially the black people, were forced to reside at a distance from white people. Dr. Hendrik Verwoerd was regarded as the Architect of Apartheid. He was the Prime Minister of South Africa from 1958 to 1966. There are four broad interpretations or theories that try to explain apartheid. According to the Afrikaner Nationalists, their identity is "given by God." In order to safeguard their Afrikaner identity and stop racial mixing, they passed the laws in 1948 ["Apartheid Museum", 11]. A society that "upholds human rights and the fundamental freedoms of the individual" is what liberals espoused. ["Apartheid Museum", 12] They resisted racial discrimination and denounced apartheid, blaming the laws that went into effect in 1948 on the concept of white supremacy. "Apartheid is a continuation of segregationist policies that were developed as a result of the labour needs of the gold mines," according to radical historians. They became cheap labour and were not allowed to become skilled. They were neither allowed to be long-lasting residents in the city nor granted citizenship or any other rights that would make them capable of challenging the system.["Apartheid Museum", 13] The Social historians study 'the lives of ordinary people and the impact of the directions and thoughts on the course of history.'["Apartheid Museum", 13] The African National Congress (ANC), a political party and black nationalist organisation in South Africa that was established in 1912, aimed to ensure that black Africans and coloured people of mixed races in the Cape Province would continue to be able to vote. It began fighting to abolish apartheid, the government-enforced system of racial segregation and discrimination, in the 1940s. The ANC Youth League comprised of members such as Nelson Mandela, Oliver Tambo and Walter Sisulu. They were instrumental in leading a number of protest marches and strikes against the apartheid laws. Sharpeville, a neighbourhood in Johannesburg witnessed such an outbreak on March 2, 1960. In 1964 Mandela and other ANC leaders were sentenced to life imprisonment which is referred to as the Rivonia Trial. The Black Consciousness Movement became one of the most influential anti-apartheid movements of the 1970s in South Africa. Leslie Anne Hadfield in her essay titled "Steve Biko and the Black Consciousness Movement" noted that Bantu Stephen Biko was the most prominent figure of the Black Consciousness movement. He spread the Black

Consciousness philosophy. His death at the hands of the South African security police led to repercussions for the Black Consciousness movement and made him a famous martyr (Hadfield, 11). The ANC began to revive inside South Africa following the Soweto uprising in 1976, when the police and army killed hundreds of people. The Soweto Uprising was another significant turning point led by young students and it began on June 16, 1976, against the government's plans to impose the Afrikaans language as a medium of instruction in schools for Black students. The uprising and the ensuing protests created a crisis of legitimacy for South Africa's apartheid government that contributed to its eventual downfall, in 1994 [Kulik]. The administration of F.W. de Klerk lifted the ban on the ANC in 1990, and its leaders were released from prison or allowed to return to South Africa. Nelson Mandela became the ANC president in 1991 and was involved in negotiations (1992–93) with the government over transition to a government elected by votes. The party was voted to power in April 1994.

Apartheid is a key issue in South African writing. According to South African author, Olive Schreiner, "Irrespective of nationality and time, the line at which light race meets dark is the line at which human society is found at the lowest ebb; and wherever that line comes into existence, there are found the darkest shadows which we humans have cast by our injustice and egoism across the earth" (Schreiner). The system of Apartheid restricted the opportunity of writers for many years. According to Gordimer, apartheid is different for different people:

If you ask a member of the South African government, he will tell you that it is separate and parallel comment of white and black – that is the official, legal definition. If you ask an ordinary white man who supports the policy, he will tell you that it is the means of keeping South Africa white. If you ask a black man, he may give you any one of a dozen answers, arising out of whatever aspect of apartheid he has been brought up short again that day, for to him it is neither an ideological concept nor a policy, but a context in which his whole life, learning, working, loving, is rigidly enclosed. [Gordimer, 63]

II. METHODOLOGY

The Qualitative research method shall be used with analytical approach. The primary source shall be the selected novels of Nadine Gordimer. The secondary source includes research papers, articles, books, interviews and other web sources. Post-Colonial theory is an important tool in the analysis of the texts and the paper shall concern itself with the work of critical theorist Homi K. Bhabha's seminal essays from *Nation and Narration* namely, "Narrating the Nation" and "DissemiNation: Time, narrative and the margins of the modern nation". Bhabha explains nations or the concept of nationality

through narrative. Put differently, he sees the country as an ever-changing web of individual meanings.

