

Chapter Five

A SPORT OF NATURE

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My Son's Story is Nadine Gordimer's attempt to visualise the complex process of the male persona's growth from childhood to adolescence within the racial and oppressive environment of South Africa. A Sport of Nature¹ is a far more ambitious attempt to trace the evolution of a female persona from childhood to middle age within the same environment. The male child's growth in the former is explored within the restrictive framework of a family, and focuses on the relationship between father and son. The female child's growth in the latter is accomplished in terms of the history of the African continent on the political level, and the relationship between mother and daughter on the personal level. Gordimer's concern is primarily psychological in My Son's Story²; it is personal-cum-political in A Sport of Nature.

Christopher Heywood regards Burger's Daughter (1979) as Nadine Gordimer's 'most ambitious, brilliant and pessimistic work'³ for being 'the culmination of three decades of

racial, critical and imaginative interpretation of South African politics and society'⁴. However, A Sport of Nature, published in 1987 after Heywood's criticism (1983), can be identified as more ambitious even than Burger's Daughter. It encodes clearly, concretely and courageously Gordimer's vision of South African future as a liberated nation of cross-racial society able to overcome its biological destiny of skin through the biological and the cultural symbiosis of the whites and the blacks. In the context of Gordimer's novels published so far, the novel emerges as the most ambitious experiment of her cultural imagination which led to her choice for Nobel Prize for Literature in 1991.

The novel encapsulates the vast period of political history of the African continent concretised through the personal history of its white heroine, Hillela Capran. It narrates, in the picaresque form, Hillela's contribution of African struggle for liberation by the black revolutionaries. The exceptional nature of her life is evidenced in her constant movements through different countries, shiftings from one career to another, intimate associations with a number of white men and black men accepted and rejected, and the unexpected changes leading her from the position of being

an orphan girl to that of being politically active mistress / wife of the president of an African country.

As the title of the novel clarifies emphatically, Hillela is "a Sport of Nature". Gordimer offers definition of this botanical term as given in Oxford English Dictionary thus - 'it is a plant, animal etc., which exhibits abnormal variation, or a departure from the parental stock or type ... a spontaneous mutation; a new variety produced in this way.'

The novel is an investigation into the process by which Hillela, gradually, departs from the parents' stock or type and emerges as a new variety of a dedicated being as found in her role 'in the destiny of her homeland.'⁵ The portrayal of Hillela's childhood becomes vital for the novelist's characterization of the heroine as 'a Sport of Nature', because it represents the original stock to which she belongs. The unusual development of the heroine, in response to the political environment, is achieved by the novelist through constant reference to Hillela's past as a child.

Hillela's evolution through more than forty years of life can be distributed into five phases.~

- I Heredity
- II Absence of parental security as a child
- III Struggle to create identity
- IV Struggle to perfect identity
- V Struggle to fulfil the perfected identity

I Heredity

Hillela's heredity plays a crucial role in her evolution. Her very name incorporates her essential relationship with her great grandfather, Hillel, a white Jew. As Hillela tells the General, 'I'm named for a Zionist great grandfather'. (p. 308) Sasha, Hillela's cousin, interprets madness of the blacks in the final stage of repression as inevitable consequence of the repression by the whites as colonisers. He confesses himself and Hillela to be guilty of sharing it through their great grandfather who 'was in it from the moment he came up from the steerage deck in Cape Town Harbour' (p. 378). Hillela's life is, on the essential level, a struggle to liberate herself from the heredity of oppressor through commitment to the black cause.

As Ruthie's daughter, Hillela inherits her sexual passion. John Cooke⁶ argues how mother-daughter relationship in

five novels of Nadine Gordimer, viz., The Lying Days (1953), Occasion for Loving (1963), A Guest of Honour (1970), and Burger's Daughter (1979), reveals her therapeutic struggle to free herself from the repressive influence of the mother. A Sport of Nature (1987) may be supposed to be a continuation of the same theme because Gordimer mirrors her own self in Hillela, engaged in liberating herself from the influence of the mother and the two surrogate mothers, at every stage of her later growth.

