

**A STUDY OF GORDIMER'S POSTCOLONIAL NOVELS *BURGER'S DAUGHTER* AND *THE CONSERVATIONIST* BEYOND SKEWED PLANES**

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Nadine Gordimer, A white settler in South Africa has a peculiar position vis-à-vis the racially divided society of the country despite the political correction. An Indian reader can have more comprehensive and polyphonic reading of her works. An attempt is made in this paper to briefly discuss her political novel *Burger's Daughter* and *the Conservationist* together here.

A Colonized Indian has many native selections which are not the Euro centric ones. However, one can't bypass the truth that now the Indian crucial and literary dimensions have themselves departed from their former grooves accepting and influencing the Western thinking. There is a lot of overlapping also.

Could there be an Indian dimension to the body of critical and creative writing identified by the nomenclature Post/Neo-Colonialism?

For Peter Barry, the Post-colonial Criticism has three phases-*the adopt phase* (following the European forms), *the adapt phase* (modifying the form to one's context) *the adept phase* (to become independent and original). Though India is a witness and victim to colonization of various official and unofficial histories, it has been conscious of its strengths and skills to endure, resist, co-habit, assimilate, philosophize, dream, reject, digest, and modify the social processes. India can always realize the otherness of historical mutations and commutations. An Indian can juxtapose the equation of Prospero-Caliban with Rama and

Hanuman. He can barter positions with the Colonizer. He necessarily needn't be at the receiving end. The colonizer has an edge over an Indian on one count: the Political power. A Colonized Indian has many native choices besides the Euro centric ones. The observation is that the Indian versions of major global theories of the past and present should not be subjected to any amnesia at the feet of verbal wilderness. We need to expand 'the adept phase'.

Colonialism is an all time phenomenon with different identities. The present time is vehemently alive to it. It could be a psychological condition inasmuch as political and social result. The Colonial critical expression has gained brilliant shines and sparks but yet appears to fall short of completeness. The Upanishads say that language and mind return without touching the Brahman. Therefore, experience and realization of experience at a deeper level is important. Perhaps the British decolonized the Indian to some measure by introducing their brand of colonial pattern in the place of certain colonial burdens plagued already. If we settle just in the adopt phase losing sight of the adept phase the neo/post-colonialism makes no impact on the minds of local readers. Nor can we evolve it. The concepts of Kayaka (work) and Bhakti (devotion) which are a way of life for an Indian give a lot of energy to encounter Colonialism. In the light of this we feel that the Indian response to Post/Neo- Colonialism need not be on the lines of widely known observations.

Nadine Gordimer, a white settler in South Africa has a peculiar position vis-à-vis the racially divided society of the country despite the political correction. An Indian reader can have more comprehensive and polyphonic reading of her works. An attempt is made in this paper to briefly discuss her political novel *Burger's Daughter* in the aforesaid background.

Though India is a witness and victim to colonization of a variety of professional and unofficial histories, it has been aware of its strengths and abilities to endure, resist, co-habit,

assimilate, philosophize, dream, reject, digest and alter the social processes. Indian continually comprehend the otherness of historic mutations and commutations. An Indian can juxtapose the equation of Prospero-Caliban with Rama and Hanuman. He can barter positions with the Colonizer. He always needn't be at the receiving end. The colonizer has a facet over an Indian on one count: the Political power. A Colonized Indian has many native selections except the Euro centric ones. However, one can't bypass the truth that now the Indian crucial and literary dimensions have themselves departed from their former grooves accepting and influencing the Western thinking. There is a lot of overlapping also. The commentary is that the Indian variations of the world theories of the previous and current need to no longer be subjected to any amnesia in the shadow of verbal webs.

Colonialism is an all time happening with unique identities. The contemporaneity is vehemently alive to it. It ought to be a psychological situation inasmuch as political and social result. The Colonial quintessential expression has received exceptional shines and sparks but seems to fall quick of completeness. The Upanishads say that language and idea return leaving Brahman untouched. Therefore, journey and intention of journey at a deeper stage is important. Perhaps the British decolonised the Indian to some measure through introducing their type of colonial sample in the sites of positive colonial burdens plagued already. If we settle simply in the adopt level losing sight of the adept level the neo/post-colonialism makes no mark on the minds of desi principles of Kayaka (work) and Bhakti (devotion) which are a way of lifestyles for an Indian provide a lot of power to come upon Colonialism. In the background of this, we sense that the Indian response to Post/Neo-Colonialism no longer be on the strains of broadly recognized observations.