III. REPRESENTATION OF HISTORY AND NATION

"Finally, when the history of the Nationalist Governments from 1948 to the end comes to be written, Nadine Gordimer's shelf of novels will provide the future historian with all the evidence needed to assess the price that has been paid" [Green]. Dominic Head states that one needs to be careful to separate fiction and history, and the disciplines of their analysis. "Gordimer's shelf of novels will certainly provide the future literary historian with more material on the apartheid era- its impact on imagination and literary form- than will the work of any other single writer" [2]. The question of Gordimer's national identification is one that has always been important to her. It has direct repercussions for her own literary heritage and, as a result, her identity as a writer. Dominic Head states that one thing that has remained constant is the conviction of her nationality in terms of simple geographical belonging. In *The Essential Gesture Writing, Politics and Places*, Clingman in his Introduction expresses concern over Gordimer's sense of identity. "Her national identity is a fundamental issue for her as it has direct implications for her own literary tradition and consequently, her identity as a writer." [4]. She had to overstep transgressions and successive boundaries as a young girl as the daughter of immigrant parents in a new country.

Bhabha bases his consideration of nations on Benedict Anderson's 1991 book *Imagined Communities*. Every nation has a story to tell, but often one official or dominant narrative overshadows all others, even those of marginalised groups. These marginalised or underrepresented groups have privileged perspectives on the reinterpretation of national identities, which help to make them more realistic and inclusive. One way to look at how nations are narrated is to look at how public figures either reinforce or weaken national identity. To highlight the relationship between nation and narrative, Bhabha states, "Nations, like narratives, lose their origins in the myths of time and only fully realise their horizons in the mind's eye" [NN, 1].

The historical and political events that were happening in contemporary South Africa at a time when Gordimer was writing her short stories and novels, stretched over four decades beginning from the 1940s to the 1990s and the short stories and novels were her way of responding to those events that unfolded in the country. Like many other critics, Robert Green, too believed that at the end when the history of the Nationalist Government from 1948 to the end comes to be written, Nadine Gordimer's 'shelf of novels' will provide the future historian with all the evidence required to evaluate the price that has been paid by the people [Green, 563]. In the Introduction to the collection of essays called "Inside and

Outside: Nadine Gordimer and the Critics”, Rowland Smith, is of the opinion that Stephen Clingman relates all the novels of Gordimer to South African history at the time of their composition and also- through that history- to the cultural and political preoccupations that inform them.” [Smith, 3] Gordimer had written numerous essays which reflect how the people were affected by the apartheid laws and the political unrest and killings that took place time and again. Stephen Clingman in the introduction to *Essential Gesture Writing, Politics and Places*, has mentioned that through these essays history emerges which follows the trajectory of the “rise to power of the National Party in 1948, and life under apartheid, the political, social and cultural world of the 1950s the sabotage and resistance of the 1960s”. It also follows the rise of Black Consciousness movement in the 1970s and the Soweto revolt. It is as if “a cumulative picture builds up not only of these events and movement themselves but also of what it has been like to live through them” [3].

IV. MAPPING IDENTITY

Identity is the fact of being, or feeling that one is a particular type of person and it includes the qualities that make a person different from others. According to Kath Woodward, identity is a dynamic and complex idea that arises from different kinds of proof of identity. She underlines that there are various identities that coexist and change over time rather than a single, permanent identity. “We are not born with an identity, but it emerges in a number of different forms through a series of identifications which combine and emerge in an infinite number of forms so that there is never one fixed coherent identity but several in play” (Woodward, 25). This idea challenges the notion of a fixed or essential self and instead posits that identity is a complex and constantly shifting construct. Identity may be said to be that quality that makes a person or thing who or what they are and makes them different from others. It is also the state of being the same as somebody or something; the feeling of having a close association or connection with somebody or something.

