

# **CHAPTER – V**

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### CONCLUSION

The present chapter consists of the conclusion regarding the various themes treated by Nadine Gordimer in her Short Stories.

The elaborate thematic study of the stories from the three collections-*Livingstone's Companions* (1971), *Something Out There* (1984) and *Jump : And Other Stories* (1991) enable the researcher to arrive at certain analytical conclusions. The themes located in these three collections are mainly classified as 'Major' and 'Minor' themes. The Major recurrent themes treated by Gordimer in these collections are- Apartheid and Liberation Movement, in South Africa Along with these socio-political themes Gordimer's preoccupation with the theme of human relationships is also evident in the stories. Various kinds of relationships are depicted by Gordimer. We can further classify them into Family Relationships and the Blacks-the Whites relationship. While treating the Family Relationships, Gordimer presents to us both kinds of relationships – perfect, harmoniously integrated, ideal relationships and also disrupted, split relationships. She mainly deals with the 'betrayal' in various relationships. In spite of being a member of the white community, She has championed the black cause. She is against racism and has always advocated the Blacks-the Whites equality. The contemporary Black –White relationship has been her deep concern and it inevitably gets revealed in her stories. The theme of the Blacks-the Whites relationship forms important part of her works. The changing nature of the Blacks-the Whites relationship is depicted in the stories. Gordimer is a great upholder of humanism and her strong faith in humanity is expressed through the portrayal of the Blacks – the Whites relationship.

✓ The Minor themes treated by Gordimer are –Love and sex, Friendship, Dreary Human Life, Remote Africa, Paradoxes and Contradictions of Independent Africa and Human Curiosity. Here, one thing must be made clear that these themes are classified under the title ‘Minor Themes’ not because they are less important for the writer. They are ‘Minor’, only because they are less in number particularly in the three collections selected for the study. They are important, because they help us to compliment Gordimer about the wide range of her themes. It is true that Apartheid and Anti-Apartheid struggle have been the crucial experience for Gordimer and many of her contemporary writers. Their preoccupation with this theme is but natural. Gordimer has been called ‘protest’ writer by many critics because of her stubborn depiction of Apartheid and daring opposition to it. The chapter III of the dissertation dealing with various Minor themes shows that Gordimer’s themes are not limited to the depiction of apartheid. Her literary career has outlived Apartheid. She wrote during the Apartheid-ridden days and also has been writing continuously even after the Independence of South Africa. Her writing does not stop with the end of Apartheid. She firmly believes in the redemptive power of humanity. Her work explores various aspects of human life- hope and despair, depths of yearning, multiple betrayals of human relationship, existential anxieties and the gap between appearance and reality.

## **5.1 Major Themes:**

### **5.1.1 Apartheid:**

John Povey in his article ‘South Africa’ says that South Africa is perceived as unique due to “its social evil of the apartheid system by which it sustains its peculiar, racial and cultural circumstances” (1974:174). Further, he adds that these peculiar

circumstances provide the opportunity for Gordimer “to investigate human reaction confronted with the South African social *malaise* which inevitably traps everyone.” (168)

Gordimer’s stories chronicle life under apartheid. The subject matters have been the effects of Apartheid on the lives of the South Africans and the moral and the psychological tensions of life in the racially-divided country. The story ‘A City of the Dead, a City of the Living’ not only gives us the realistic picture of a black township, but also the acute tense mood in a house which hides an activist inside it. Gordimer focuses on Nanike’s psychological pressure, who could not bear the tension of hiding the activist and ultimately herself informs the police.

While portraying violence ridden post-Apartheid Africa, Gordimer is mostly concerned with the individuals, their happiness and sorrows, aspirations and yearnings. She records the way people go about their daily lives and interactions with one another in the myriad tensions of a brutal police state. The stories examine how people cope with the terrible choices forced on them by violence, racial hatred and the state. She delineates the relationship between the personal and the political. The story ‘Blinder’ presents to us the ineffectual, servile life of a black maidservant, Rose. Gordimer depicts how Rose’s personal fate gets entwined with the political policies. Here, we have also the glimpses of the ‘Grand Apartheid’ in the description of Partition of South Africa into homeland system.