Ruthie is a victim of the suffocating restrictions and traditions of her parental family. Pauline confesses the tragedy of Ruthie when she declares her resolution not to do with her children 'what our parents did to Ruthie.' (p. 46) Ruthie was a girl who lived in the romantic world of dreams. As the mother reveals to her daughter in their first meeting after twenty-nine years, 'I was supposed to be the impractical one, I lived in dreams...'. (p. 342) Ruthie, the most beautiful of the three sisters, finds her dreams of freedom unfulfilled as Len's wife. As a result, she leaves her husband and the two year-old daughter for the love of a Portuguese named, Wasco, who abandoned her to the destiny of the miserable life of a dancer in the nightclubs. One of the causes of Hillela's satisfaction is 'not to have reduced herself, not to have produced a

third generation of the mother who danced away into the dark of a nightclub.' (p. 228)

II Absence of Parental Security as a Child

As a child, Hillela is the victim of the estrangement between father and mother - Len and Ruthie - which compels her into the life of an orphan. On the psychological level, the little girl suffers from a deep sense of insecurity. Ruthie rejects motherhood and Len is unable to fulfil his responsibilities as a father after his second marriage. Hillela presents an interesting contrast to Will, the hero of My Son's Story, who is perfectly secure within the parental identity. As an orphan, Hillela is prevented from developing a strong bond of attachment with the parents.

Of course, Hillela carries within her the intense memories of her brief life with Len. He is representative of firms. Hillela has played and slept and eaten beside him in his big car with all the boxes of samples, catalogues and order-books piled up in the back. He has made her a nest in there, on rugs stained with cold drinks and ice-cream she spills. He entertains her - 'A suncrush for my sweetheart'. (p. 11) She sits on bar-stools in country hotels. He buys her sweet orange-coloured drinks. 'He washes her panties in the hotel basins while she falls asleep watching him'. (p. 11)

However Len's second marriage with Billie leads to his neglect of the school-going daughter. 'Neither did Billie care for physical privacy; 'Come in luv' - While the school girl made to back out of the bathroom door opened by mistake'. (p. 21) Due to meagre income and demand of privacy, they decide to hand over Hillela to her aunts. Thus, she is made orphan by her father.

Hillela is shifted to her elder aunt Olga, the wife of a businessman. Olga's husband Arthur and her three sons have no affection for Hillela. Olga is, to some extent, a surrogate mother to her. She explains menstruation as natural, and sexual intercourse as beautiful to Hillela, when the right time comes. Olga pays for her teeth to be brought into confirmation, buys her clothes chosen in good taste, and cares for her hair and skin so that she should grow up pleasing in the way Olga herself is and knows to be valued. She is rich, so she takes responsibility of her boarding school expenditure.

Olga loves rich Jewish tradition of 'parties' about which she wants to teach Hillela. It is Olga, who narrates Ruthie's/Hillela's mother's story to her, only to caution Hillela of the highly romantic notion of Ruthie which ended into disillusionment. Hillela spends her vacations with Olga's family. Olga compares her

family background to that of her sister Pauline and suggests Hillela that she will get ' a breath of air' i.e. healthy atmosphere, with Pauline's family. She shifts Hillela to Pauline. Thus, after her mother and father, her elder aunt neglects her responsibility. Hillela is disillusioned with the sophisticated upper class life with Olga and the white South African colonial world.