Identity, as given in the *Merriam-Webster’s Learner Online Dictionary* (2016), comes from “middle French *identité*, from late Latin *identitat* or *identitas* probably from Latin *identidem* repeatedly contraction of *idem et idem*, literally same and same”.

According to Bill Ashcroft et al. in the book *Empire Writes Back* the influence of colonialism is unquestionably the factor which has generated numerous motifs and thematic notions including racism, cultural supremacy, hybridity, inequality, and the search for identity.

As Riley (2007:70) suggests, for more than 2,000 years, identity has been a “philosophical aporia” relating to intractable issues, such as ‘the monadic against the multiple self’ and ‘the relationship of the individual to society’. (21)

Margaret Wetherell in “The Field of Identity Studies” from *The Sage Handbook of Identities* states that in the most basic sense, the study of identities is about what Avtar Brah (1996) would refer to as “names and looks” (3). According to James D. Fearon, “identity can be used to describe personal traits or qualities” that cannot be naturally expressed in terms of a social category in ordinary language, and in some situations, certain categories can be described as identities even though no one sees them as central to their own personal identity. The concept of identity is nevertheless challenging and intriguing despite this unfathomably broad and expansive concern [Fearon, 1999, 1]. The term identity refers to “the way that individuals and groups define themselves and are defined by others on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, language, and culture” [Deng, 1995, 1]. Identity is considered as “the way in which individuals and collectives are distinguished in their social relations with other individuals and collectives” [Jenkins, 1996, 4]. For Bloom (1990), “national identity describes that condition in which a mass of people have made the same identification with national symbols – internationalized the symbols of the nation” [Bloom, 52]. According to Kowert and Legro (1996), “identities are ...prescriptive representations of political actors themselves and of their relationships to each other” [453].

Stuart Hall (1989) defines identity as “a process, identity is split. Identity is not a fixed point but an ambivalent point. Identity is also the relationship of the other to oneself” [5]. Martin Heidegger in “Identity and Difference” states that according to the metaphysical view, identity is a fundamental aspect of Being such that Being and thinking are part of a single identity whose active nature results from their letting themselves belong to one another, a process referred to as appropriation. The occurrence of appropriation has the essence of identity as a characteristic. [41]

Although identity theory mostly borrows from Mead’s work, according to Peter Burke in *Identity Theory*, there are two key ideas from James’s works (1890) that predate Mead and are crucial to identity theory. James called attention to the complexity of the self by acknowledging that people have multiple selves “as many different selves as there are different others that recognise the individual—in addition to emphasising that people are social and that habit plays an important role in human behaviour beyond biology and instinct” [James 1890, 29]. Identity is defined as the uniformity in all that constitutes the objective reality of a thing. The objective reality is the collection of things that exists independently of us. The Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary [2003:622] defines identity as “who a person is, or the qualities of a person or group which make them different from others”. It can be said to be the state or quality of being a specified person or thing, which embraces who or what a person is or individual characteristics by which a person or a thing can be identified. Anthony Smith in *The Routledge Dictionary of Literary Terms* (1991), argues that nations

are anchored in pre-existing cultural communities called ethnies. These are more or less culturally homogeneous, consisting of a ‘myth-symbol complex’ that forms a fund of shared historical meanings to which every person in the ethnie has access, which bonds ‘a people’ together, and which ties that people to a ‘historical territory or homeland’ [10–15]. The work of Benedict Anderson helped to reframe the discussion in terms of ideology and consciousness. In suggesting that nations are ‘imagined’, he draws attention not only to the idea that ‘nation-ness, as well as nationalism, are cultural artefacts of a particular kind’, but also to the role of culture in politics because, to be more precise, a nation is an ‘imagined political community’ [Anderson]. Both ethnicists and modernists concur that culture is a vital aspect of nationalism and nationhood. Indeed, this reflects both the fact that nationalism is perhaps one of the earliest forms of cultural politics, and that in modernity the question of identity has emerged as a key site of social and political contestation and negotiation.