The story ‘Jump’ portrays the atmosphere of mutual racial hatred and prejudices. A young white man is victimized by racial hatred. This youth of artistic mind is dragged into the terroristic activities from where he could never return to his previous innocent life. Gordimer

shows how the modest expectations and yearnings of the young man's parents gets shattered during their son's victimization.

Gordimer criticizes the white characters who take pride in keeping themselves apart from the blacks and claiming their superiority. In 'What Were You Dreaming?', She ironically exposes snobbery of a white lady who justifies 'Forced Removals' of the blacks. There are also black characters who due to consistent oppression, injustice and insult have lost their dignity as human beings. The black man in the story is such a victim of 'Yes-baas' system. Gordimer presents before us the black activists as well as the white activists fighting for the cause of the blacks. There are also the black informers of the police and the black police shooting and arresting their own people. Thus, she wants to create an awareness among the blacks who act against their own people.

Gordimer shows wide differences between the lives of the blacks and the whites. She contrasts the ugly, dirty life in 'Squatter Camps' or 'black township' with the rich amenities in the houses protected by compound walls and gates in the suburbs.

Gordimer believes in the inter-dependence and inter-relation between the blacks and the whites. According to her the blacks and the whites can live together happily and can have most intimate relationship. She sadly points out that the colour bar does not allow the races to mingle with each other. Her grief is expressed more evidently in the story 'The Moment Before The Gun Went Off' in which she portrays the racist society which fails to understand that the black labour boy could be the son of his white master. The stories 'Once Upon a Time' and 'Keeping Fit' depict the realm of terror, insecurity and distrust in the violence-ridden South Africa. The stories symbolically express Gordimer's faith in the necessity of perfect reciprocal understanding and affection between

the blacks and the whites. Gordimer recommends that the liberal whites should play active role in the liberation of the blacks.

### **5.1.2 Liberation Movement :**

Gordimer in her Introduction to '*Selected Stories*' (1975) tells us that "---in a certain sense a writer is 'selected' by his subject --his subject being the *consciousness* of his own era". (15). Accordingly, we see Gordimer has dramatized the history of her country --the violence of Apartheid, the extreme oppression of the blacks by the white minority, the awakened minds of the blacks, their struggle against the oppressive system ultimately leading to the liberation of the blacks. All these phases which the country has undergone find expression in Gordimer's stories.

While using the freedom struggle of South Africa as the background of her stories, Gordimer skillfully blends history, politics with personal elements. She focuses on the excessive intrusion of Apartheid in the individual's life as well as individual's reaction to the oppressive system. She explores how the participation in the liberation movement affected the individual's life. Teresa's happy home in the story 'Home', gets disturbed when her mother and siblings are arrested. The harmony of her marital life gets threatened when her husband wrongly suspects her having an extra- marital affair while she is busy in the various efforts for the release of her relatives. Gordimer depicts the harsh repression of the liberation movement. The police arrest anyone and everyone related to an activist and they are detained without trail. The imprisoned activists have to endure severe torture and their relatives outside too, have to undergo the grief of separation, the tension of the safety of their near ones. Gordimer presents to us the 'underground activists' concealing themselves from police, still keeping their struggle alive through secret activism.

The activists who have dedicated themselves for the cause of freedom have to sacrifice their personal desires and happiness. 'Amnesty' is a fine portrayal of the entanglement of personal life with the political activism. Gordimer delineates how a political activist's domestic life gets affected due to his participation in the Liberation Movement. He even could not spare time to marry or build a home. Gordimer intensifies this entanglement by narrating the events from the point of view of the activist's fiancée. This simple farm girl remains waiting throughout the story for her fiancé to come and marry her.