Hillela joins middle-class bourgeois world of Pauline, as a child- adolescent. Pauline and Joe's house is not nearly so beautiful as Olga's. Joe is a lawyer and both of them devote their life for black cause. They send their son Alexander to a school for all races as they are against segregated education. Pauline admits Hillela in a private school with Carole, her younger daughter. She believes in open discussions on every subject except sex before children. She is anxious to prepare the two girls for future as is evidenced in her advice that - ' when you do what is right, here you nearly always have to give up something. You have to accept that you won't be popular just because they appreciate what you've done' - (p. 30) Hillela learns her first lesson under Pauline who sees that black waiters should not be treated like dirt by little school girls. Hillela and Carole are advantaged by the educational opportunities at school and by home background. Pauline suggests

Hillela, 'Hillela... you know in this house I take full responsibility for bringing you up without any colour-feeling, any colour-consciousness. But you must realize that there are risks one doesn't take... Young girls just do not take lifts from men - men of any colour-'. (p. 55)

Pauline and Joe encourage the young people to bring home their friends; the only way to know with whom they are mixing. They offer dinner to Hillela's African friend named, Prinsloo. They are able to help coach black students who come in from the townships to the centre run by Pauline's supplementary education committee 'KNOW'. They shelter a girl named Rosa Burger whose parents are in prison, and is taking education in 'horrible' school. Pauline hides Donsi Masuka, the black activist who is under political detension. Joe and Pauline always help revolution through court matters, or they help them to publish revolutionary material. Thus, Pauline and Joe do their best to prove the best impartial, anti-racist parents to Hillela.

But Hillela creates some problems to them. Once Hillela and her new friend Mandy Von Herz get out of school on Saturday night. Their photograph is published with flying legs and hairs, dancing in a shop window. Headmistress of Hillela's

boarding school warns her parents. She takes undue advantage of school and hurts the feelings of her aunts. She becomes problem child to her aunt Pauline for the first time.

Pauline and Joe's work for revolution catches the attention of government. Under the fear of raid, they run away from home, with Carole. Hillela and Sasha are in the company of each other during the repeated absence of other members of the family. The physical instinct to respond to each other on sexual level binds the two adolescents into secret attraction for each other. In the absence of Pauline and Joe, Hillela and Sasha, both are driven passionately into a sexual intercourse. The family returns early unexpectedly and Pauline faces the trauma of her son and his cousin, naked in the bed - 'with the scents of sexuality caressed from the female nactary.' (p. 108) Pauline hits Sasha twice, across the face. Sasha decides to join his boarding school. Hillela spoils Pauline's ideal vision. She becomes great problem for them, for the second time. She expresses her disappointment to Olga - '--- all parents are quite positive the way they've brought up their children has produced models of virtues.' (p. 113) She worries about her future. Olga comes to the conclusion that Hillela's sexual misbehaviour is due to her heredity. She says, 'A little tart, like her

mother. I could always see it. Bad blood--.' (p. 114) Both the aunts request Len to solve the problem. But he himself is trapped in his own problems. Hillela, herself provides the solution. She leaves school for ever. She has got a job and moves in with other young people who have rented a house. Thus, she cuts herself from the ties of her aunt Pauline and uncle Joe.

On the whole, Hillela's childhood with her aunts appears to offer to the orphan girl certain advantages both 'intended' and 'not intended' by them. Significantly, the term 'advantages' operates with ironic centrality in the novel. In her vital need to create identity and sustain it in her later life Hillela is shown either to benefit by, or to modulate, or to bypass, or to directly rebel against the so-called advantages inoculated in her by the families of the two aunts. Olga's family lives in its self-complacent world of white supremacy, while Pauline's family contributes to the black cause although it enjoys, at the same time, the benefits of white bourgeois world.

III Struggle to Create Identity

Hillela's struggle to create identity covers the period of her early youth. Compelled to learn on her own the mechanics of survival economically and socially, Hillela experiments with

various options. Sculpted in the hereditary image of her mother Ruthie, Hillela's instinctual assertion of the identity is in terms of sexuality. Even as a child-adolescent living with Pauline, Hillela was discovered her mother's sexuality as the reflection of her own sexual awareness. When she reads Ruthie's passionate letters, the girl experiences the same passion being aroused within her - 'all sensations alive in the body, breasts, lips of the mouth and vagina, thorax, thighs, charged the antenna of every invisible hair stretching out. A thirst of skin.' (p. 62) In looking back at her sex life, Hillela confirms her trust in sexuality because she argues, '--- what could be wrong about it? Left behind by my mother, they say, because of it, because they told her it was wrong---?' (p. 165)

