

Chapter Six

CONCLUSIONS

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Nadine Gordimer, the White South African woman novelist, occupies exceptional position in South African literature in English due to her opposition, both in theory and practice, to the ideology of power and privilege based on the hierarchy of the colour of skin. Her fiction tries to diagnose the complex nature of the repressive apartheid environment and its distorting consequences on human relationships. It is a medium through which she concretises her vision of liberated South Africa as a society founded on the equality between the blacks and the whites. In order to individuate the socio-political experience of apartheid, Gordimer experiments with a variety and complexity of personal relationships through the thematic and strategic use of childhood. The detailed study of the portrayal of childhood especially, in her three works, Jump and Other Stories (1991), My Son's Story (1990), A Sport of Nature (1987) clarifies its crucial significance in the writer's attempt to perceive the chaos, i.e., South Africa.

The history of anti-apartheid struggle for liberation spreads over five decades. It begins with the implementation of segregational policy by the colonial government in 1948, and ends legally in 1990. It reaches climax with the liberation of the country in 1994. Nadine Gordimer, as a child brought up in the Jewish family in the small mining town near Johannesburg was exposed to the regressive influence of her mother at home, and of the exploitative apartheid environment outside home.

The non-chronological approach appears to be essential to concentrate on the thematic significance of the three works. Jump and Other Stories, evidences Gordimer's basic methods of operating, through child-image, on the theme of human relationships. The childhood stories in the volume can be divided in two groups. The first group includes stories which are centred on child. They are - 'Once Upon a Time', 'The Ultimate Safari' and 'A Journey'. The second group includes those stories in which childhood is treated as a vital, though not a major, term of reference by the writer. They are - 'Jump', 'Some Are Born to Sweet Delight', 'Home', 'Amnesty' and 'Comrades'.

The image of child is used as an integrational centre of the two parts of 'Once Upon a Time'. The first part is an

autobiographical communication by the author-persona about her lack of interest in writing children's stories. It is, however, complemented by a communication of her urgent need on the subconscious level to find outlet for the obsessive fear of violence by the blacks. The second part is a narrative apparently constructed by the subconscious to surface that fear. The narrative comes as the tragedy of a white child killed in his parents' attempt to prevent black intruders by installing the most barbarous device along the compound of the house. The child symbolises the victimization of humanity, ironically, at its own hands.

The eleven year-old black refugee girl is the protagonist of 'The Ultimate Safari'. The story encodes the tragic suffering of humanity in the world compelled to leave the motherland and accept as endless state of instability as refugees. The writer authenticates the refugee experience from a child's perspective. The action extends over a period of two and half years, covering three stages of the experience. The family's struggle to survive in their own country in spite of the chaos of civil war their miserable journey through Krugar Park, the forest reserved for wild animals, and their life in the tent in the neighbouring country as refugees. The anonymity of the girl is a device to highlight the typicality of

the human tragedy itself a devastating tale of man's backward journey from civilization to barbarism.

'A Journey' repeats Gordimer's preoccupation with the theme of childhood in the travails of adolescence. Technically, the narrative encapsulates a triple version of the experience of a twelve year-old boy suddenly stepping into adolescence in response to his mother's pregnancy and the arrival of the baby. The baby, in the womb and after birth, plays a crucial role as a catalyst for the development of the elder brother, and activates the process of re-formation of relationships between the son and his parents.

'Jump', a story from the second group, focuses on the white youth who, unfortunately gets involved in the terrorist activities of the white secret organisation against his own country of birth. It projects the childlike innocence of the youth revealed through his ignorance of his political blackmailing by both the whites and the blacks. 'Some Are Born to Sweet Delight' marks

a shift in the writer's concern from the apartheid-ridden South Africa to the international problem of terrorism. It is a tragedy centered on man's brutality to man through the symbolic destruction of innocent life of the unborn child within the pregnant Vera- herself a child in her absolute trust in the love of the stranger.