Michael Bamberg in ‘Identity and Narration’ published in *The Living Handbook of Narratology* states that Identity refers to the attempt to distinguish and integrate one’s self along many social and personal characteristics such as gender, age, race, occupation, gangs, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, class, country states, or regional territory. When one tries to define political identity one realises that there are various ways by which one identifies oneself. It may be by their nationality, their ways of thinking- traditional, conservative or progressive or by one’s gender. Ethnic, religious, or class identity may also influence one’s political identity. We, therefore, realise that our sense of self influences our politics and politics influences our sense of self. “Political identity concerns itself with how a person or group of persons think about themselves in relation to the politics and government of a country. Everything that makes up our sense of self are components of our political identity. This includes our ethnicity, religion, gender, class, ideology, nationality and even our age and generation”. Identity can be the driving force behind a social or political movement. Identity also can be the goal of a social or political movement in terms of gaining acceptance or redefining traditional identities (Bernstein, 2005). According to the definition of identity politics, it is “the tendency for people of a particular religion, race, social background, etc., to form exclusive political alliances, moving away from traditional broad-based party politics”. While identity politics can provide a group of people a sense of purpose and belonging, it can also cause conflict and a sense of us versus them. It can be more challenging for a society to handle issues that affect all citizens of the nation if they feel more a part of and belonging to one group than they do to a larger one. Members of certain constituencies “assert or reclaim ways of understanding their distinctiveness that challenge dominant characterizations, with the goal of greater self-

determination,” notes Cressida Heyes (2020) in the *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*.

Ernest Renan in “What is a Nation?” has stated that “Nations are not eternal. They have a beginning and they will have an end. A nation is a soul, a spiritual principle. Two things which, properly speaking, are really one and the same constitute this soul, this spiritual principle” [Renan 10].

John McLeod in *Beginning Postcolonialism* mentioned about nations that “Nations are not like trees or plants they are not a naturally occurring phenomenon yet the nation has become one of the most important modes of social and political organization in the modern world and we perhaps assume that they are simply just there. Most commentators agree that the idea of the nation is western in origin it emerged with the growth of western capitalism and industrialization and was a fundamental component of imperialist expansion it is almost second nature these days to map the world as a collection of different nations each separated from the other by a border but what does between nations do not happen by accident they are constructed, defended and (in too many tragic cases) bloodily contested by groups of people. It is important that we try to think about nations fundamentally as fabrications. As Ernest Gellner argues in his book *Nations and Nationalism* (1983) “that nations are not inscribed into the nature of things” [49]. Nations, are planned by people like buildings which means that they can both rise and fall. So, the nation is primarily an idea. It is customary these days to talk about the ‘myth of the nation’ in recognition of this. In his influential book *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (1983), Benedict Anderson defines the nation first and foremost as ‘an imagined political community’ [6]. This is because ‘the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion’ [6]. Individuals think they are part of a greater collective, that they share a ‘deep, horizontal comradeship’ [7] with many others. In a similar vein Timothy Brennan points out in his essay, ‘The National Longing for Form’ (in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha, 44-70) that the nation refers ‘both to the modern nation- state and to something more ancient and nebulous- the “nation”- a local community, domicile, family, condition of belonging’ (45)

The marginalization of specific groups in postcolonial nations after acquiring political independence has resulted in cultural dissent, fundamentalisms, secessionist-separatist movements and political unrest. According to Nayar, “The nation is clearly at the forefront of postcolonial thought. The debates and disputes over what constitutes a nation’s authentic culture, the tensions over new forms of colonialisms and the very evident internal colonialism whereby some groups are marginalized figure prominently as themes in postcolonial writings from

Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and South America” [Nayar, 100].