In Hillela's life after leaving Pauline's home till her meeting with Whaila, her lover- husband, she ventures into sex relationships with different men. In creating a causal link, thus with others outside the family through sex, she seeks to fill the vacuum of her orphaned existence. For instance, in living with Rey, who later betrays her, 'she achieved a balance. A balance leaving them all, the advantages they had offered---' (p. 131) Hillela's sexuality, accepted as a means of survival, marks her revolt against the so-called middle-class morality of Olga and Pauline. For instance,

when the art director compliments her for looking 'Wel fucked' Hillela 'laughed and at the same time burned with embarrassment for Olga, for Pauline and for Joe.' (p. 131)

Hillela may be regarded as one of the many heroines through whom Gordimer validates her deep faith in sexuality. As a daughter staying in the small mining town and 'born exiled from the European world of ideas', Gordimer herself confesses how her 'only genuine life of the town---was through--- femaleness', and how sexual attraction enabled her 'to let herself out and live in the body, with others, as well as - alone in the mind'.⁷

Hillela has got a job at the psychiatrist named Ben, who has twins, with whom Hillela works as receptionist. She flirts with him when she joins them in picnic. They drink white wine together. He buys her a slippery satin dressing-gown with a gold dragon embroidered down the back. He raises her salary after every six months. But she rejects the offer while saying that she will not stay much longer with him. Ben is ready to divorce his wife and to marry her. Though she surrenders herself physically, she does not take undue advantage of it.

She comes in contact with an Australian journalist Andrew Rey, who is free lance reporter for several newspapers. They meet in an advertising agency where she gets her new job. They often accompany each other in parties; drink together; experience sex. She works like a housewife - 'washing shirts, sewing on buttons.' (p. 132) Rey is writing report on apartheid, which focuses blacks side and attacks on whites. He is suspected by South African government. They decide to leave the country. Hillela solves the problem of money by demanding it to Joe. Joe solves their problem of money. 'It must have been in June 1963, exact date unknown, she left South Africa.' (p. 140) The young girl carries with her the memories of her childhood, though she leaves the country. '--- the Rhodesian boarding school, the rich aunt's villa at the sea, the old church path where children sang picking their way past excreta, the shop window where schoolgirls danced, the kitchen where a former trumpet player with the Extra strongs took refuge.' (p. 139)

Hillela is declared 'a political refugee'. Both the aunts take it as Hillela's love for non-restricted life. She never cares for social ethics. Olga denies the failure of them in case of Hillela - 'We'd never actually adopted --- she has her father --- she already

hadn't lived with us for some years --- we've been completely out of touch---'. (p. 144) Rey and Hillela arrive at Tamarisk Beach. Rey leaves Hillela in one of the hotels and does not return. She is penniless and companionless in a totally alien atmosphere. The author describes her poor dress with 'the big safety pin that held together the waist band of the girl's jeans above a broken zipper...' (p. 150) Many weeks pass in her waiting for Rey. Her watch is stolen in the hotel. There are no laws to prevent her from going down the black quarters of the town. She eats the fruit in place of lunch and dinner. Now she feels as the real orphan. The novelist significantly stipulates the comment, 'Olga, Pauline and even Len - they had never given her the advantage of knowing what to say to someone to who one owes money and can't pay.' (p. 153) Thus, for the first time in her life she experiences economical disability. She runs secretly from the hotel, stays on the beach, a totally unsafe place for a pretty girl like her. These are the toughest days for her. Again she remembers her safe childhood - 'oh if Pauline if Olga had known how little one could make out on, in money comfort, calculation, principles and respectability and stay healthy and lively, with good digestion and regular menstruation.' (p. 154)