We are confronted with the activist characters fighting for the Liberation Movement in various ways. Some follow the violent path like sabotage, explosions. Some take part in demonstrations and boycotts. The story 'Comrades' deals with youngsters who have accepted the great responsibility of fighting for the freedom. The school and colleges have become battleground for their demonstrations and boycotts. They have even gone through the imprisonment. Gordimer satirizes the armchair liberalism of Mrs. Telford who is ignorant of her fellow comrades' poverty and deprivation.

The story 'Something Out There' portrays four revolutionaries preparing for the explosion of a power station. They have accepted path of sabotage without causing any bloodshed. Gordimer emphasizes the strong sense of attachment and perfect understanding among them. The story proclaims Gordimer's faith in the blacks-whites collaboration. The four revolutionaries are –a white man, a white girl and two black men. The story has a hidden message for the white minority. The whites in the story live under fear of being 'Something' out there. Gordimer suggests that the reality itself has become horrible. The change in racial policy is inevitable and the whites should accept it.

### **5.1.3 Family Relationships :**

Gordimer deals with the theme of family relationships in many of her stories. It shows her respect for the family as an important social unit. She portrays various kinds of family relationships - parents-children, husband-wife and grandmother-grandchildren relationships. These stories show Gordimer's concern for the familial bonds and love. She presents before us not only the intimacies but also the intricacies of these relationships. Gordimer is for perfect, ideal family where the parents take care of their children, educate them while giving them freedom to learn by their own experiences. Shirley, in the story 'The Bride of Christ' is such a liberal mother. Gordimer has full praise for Shirley while presenting her as a skillful mother who even grants religious freedom to her daughter. But this mother turns strict whenever the occasion demands. Gordimer finely portrays Lyndall's adolescence full of excitement and attractions. Shirley is an efficient mother who can handle her adolescent daughter delicately.

Gordimer is well aware of the deterioration of the familial bonds. 'Abroad' is a story of the son's callousness, ungratefulness and unlovingness to their father. On the contrary Manie has a broad heart of a father. He forgives his sons and compromises with reality. The story 'The Credibility Gap' presents generation gap. Moreover, it presents the gap between one's facial expression and emotions, appearance and reality. Mrs. Aucamp who belongs to the older generation is stupefied when she learns how her daughter is 'advanced' in 'putting on' the emotions on her face to deceive others.

The story 'A Correspondence Course' presents another kind of mother-daughter relationship. Gordimer exposes Pat Haberman who lives in her romantic world and could not face reality. Pat encourages her daughter to develop the correspondence with a political prisoner. For her,



it is a chivalry. But when this chivalry knocks her door, she is frightened. The prisoner escapes and comes to their house. Pat who has always guided her daughter, now herself could not understand how to deal with the reality.

‘The Ultimate Safari’ is a single story dealing with grandmother-grandchildren relationship, but it makes impression on our minds. This grandmother- grandchildren relationship is not of usual kind. It is very much distinctive as it is described against the background of violence of civil wars. The grandmother is not described as giving gifts or telling stories to her grandchildren. She takes care of her grandchildren in a very adverse situation. Even in a refugee camp, she successfully tries to provide a quality life for them. Gordimer highlights the grandmother’s resourcefulness, vision, intellect amidst the anarchic situation in the refugee camp. She presents grandmother as a constructive person who tries to build the life of her grandchildren by educating them. The story is narrated to us by the girl child. The child narration enhances the pathos of the account of the terror, violence and chaos. ‘A Third Presence’ deals with the contrasting lives of two sisters - Rose and Naomi. Their lives destined to develop in different directions intersect at one particular stage. Naomi, who has hitherto lived happy and complete life of a wife and mother wishes that her sister Rose, a spinster, should be in her place.