National identity can be termed as the sense of belonging to a particular state or to a particular nation. National identity can be said to be socially constructed. Incorporation of national identity into a person’s personal identity takes place by the adoption of the beliefs and values which are the characteristic traits of one’s national identity. Symbolically represented in discourse primarily through historical mythologies and a popular cultural canon (including iconic images), national identity can be defined as the public image of an imagined community projecting an illusion of unity, as reflected in a flag, a national anthem, and distinctive rituals. National identity is also narratively constructed and transmitted by social institutions. These essentialist portrayals aim to evoke personal identification with an ostensibly common identity that surpasses other aspects of identity, like socioeconomic status and ethnicity. Gordimer's books are part of the movement that could be referred to as “writing the nation” [Bhabha].

Louise Yelin in her introduction to her book *From the Margins of Empire*, noted that when other white writers chose to leave the place where they were born or grew up, Gordimer chose to stay in South Africa and “be (or become) a South African writer”. According to her, “Gordimer identifies as a South African. That is her national identity” [Yelin, 16]. Drawing on Baba's theoretical formulations on identity in the seminal essay, “Narrating the Nation”, Yelin analyses *Burger's Daughter* and Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook* and locate women in public spheres which are conventionally considered to be masculine spaces. According to Yelin,

Both novels explore the consequences of women's marginal or tangential relationship to the national and transnational political and cultural formations they describe. Burger's Daughter places its young, white female protagonist in the struggle against apartheid and, in doing so, rethinks such traditional concerns of the feminine bildungsroman as sexual awakening and the quest for autonomy. [7]

Burger's Daughter attempts to imagine a non-racial South African nation over and against the barriers that apartheid sets on doing so. The novel represents South Africa from the perspective of its title character, Rosa Burger, a young white woman opposed to apartheid. Throughout, Rosa is both an actor or potential actor in the politics of the nation and an angle of vision through which a nation and its conditions of possibility or impossibility are framed. The strategy of imagining South African nationality from the point of view of a white protagonist is determined in part by the exigencies of apartheid. But only in part, for the situation of Rosa Burger also underwrites then novel's exploration of the ways that whites might participate in a South African national

community at a moment when the Black Consciousness movement has redefined the role of whites in the liberation struggle and in the emergent political order. Rosa is identified, in the novel's title, as someone's daughter. Her parents, Lionel and Cathy Burger, are Afrikaners, prominent Communists, and leaders in the struggle against apartheid in the 1940s, 1950s, and through the 1960s. When Rosa's parents die, her legacy is their commitment to justice. But the role that they and others like them— Communists, white Communists— played in the struggle is not available to her. Rosa must stake her own claim to her inheritance, come to terms with the history that her parents incarnate, and find her place in a changing South Africa.

Rosa's life takes her back in time, she lives in exile in Europe, and she eventually returns to a South Africa that is going through a lot of change. The Soweto boycott began as a demonstration against Afrikaans instruction; it grew into a far more significant uprising that was initiated by students and later supported by their parents and other people.) As it shifts from the present, where it appears that non-racist politics have come to a standstill, to the past, where South Africa appears—at least to Rosa—as “Lionel's country,” it asks what role white people like Rosa might play in a history that is still being written as well as whether or how white people of European descent can identify and be identified as South Africans. Gordimer represents through the couple, Steve and Jabulile, the efforts of those who fought for justice see that the present social conditions are threatened by poverty, unemployment, AIDS, government scandal and the influx of refugees from other African countries. Under President Zuma there was large scale corruption by himself and other governments officials, Steve remarks:

With apartheid we were the pariah of the world, with freedom we become what we never were, we're part of the democratic world. Corruption doesn't disqualify. It's everywhere [NTP 127].

In his book *The Political Novel*, Joseph L. Blotner claims that a political novel might give the reader a vivid picture of the past, an understanding of the character of political figures, or a prediction of what is to come. “The political novel continues to serve the reader as a means of comprehending significant facets of the complex society in which he lives as well as a chronicle of how it developed as an art form and analytical tool” (1).