Hillela is introduced to Udi by Christa, a beach girl, one of her sympathisers. Udi Stuck is a German fellow who shelters many of these refugee girls. They are living in a kitchen of a big flat. Hillela has got place under a kitchen table, among cockroaches. She realises - 'It is terrible, terrible to be far from home.' (p. 158) Udi's wife has died in a car accident, which is driven by he himself. He has guilty feeling of being a murderer of his wife. Hillela and Udi travel to beautiful places, take rest in hotels but have no 'sex'. Udi does not experience it after his wife's death. Hillela laughs at his 'gentleness' and compares her boldness with his strange experiences - 'Nothing really terrible happened to me, so I suppose --- it seemed awful at the time --- not like dying! D'you know why I had to leave home? --- My cousin and I used to make love. He is bit younger than I was.' (p. 181) Arnold, the lawyer, friend of these refugees, brings first-hand news from home. Hillela compares him with her uncle Joe because he is a lawyer, his divorcee wife with Pauline and his orphan children, she compares with herself, who grow here and there, illegally. Arnold advises Hillela about the people like Rey and Udi. He, like a true friend, warns Hillela from her being exploited and used by those diplomats. Arnold realises her potentialities to be moulded into an ideal revolutionary. '---

someone needs to take you in hand, my girl. You are not a fully conscious being --- . I can imagine the sort of home you come from.'

(p. 162)

Udi introduces Hillela to the Ambassador, very important person, who introduces Hillela to the wide political circle. There has been gossip about his relations with Marie Claude. Hillela gets job as a governess to Ambassador's kids. Marie Claude, his mistress / wife is jealous of Hillela, who impresses the Ambassador with her beauty. Hillela wins his kids' love and also wins the Ambassador's love, who is forty-seven years old. Marie Claude criticises Hillela's shifting of her attention from one person to another - 'To be one wife among several, the way the Africans do it - that's to be a mistress, not a wife ---.' (p. 205) In the Embassy, Hillela meets Whaila Kgomani, black leader. The inheritance of sexuality is, thus, put to vital use by Hillela to create a space for herself. It is the first major phase of her life in which she succeeds in authenticating her essential self. Biologically, it is 'blind primal instinct to ensure the species survives in circumstances of danger...'⁸

IV Struggle to Perfect Identity

Hillela's life with Whaila Kgomani, the black revolutionary from her country, reveals her struggle to perfect identity. The struggle for survival is now transformed into the struggle for meaningful survival through discovery of the sense of commitment to the black cause. The sexual identity is perfected, at this stage, through its symbiosis with the cultural identity as the beloved and the wife of the revolutionary.

Hillela is immediately impressed by Whaila's integrity. He appears so black, so defined, a man who does not laugh loosely, has a slow-developing strong smile when confirming something he is sure of. Whaila speaks for his people before the United Nations Commission on Human Rights. He talks on contentious matters in the European mode of scepticism and irony that makes communication possible between the social irreconcilable of power and powerlessness. The Ambassador introduces Hillela to Whaila - 'I don't know about the other whites in your country, but this one - we love her - she wanted to help the organization -.' (p. 203) She works very honestly. She is appointed as clerk for organization's sake.

Hillela trains herself as the revolutionary - as Whaila's secretary. She accompanies Whaila everywhere; learns the conventions to be observed, signs to be read; maneuvers to be concealed in refugee politics. She cultivates friendships at the university so that she could borrow the standard works of revolutionary theory, she could have taken advantage of, in Joe's study. The application and the shrewdness with which she studies all cuttings, reports, papers, journals, manifestos buy an intimate aside from Whaila. Hillela proves faithful, devoted revolutionary. Whaila marries with her. She gets acquainted with Whaila's notion about whites. She asks - 'Is it bad for you --- I mean that I'm white?' (p. 209) He explains that, though some whites work with them, the blacks would like to choose their leaders - 'from our loins --- it means black.' (p. 209)