While depicting husband-wife relationship, Gordimer is particularly concerned with the ‘loyalty’ and ‘betrayal’ in this relationship. It seems that according to Gordimer, most of the time it is the men who betray their life partner. Gordimer indirectly praises the women’s loyalty, patience and steadfastness. The story ‘An Intruder’ deals with an innocent wife’s deception by her perverse, immoral husband. He tries to horrify her by using very obscene trick. Mary, the wife is very much shocked initially. But later she recovers from the shock

and becomes strong as she is going to be a mother. The 'realization' of her husband's real nature changes her into a grown-up woman. Gordimer recurrently shows such transformation of her women characters after going through the ordeals. 'Home' is a story about Teresa's transformation. Here, the ordeal of her relatives' arrest transform her. Initially, she too, is a delicate, soft and dependent woman. She becomes the determined and independent woman while struggling for the release of her relatives. Her husband, Nils who has always supported his delicate wife now could not accept her independent struggle. Gordimer suggests another reason for the temporary breach created between them Nils does not share her background of poverty and activism in liberation movement.

'A Journey' is one more story of transformation. This time a ten years old boy is transformed due to the spilt between his parents. The husband's extra-marital affair establishes 'silence' in the house disturbing happy, sportful atmosphere. The son could not understand the reason of silence, but he could realize his mother's loneliness. He accepts the responsibility of his father at a premature stage and accompanies his mother every moment.

'Rain-Queen' mainly deals with an adolescent girl's experience of first sexual relationship. Jillie has illicit affair with Marco, a married man. Here, Gordimer is critical of male egotism. On asking how he would react to his wife's relationship with another man, Marco answers Jillie that he would be mad with jealousy. In 'Sins of the Third Age', Gordimer treats the theme of the extra-marital relationship from moral point of view. After leading long harmonious life, Peter has an extra-marital affair in middle age. Gordimer satirizes the men as vulnerable to the lust and infatuation. Mania, in spite of going through emotional crisis and anguish, keeps her equilibrium. Gordimer tells us

that though Mania is apparently calm and satisfied, the husband's infidelity has left sense of 'bereft' in her and the damage could not be recovered.

#### **5.1.4 The Blacks –The Whites Relationship :**

Having witnessed the colour bar, Gordimer depicts the peculiar kind of black–whites relationship in South Africa. The relationship is of–the ruler and ruled, the oppressor and the oppressed, the superior and the inferior and the most common is of the master and the servant. Her stories deal with racial misunderstanding and prejudices. The atmosphere of racial distrust prevails in most of the stories. The white people keep themselves apart from the blacks. They live in the suburbs where the blacks could enter only with 'Pass'. The white masters need black servants. But they keep the servants only when they are authentically recommended. They fear the black burglars and terrorists. So, most of their houses have burglar-proof windows and alarm-system attached to the gates. The blacks, living ineffectual life in 'Ghetto' or the backyards of white family, almost lose their dignity as human beings. Gordimer portrays 'Yes-baas' and 'Yes-missus' system. She also describes the black people's awakened minds which make them protest against the prevalent system. Her faith in the blacks-the whites coordination and collaboration is revealed in the stories. She asserts that the blacks and the whites should live together cordially and should have intimate relationship.

The stories 'Abroad' and 'A Satisfactory Settlement' depict the racial grudge deeply rooted in the white people's mind. This racial contempt accompanies them whether they go abroad or to a suburb to settle newly. 'Blinder' is a moving account of a lonely life of Rose, a black maidservant. Gordimer presents Rose as a representative of the

black people whom things could happen but who have not the resources to make things happen. Rose is not exploited by her master; but, she is a victim of much larger political system. Gordimer satirizes the snobbish white class who defends the colour bar. In the story 'What were you Dreaming?', Gordimer criticizes the social stratification which maintains superior position of the whites. The white lady in the story mocks at the black people as uncivilized, barbarian people and their strange rituals.