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racially divided society of the us of a regardless of the political correction. An Indian reader can have greater complete and polyphonic studying of her works. This paper tries to have a short discourse on her political novel Burger's Daughter in the aforesaid backdrop.

Gordimer depicts the political scenes and the life of a child of a white activist in this work. Rosa Burger experiences a lot of things in life and becomes an activist. She rejects her father's ideals, which denied her own identity. For Gordimer, both the donkey and the Blackman are frustrated. *"The infinite variety and gradation of suffering, by lash, by fear, by hunger, by solitary confinement-the camps, concentration, labour, resettlement..."* Rosa decides to move to Europe.

Rosa joins the Anti-Apartheid Movement in France and meets her childhood companion Baasie. He speaks against her father from whom he had received immense help. He argues that many Black men die in prisons but the whites like her father get publicity. This view disturbs her and she gets back to South Africa to be an activist. Towards the end of the novel she falls in line with her father's political legacy, resolving her conflicts. Now her identity is merged with her fathers and she is complacent about it. But still she believes that bringing an end to suffering is more meaningful than any ideology or theory:

*I don't know the ideology:*

*It is about suffering.*

*How to end suffering.*

*And it ends in suffering. (332)*

Now, for her, the speech is silence; to go forward is to return. To end suffering is the mission on her hand, knowing well that it is to invite suffering. Buddha had similar predicament.

He attempted to end suffering undergoing suffering at personal level. Here, the ambition of the novelist seems to be fulfilled for she expects Rosa to transcend and “*gain sense of discovering reality, coming alive in a new way*”. In her second tenure in South Africa, she renews her father’s political commitment and nurses the injured black. This act of devotion to some aim and hearty service certainly connotes more than the shades of just the socio-political paradigms.

Many themes and sub-themes can be found in *Burger’s Daughter*: Oppression, exploitation, racism, humiliation, male domination, feminism, humanism etc. As Stephen Clingman observes, this novel concerns a challenge to the idea of political commitment.

The epigraph of the novel is: “*I am the place in which something has occurred*” (Claude Levi-Strauss). Rosa experiences the place, self and occurrence in her political and personal journey from South Africa to Europe and back to her father’s South Africa. Actually, she is the action field where Politics, self, and Journey interact to interpret the ‘I’ness in a subjective context of physical time and place, where she finds herself in. In this, the mystic or spiritual one overtakes the conspicuous themes. Theoretically too, it is a state of *adwaita*. The political and social contexts and the responses of the characters to them are only signifiers where as the signified has to be found at a deeper level in the abstract. But the strength of the novel lies in the fact that it is a tremendous success at its socio-political level as aimed by the novelist consciously. The success it achieves at other levels unconsciously is a greater one.

Richard G.Martin feels that the novel situates itself within a precise spatio-temporal matrix through the citation of innumerable historical, geographical and social references, *Burger’s Daughter*, resists abstraction or generalization; it refers at every point to a binding itself irrevocably to its own historical position. He observes that Gordimer changed the ending of the novel to confirm with new developments in the local history.

What Martin observes may be factually correct. The novel's faithfulness to history is significant in some way. But it definitely cannot take away the other aspects of the text beyond its frames. It can actually become a larger and universal text when it is liberated from its immediate frames.

The protagonist of the novel, Mehring is not a male chauvinist. Nor is he a liberal and fully progressive. He wants to be a gentleman. But he picks up a coloured girl and surprises all. The dead body of an unknown African is found on the farm. This comes in the way of his claim to his land. This symbolizes the claim of the landless people of South Africa over their country. The Conservationist is Gordimer's densest and most poetical novel. Its minute details and documentary precision form an intricate web of meanings where each stone, egg, and piece of marble carries symbolic implications. Here as in July's People, Gordimer finds a fertile blend of narrative interest, rich language and high moral seriousness, as well as rounded characters. She avoids explanations and leaves the reader free to interpret Gordimer's characters live in the shadow of violence, threatened by unpredictable brutality. Races and classes, conventions and codes ferment in a decoction of final showdowns and mysteriously glimmering hope of unexpected mergers and elective affinities outlined in the sands of the future. The nuances of art in life despite the social and other problems make for a bigger canvass for life. This is not to underestimate the nagging social issues that demand immediate response from the fiction. But to say that the picture we capture may go incomplete if the social issues turn a blind eye to the other things, whether small or big, objectively.