The theme of childhood is operational on two levels in 'Home'. It refers to the heroine's relationship with her mother during childhood, and to her elderly husband's patronising attitude to her a child. 'Amnesty' is the tragedy of both the wife of a black activist and his little daughter. In 'Comrades', the writer charts the disastrous consequences of apartheid on the growth of black children.

The thematic concern of Gordimer's novel My Son's Story, is an extenuation of her essential concern with the individual's growth. The political theme of black revolution is intellectualised through the central plot of love-relationship between the black activist Sonny, and the white woman activist Hannah. In spite of the centrality of Sonny the father, the novel is, both in theme and structure, the son's i.e., Will's story. On the fictive level, it is the first novel of the son whose crucial need to come to terms with the adolescence-experience compels him into creation. The narrator persona is skillfully split by the novelist in two - the child - adolescent Will, and the adult Will. Through it the adolescent narrator's perspective is balanced against the adult narrator's perspective. On the thematic level, the novel indicates how Sonny's son becomes, in the end, an imagistic specification of

the line from William Shakespeare's sonnet, chosen by the novelist - 'You had a father, let your son say so'.

As a child secure in his parent's identity, Will carries the most happy memories of his idealistic school teacher, father and the affectionate mother. The boy is initiated into an awareness of his sexual identity through the traumatic experience of his unexpected meeting with the father coming out of the cinema hall with a white woman. It develops into an inner conflict for the boy complicated by his obsession of sex with Hannah who belongs to the race of oppressors. Will's own adulthood prepares the identity - oriented youth, anxious to be reconciled with the father. He realises the greatness of his father's integrity as a black activist, and is proud of his mother as a revolutionary.

A Sport of Nature is also a continuation of Gordimer's dialectic of individual's growth from childhood to maturity. But it is a far more ambitious experiment to trace the political history in terms of a white orphan girl's evolution from childhood to middle age. It encodes the Utopean vision of Gordimer's cultural imagination which projects South Africa as a liberated nation of 'rainbow' society built through the relationship of love between the blacks and the whites. The novelist desires, through it, the

symbiotic integration between the biological and the cultural within the human beings.

The evolution of Hillela provides the centre for the otherwise picaresque novel which spreads over a number of continents and assimilates a large variety of nationalities and places. Heredity is regarded as a definitive term for the heroine by the novelist as suggested by the botanical metaphor 'a Sport of Nature', which signifies 'variation from the parent stock.' Hillela, as a white girl from a Jewish family of her great grandfather, Hillel, inherits the tradition of oppression. Her instinctual inheritance of sexual passion links her with her mother, Ruthie. Hillela, however transcends passion by mission which indicates her 'diversion from the parental stock' in human terms.

The absence of parental security in spite of the childhood spent with the two aunts, Olga and Pauline, forces Hillela, into the struggle for creation of her own identity. It covers the period of her early youth. The next phase of Hillela's life may be described as her struggle to perfect identity. It covers the most happy period of her life as the beloved and the wife of Whaila Kgomani, the South African black revolutionary. Her biological need of survival is transformed into the inner urge for meaningful

survival through dedication to the black cause of liberation. Whaila's murder confirms the definition of her life a revolutionary. She plays a vital role in the liberation of an African Country.

The apparently disturbing gaps in the narration are a technique to restrict the novel to the level of symbolic conceptualisation. The picaresque form of narrative is romantic yet realistic in the historicity of its details. Childhood provides the vital centre for the panoramic experience in the narrative in the context of which every change in Hillela's life is assessed. It is disclosed by the choric repetition of the terms, 'advantages', 'intended' and 'not intended', throughout the novel.

Thus, childhood provides a powerful means for Nadine Gordimer to map and pinpoint the complex and contradictory tensions in the personal relationships generated by the racist repressive environment. It becomes both a vital strategy and a thematic centre which facilitates her fictionalisation of the human condition in Jump and Other Stories, My Son's Story, and A Sport of Nature.