The story 'Something Out There' proves Gordimer as a great humanist. It is a blending of Gordimer's utopian concepts and the prevalent dystopian elements. We have here ideal society of the four revolutionaries where there is equal distribution of work, food and everything. The four are fighting against the real society which is based on racism. Through the relationship of the four - a white man, a white girl and two black men, Gordimer recommends the perfect understanding in the society. In this miniature society, she reverts the social order by making Vusi, a black man, the leader of the group. Throughout the story, Gordimer suggests that these revolutionaries who are referred to as 'monsters' are in fact human beings. The story proclaims her faith in humanism and brotherhood. She advises the whites to treat the black as nothing else but as 'human beings'. While depicting the blacks-whites relationship, Gordimer herself crosses the colour bar.

## **5.2 Minor Themes :**

Gordimer deals with the theme of love and sex frankly and boldly. She depicts the passion of love and sex with all its intricacies. We have the stories dealing with the passionate love of a teenager, adolescent love full of excitement, perverse instincts of love, sensuous and greedy love and also love and sex as the communion of two minds through the bodies. These stories mainly deal with clandestine extra-marital affairs

✓ which are short-lived. Gordimer seems to be advocating the idea of 'marriage of true minds'. The 'mindless happiness of physical exercise' does not satisfy the lovers for long. That is why, she wants to suggest that such relationships are short-lived. Through the stories 'Crimes of Conscience' and 'Life of Imagination', she suggests that the sexual relationship should not be only physical one. It should also be spiritual. The bodies should act as a password opening the minds to each other.

Gordimer relieves us from the tension of the bleak realities of the adult world by taking us into the innocent world of children in the story 'Meeting In Space'. The story depicts friendship of two ten years old boys. 'Otherwise Birds Fly In' is another story dealing with the theme of friendship. Here, we have friendship of two young women. In both of the stories, Gordimer seems to suggest that the persons having similar yearnings, become friends. Along with the theme of friendship, the story has some moral values for the readers. It teaches us that the relationships are more important than money. The relationship and love are eternal things and we should cherish them, nourish them.

The story 'No Place Like' shows that Gordimer can give expression to the anxieties of modern mind. The woman in the story wants to escape from routine, dull life. Through the woman's weariness, Gordimer poses some existential questions.

✓ "Inkalamu's Place" brings out Gordimer's descriptive power and an eye for details. She evokes ancient and remote Africa. She laments over the historic ruin and wishes the revival of ancient monuments. According of Gordimer, modern Africa too, is mysterious like a maze and still, is capable of puzzling any foreigner. She presents the twentieth century Africa to us with its paradoxes and contradiction in the story 'Livingstone's Companions'.

In the story 'Rags and Bones', Gordimer mocks at some wrong human tendencies as – excessive curiosity, gossiping nature or interest in other's private lives etc. She makes fun of over-excited or over-curious people as well as her readers by providing literally only 'rags' and 'bones' in the story. 'A Find' is another crispy story narrating a cynic's funny trick to find his life partner. Gordimer gives an amusing account of how an incidental find of a ring gains the man the find of a wife

Thus, such a diversity of themes found in these collections proves Gordimer's multi-dimensional talent. She amuses, criticizes, makes aware, warns, advises, teaches and delights through her stories dealing with a variety of themes.

### **5.3 Nadine Gordimer as a Short Story writer :**

Nadine Gordimer is a prolific writer of novels, essays and short stories. Her status as a novelist is well recognized. Equally important is her contribution as a Short Story writer. The above mentioned themes of short stories also appear in her novels. Gordimer efficiently handles both the forms. Along with the art of Novel writing, she has acquired the techniques of the Short Story writing. We find all the necessary characteristics in her Short Story writing- piquancy, exactness, precision, brevity, unity of impression or effect. She has made important contribution to the modern short story writing.

The foregoing discussion of the themes treated by Nadine Gordimer establishes her status as a major Short Story writer with introspective, visionary insight. The discussion also points out how thoroughly Gordimer has absorbed the African milieu and psyche. She stands out as the spokesperson of the African community, promoting healthy relationships and progressive attitude as she asserts, "My time

✓ and place have been twentieth-century Africa. Emerging from it immersed in it, the first form in which I wrote was the short story.”(1975:15)