You see, writing for me is not a political activity. Before anything else, I am a writer...I imagine that the South African government considers me a political adversary—as if I were someone utilizing my profession to combat it. But I myself would not call what I do a political activity, because even if I lived elsewhere, I would still be a writer [Servan-Schreiber 108].

Bruce King, notes in his book, *The Later Fiction of Nadine Gordimer* that almost all of Nadine Gordimer's fictional projects have tried to construct an archive of apartheid, the "consciousness of her era" even though she was constrained by the machinery of apartheid itself. [King, 237] Her works have tried to focus on the feelings of white South Africans, alignment with identifiable political movements, its attempt to serve instrumentally as an agent for social change.

According to King, "The problems confronting this archival effort have been articulated most eloquently by Gordimer herself, but whatever form these obstacles have taken - whether bannings, censorship, political disenfranchisement, or the 'split' historical position from which Gordimer must account for her word - they have been met, and therefore the archive exists: a monumental task of monument-making for those who have suffered under apartheid, struggled against it and work toward its demise" [King, 237]. Gordimer, took the "professional responsibility' for the transformation of society seriously and according to her, it is the commitment for a South African writer" [*The Essential Gesture*, 297].

Gordimer's novels *Burger's Daughter* (1979) and *July's People* explore the tension between white rejection by blacks and white resistance to apartheid: The white people's efforts to resist apartheid seem at odds with black self-liberation. Gordimer depicts the white people needing to find a way to do without the deferred prospect of establishing a 'common culture' in South Africa. Brendon Nicholls in the first chapter of the book, *Nadine Gordimer's July's People*, called "Texts and Contexts" states that:

This historical context should make it abundantly evident that Gordimer wrote July's People from an uncommon vantage point within a divided national society. She held a very privileged position in South Africa as a white writer. However, she was by no means representative of her political class when she wrote July's People in terms of political consciousness. Rather, Gordimer had realised that the pivotal event of the mid-1970s required a dedication to subverting appetite and a loyalty to armed Black political resistance. (19)

Black radicals were encouraged by the Black Consciousness movement to distance themselves from white dissidents in South Africa in the early 1970s, believing that they were undermining the anti-apartheid campaign to protect their illegal privileges. Despite the movement's declared goal of creating a South Africa free of racial discrimination, liberal whites denounced this separatism as a surrender to apartheid's concept of "separate development". For Gordimer, Black Consciousness was necessary for black liberation, and she sought ways of reconciling white dissidents with black separatism. Her belief was that if there were to be a place

for whites in a majority-ruled South Africa, then they needed to join the blacks in a "common culture" [Head, 7]. Lionel Burger describes his predicament thus: "I am talking of the contradiction that my people- the Afrikaner people- and the white people in general in our country worship the God of justice and practise discrimination on grounds of the colour of skin; profess the compassion of the Son of Man, and deny the humanity of the black people they live among" (BD, 19).

V. CONCLUSION

The historical and political events that were happening in contemporary South Africa at a time when Gordimer was writing her short stories and novels, stretched over four decades beginning from the 1940s to the 1990s and the short stories and novels were her way of responding to those events that unfolded in the country. Like many other critics, Robert Green, too believed that at the end when the history of the Nationalist Government from 1948 to the end comes to be written, Nadine Gordimer's 'shelf of novels' will provide the future historian with all the evidence required to evaluate the price that has been paid by the people" [Green, 563]. Gordimer herself has acknowledged that in her writing she acts upon her society, while history acts upon her. According to her she is not a politically-minded person by nature. The real influence of politics on her writing is the influence of politics on people. Their lives and their personalities are changed by the extreme political circumstances under which they live. Her acute and continuous observation of the society in which she inhabits gives her novels an extraordinary and unique insight into the historical experience in the period in which she has been writing. This sense of history is her essence of her identity in the political climate of South Africa during the period of apartheid. Therefore, she remarks the historical novel is not the same as the novel with a history. It is through her novels that Gordimer's historical consciousness grows.

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