Hillela asks his opinion about mixed marriage. He thinks that marriage between any colour has no importance for blacks but it is not luxury to them to marry a white lady. Hillela is impressed by his way of thinking. She studies his handling of revolution, his efforts to make campaign successful. He tells her about the military he had formed for freedom struggle. Her aunts criticise her marriage decision. Pauline, though anti-racist in

thinking, comments- 'Hillela? A black man? What, is that girl mad? Black men are no good for husbands. He'll run away, you'll see. Ah, poor Hilly. We must bring her back home to us.' (p. 217)

Hillela is pregnant of Whaila's child. She asks Whaila about the colour of the baby. Whaila doesn't worry about these minor things, he says. She delivers a black girl. Her baby is named after Nelson Mandela's wife. 'Nomzomo'. The child brings happiness in their life. They take the baby for an airing; visit beaches and dream 'free nation' for the child. Whaila speaks with baby in his language; Hillela, in her. Whaila is busy with his military-work and becomes gradually more and more unsafe in due course of time. Hillela informs him about her second pregnancy. Whaila is not in a mood to shoulder one more responsibility. He blames her - 'a spoilt little white girl without proper responsibility to the discipline of the struggle.' (p. 234) But she sees in the unborn child, vision of 'rainbow-colour African Family'. He advises her as a matured man, 'Hillela, this isn't the time to go ahead with your big ideas of an African family.' (p. 234) Thus Whaila is realist; Hillela, a visionary.

Whaila is murdered unfortunately and Hillela is saved fortunately. Hillela is terribly shocked. She gets sympathy from all

over the world. But her aunts criticise as usual. Olga says, 'she is always trouble.' (p. 249) Joe, always soft towards Hillela, assures the family about her safety - 'People will look after Hillela and her child, the organization will take care of that.' (p. 249) Whaila's murder leaves Hillela an orphan once again. The author views - 'A tragedy, Hillela is, when a human being is destroyed engaging himself with events greater than personal relationships.' (p. 251) She is patronised by the organization. She has got the identity of the true revolutionary. As she explains to the General later, '--- I wanted to get rid of the people who come to the flat and shot Whaila. I knew who they were, by then--- I never understood my life until there he was. In the kitchen. It happened in the kitchen.' (p. 311)

V. Struggle to Fulfil the Perfected Identity

The heroine's struggle to fulfil the perfected identity as a revolutionary committed to black vision of liberation covers the period from her youth to middle age. She delivers dead child due to shock. Her dream of big African rainbow colour family is unfulfilled. But she determines to land her dream into reality through her work for liberation of the country. As Whaila Kgomani's twenty-five years' old Widow, she presents herself like a

true, perfect African - 'she wore African dress and headcloth and made a speech on behalf of wives and mothers who have given husbands and sons to the cause of liberation.' (p. 253) Her present position is totally contrasted to the people, who have come in contact with Hillela. She involves herself in revolutionary work.

Hillela comes in contact with the Chairman, almost double in age, looks like her father, named Citagela the activist, who becomes a good friend of her. Pavel Grushko, is her second Russian friend. She becomes his mistress for a small period. He takes a house for her in a Black Sea resort and even decides to marry her but she leaves the Eastern European mission.

Hillela shifts to America, where she admits Nomzomo in school. Hillela works with Dr. Adlestrop, active revolutionary. She travels to several nations with him for the sake of organization. She works for refugees. Adlestrop's special position in Africa makes it possible for her to move with ease, everywhere except South Africa and Namibia where she has been declared a prohibited immigrant. Her only goal to which she advances with unflinching determination, is looking for ways to free Whaila. Her instinct to survive is changed into a meaningful life dedicated to freedom for Whaila's country.