The white writers in South Africa usually favour the whites and talk of their alienation from Black Africa. In the mind of a westerner a sense of loss is very dominant under a white skin. The black writers attack the whites. The literature of South Africa is nothing but a conflict

between the white conquerors and conquered black, between white masters and black servants, between the village and the city. The history of this country is replete with wars and migration. Under the pressure of apartheid laws, the uprooting and replanting of Africans were the common phenomena of black literature. This has destroyed the cultural roots of this country and it is out of culture, feels Gordimer. Under the pressure of apartheid, the writer's potential feels hampered in South Africa. The black writers are totally ignorant of white man's life and feelings of his native land ruled by the whites. Each finds himself shut out.

When the major writers of South Africa (like Jack Cope, Dan Jacobson, Olive Schreiner, Doris Lessing) build their black here, they do so as outsiders with an even more limited knowledge of native's day to day experience than the black writers have. However, owing to the political pressure, not fiction of any real quality has been written since the sixties by the black writer. Nadine Gordimer is writer who is a romantic struggling with reality. She is aware of western man's longing to soil beyond the ambit of his own world, beyond his conscious identity in search of a vital center, a primal wholeness and vigour within the limits of Africa. As a white liberal, Gordimer has always found herself an outsider in her country. In her *The Late Bourgeois World* which was banned in South Africa and got the Nobel Prize in 1991, she has attacked apartheid

Mehring (*The Conservationist*) is a practical man of business. His sexual partner Antonia, an anti-government political activist, self-exiled in England to avoid arrest laughs at Mehring's idea of being buried on his farm in his purchased soil. His idea of preserving his identity after death is futile because Antonia predicts that the native will take back the land from Mehring's children and no one'll remember where he is buried. Antonia mocks upon Mehring's futile hope of insuring the survival of his name by passing the farm on to his son, "the four hundred acres isn't going to be handed down to your kids and your children's

children". The black African past having signs of Europeans and their culture dominates the theme of the novel. For blacks the land is a symbol of hope and the promise of rebirth. But it is a 'graveyard', a 'cold thick hand' for Mehring. He wants to plant trees that probably will not take roots in African soil.

In South Africa, the whites are enjoying only because of the labour and hard work of the black community. Antonia pointing with her toe at a flower, she is in search of wholeness and regeneration. The flower is 'a perfect mandala' and a symbol of the universe. Despite her quest of universal brotherhood and harmony, Gordimer's characters are also governed by the Blacks' feelings of a separation from the whites. Antonia does not identify any 'connection' between her body and Mehring's ego. After making love 'it was always necessary to her ego to establish the difference, the gap between herself and a man like him'. To her it seems to be bridged itself in pleasure. This feeling of separation is a call for whites to quit the country. Mehring is the most insecure person among blacks. The sense of insecurity bothers him constantly.

The novel makes use of effective symbolism. The symbol of egg is used widely in the novels of Gordimer. In *The Soft Voice of the Serpent*, a teen-age girl is quite disturbed about her future and loss of childhood. It takes a depressing form of 'egg smeared dishes into the sink' of her married sister. And in another story in the same volume, a disloyal housewife tries to cope with the fear of her husband, 'triggered by a kiss from her husband's egg-flecked mouth'. The novel begins with 'pale freckled eggs'. It is a symbol of regeneration for both whites and blacks. "The eggs are arranged like marbles" and it is a hope for both "eggs and children". Mehring likes the egg that can break and run, like the 'guinea fowl eggs' held by the children of the black farm.



Mehring stands naked before the ‘calendar with a picture of a white woman without clothes’. He wants shield his masculine dominance from the effect of time. He wants unbreakable eggs and Antonia is his ideal character as she does not come under the spell of wine. He appreciates her: “a funny thing, the simple pretty ones disintegrate when they drink, the clever handsome ones become more beautiful, and their sex comes to the surface”. Antonia, ‘shone, on wine, not the way a woman has a shiny nose,’ but like one of those “satiny stone eggs, striped brown agate that come from the desert back,” where Mehring was a child.

The author’s developing consciousness of history through her novels contributes to a history of the consciousness of South Africa in the last four decades. Each of her novels is related to the cultural, social and political moment from which it emerges and from which it, in turn, offers an inside perspective. However, despite such echo-relays in her fictional mode, it is Gordimer’s ‘split historical situation’ accounts for a deeper history of South Africa. Many have been only too aware of her paradoxical social situation—a white living in a privilege, still writing for the cause of the deprived blacks. Though the ideological implications of her works are populist, the modes of expression are elitist and transforming.

“A white man must lose himself in order to find himself” (Gordimer), in the context of South Africa’s social conscience. In South Africa, death is a ‘final bankruptcy’ for whites and symbolic of a belief that the European has no future in South Africa.

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