Brodley Burns, Hillela's white American friend, proposes her. He spends many dollars in decorating his flat. But due to some problems, they postpone their marriage for more than once. He accepts her with her black daughter. He does not worry about her past. They live like husband and wife in a flat. Hillela suffers between the conflict of stability and duty. Duty has greatest importance to her. She can not chain herself in marriage. Hence she tells Brad - 'I don't think you should marry me. I've been with Reuel, on and off, when I was in Africa. I don't think you'd be able to - well to manage with that ---'. (p. 306) She does not cheat Brad. She sacrifices her domestic stability for the cause of revolution.

Rouel is the General of the armed force, black catholic African and calls himself Nationalist Marxist. Rouel appreciates Hillela's devotion for organization. They come close in their visit to Mombasa. She discovers in Rouel, a means to fulfil Whaila's dream. The General's son, of Hillela's age, rebels against his father's power. Hillela settles the matter. Both the father and son love Hillela but Hillela does not try to seduce both of them; she rejects son and accepts father. Throughout her life, Hillela has proved herself worthy of trust. The General leads the armed struggle against the white government of his country from outside. He wins the battle.

He gives new Nigerian name to Hillela 'Chiemeka Hillela'. i.e. God has done very well. His country becomes independent, and the General becomes President of the newly formed nation. Thus, Hillela fulfils the dream of Whaila. Her life is full of many ups and downs. She starts from Rhodesian boarding school and reaches the status as President's wife.

Thus, A Sport of Nature is the only novel in which Nadine Gordimer fictionalises her utopian vision of South Africa in optimistic and holistic terms. Her ultimate remedy to uproot the apartheid myth of colour from the South African psyche is, no doubt, the most romantic. Yet in the final analysis, it may be the basic remedy for destroying the virus of colour embedded within that psyche. At the core of her utopian vision lies the recognition that 'the condition which, gives rise to--- conflict must be eliminated --- the amelioration of conflict will not, by itself, automatically inaugurate the integrate 'the integrated community.'⁹

The dialectic of Nadine Gordimer's utopia 'probably one of the great cautionary tales of modern literature,¹⁰ contradicts the social, political and economic discourse of the anti-apartheid reformers who emphasize the need of 'vigorous social commitment to more equal educational environment, resource distribution ---

affirmative action programs.¹¹ Nadine Gordimer seems to fail in convincing the critics like Peterson and Ettin about the essential quality of her utopian vision. Ettin argues that 'Gordimer's imagery of black physicality is --- idealised, but not, finally, romanticised or essentialised.'¹² Petersen regards Hillela to have been 'merely presented as a possible way out of a dead-end situation.'¹³

On the structural level, Petersen finds the novelist to be insincere. For instance, he points out that there are 'many gaps in the narrative where Hillela simply disappears from view and there are inexplicable changes and moves and even several versions of attempted explanations as to why she left one place and turned up in another.'¹⁴ Ipshita Chanda shares Petersen's view when she also points out that 'all that the narrator tells us about Hillela is open to contradiction or confirmation because these are reported --- and not corroborated in almost any case by Hillela herself.'¹⁵ On the other hand, Shobha Shinde thinks, the novel to be 'richly detailed and visionary, blending facts with fiction.'¹⁶

As the novelist herself emphasizes through the narrator persona within the novel, the novel is not intended to narrativise the personal history of Hillela, but to suggest the possible theoretical

direction of the solution for South Africa's problem of apartheid and colonialism - 'the dynamic of real change is always utopian --- utopia is unattainable', but, 'without utopia - the idea of utopia - there's a failure of the imagination.' (p. 218) Stephen Clingman is right in his symbolic reading of the utopian revolutionary themes of the novel.¹⁷

The fact that Nadine Gordimer never offered such utopian vision in any other novel before or after A Sport of Nature evidences her realistic understanding of the impossibility of realisation of such vision. For instance, in her latest novel, None to Accompany Me,¹⁸ the major plot does not involve black-white love-relationship on sexual level. The two heroines of the novel, white Vera and black Sybongile, are shown to fall in love and marry the members of their respective communities only. Hence, even in the context of the totality of Gordimer's fiction, A Sport of Nature is a conceptual diversion, from the main body of her work.

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