

MAJOR ISSUES IN NADINE GORDIMER'S '*MY SON'S STORY*'

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Abstract:

It shows South African political impact on the common people's life. Gordimer thus underlines the real picture of the disturbed family. It is a different way of assessment of South African experiences which makes these all to lead the liberation movement. She presents the political and social turmoil through these characters. Her writing expresses the revolutionary approach towards the uncertain social life of South Africa. These characters are the spokesperson of Nadine Gordimer who expresses her urge to reflect the sensitive awareness about equality.

Key Words:

Introduction:

South Africa's twentieth century witnessed a rise of the Apartheid regime movement. It was based on the separation and made apart the races of the South African society. It caused a lot of, if not a complete, destruction and suddenness on the lives of masses of people of all the races. However, these issues of racism and other sub-issues such as black identity, which might seem less important in the eyes of some writers and historians, were the mere interest of many writers and thinkers. Among them, we found Nadine Gordimer. Nadine Gordimer is a famous satirist and social reformer. She wants behind most of her novels social change and reform, and the social ills, which are known as racism. Novelist, play writer, short story writer, polemicist and activist Nadine Gordimer emerged as the most resourceful, versatile writer in South Africa. She is the notable exponent who writes on the philosophical ideason interracial experiences. Nadine Gordimer was born on 20 Nov.1923 for a family of white minorities. Her father was of Jewish decent and her mother was of English decent. This would influence and inspire her after that when dealing with the Apartheid system and the relation between racial groups in South Africa. She was eminent author of South Africa as well as political activist. She is honoured by the Nobel Prize in1991.Gordimer is the first

South African, the third African and the first woman in twenty five years who wins Nobel Prize. She has earned critical and popular acclaim as a major South African writer. Fourteen novels, more than two hundred short stories, number of essays on political and literary issues made her the acute sentimental writer of her times. Her varieties of writing explored social as well as political consciousness and reflect her dream about future of South Africa. Her attitude towards life made her more sharp and lively, which shows her increasing concern with social issues like racism, rootlessness and identity crisis. Her writing reflects the multicultural heritage of South Africa.

"I feel I have a political responsibility", Nadine Gordimer said in a telephone interview from her hotel in New York. "But I don't allow it to intrude upon my writing. The fact that my books appear to have strong political meaning is because this is what is in people's lives in my country". And making a reference to *My Son's Story* she said:

The book is really about the problems the ordinary forms of love bring within a particular context she said, "in which love of country is inextricably bound up with these other types of love. And by love of country, I don't mean gung-ho patriotism, but involvement with the time."

We think Ms Gordimer's remarks are clear pointers to the major issues involved in the novel. For one thing 'involvement' means 'commitment' and in *My Son's Story*, the principal figure (not to mention others) a dedicated school teacher awakens to his own political responsibility at a great personal cost. His activism and his affair with a white human-rights worker estrange him from his family."

All these issues are inter-woven into the texture of the story - so inextricably.

Promise to the Cause

Sonny coming from a humble background becomes a dedicated school teacher. Committed - yes committed to the improvement of the conditions in the school and of course of his students. His contribution to the general upliftment of the school is fully recognized by the Principal as well as by the Education Department. When his students (to show their solidarity with the black students) boycott their classes, Sonny pacifies them and he keeps their protest under full control and non-violent. But then there is another violent march when students set a bus afire and pelt stones and use petrol- bombs. Here the explosive situation

gets out of his control. He goes into the dossiers of the Security police and loses his job. At this juncture, he is naturally swept off and enters the arena - political struggle-which he had never imagined to enter; choices are sometimes not made by individuals, but are thrust upon them. The prevailing regime - the white enemy -suddenly transformed a committed teacher into a committed political activist. He moves his family into a city suburb where the not well-off whites live. He has thrown the gauntlet. He is in great need. His political oratory is in great demand. His posters appear at various places where he is supposed to address the blacks of all colours (now he has aligned himself with all the racial non-white communities.) He is arrested by the police and charged with instigating political demonstrations.

The Dogmatic Assurance creates another Cause

The trial brings Sonny into yet more passionate involvement (hardly foreseen) - sexual passion. During his detention, he is visited by a member of Human Rights Commission - Hannah Plowman, a white blonde, about thirty. During her interviews with political activists, she had learnt their vocabulary - how to transmit information to fellow activists. So Sonny has learnt during his underground activities, Hannah had visited Sonny's house in the white suburb. She drives her volkswagon all through the coloured areas and finally locates Sonny's house. She is welcomed and offered tea which she drinks. She is impressed by the beautiful Aila and her equally beautiful daughter, and her handsome son. She steals a glance around the sitting room and notices books of Shakespeare and other great writers and philosophers in the shelf. The compact and cohesive family so charmed her that she carried the picture in her mind like the one carries a nicely framed painting of a great artist. She felt the magnetic pull that Sonny (even while he was a detainee) exerted on her. His house-hold gave the impression of an entirely different kind of an activist - an intellectual.

She was a bold and courageous woman who forced her way into the detainees cells, threatening international action. When she met Sonny, she spoke to him in code vocabulary giving all the information she had collected from other detainees. Using an oblique and cryptic language she told him that he was going to be charged soon- Pretoria. Before going away she quoted a line from Shakespeare - Sermons in stones and good in everything.

Hannah along with other members and representative of various Organisations took great interest in Sonny's trial She was always present making notes and exchanging them with her colleagues. It was Hannah who pushed an appeal against the first verdict and managed to get the sentence reduced to two years.

Clandestine Love and Family Troubles

She continued to write letters to Sonny all the while he was in jail. She attended the party the family held when Sonny was released. She felt the spirit of joy all over the house. But she did not stop there, nor did Sonny think of her only as a white sympathiser. To him she had become much more than an outsider.

Their friendship soon changed. They became lovers; sexual passion ousted every other thought.

The loving state of being in which she had sat with the beautiful wife, the daughter, the son, was also thrust away, terrifyingly transformed into something, else; passionate awareness of the ex-prisoner host.(p.63)

Both Sonny and Hannah get into passionate sexual relationship, much against the solemn condition that Hannah had made when they first made love to each other. They made Hannah's big room their love-nest and for them it was 'everywhere'. The thrill of clandestine love is perhaps sweeter. For some time they thought that their love was secret. No! The comrades knew; the security police knew; and all the three members of the family knew. The ironic situation was that Will tried to keep the secret from his mother and sister, and the two women tried to keep it from Will. While Aila perhaps tolerated and kept quiet about it, Baby rebelled, became violent and tried to commit suicide. She could not tolerate her darling Pa (oedipal complex) with another woman, a white; perhaps she could have overlooked the affair if the 'other woman' were of their kind, as such adulterous affairs were common in their community. Sonny, however, understands Baby whom he loved more than anyone else in the family. His love-making to Aila had also become stale, a mere pretence.

Thus, his sexual passion jeopardized his family life, his commitment to it. Baby left her home first, and then the country - went away with her lover whom she married. Aila continued to distance herself from Sonny gradually as she made visits to Baby before and after the birth of her baby boy. Her attention was now fixed on Baby, her son, and on Will at home. She was involved in more dangerous kind of political struggle, but went away with it all alone and carefully kept Will out of it. She stressed the need of experts in economic war which could not be won by bush-fighters as she called the underground struggle.

In the heat of his sexual passion Sonny did not realise the disaster his affair was causing to his family. You can't play base-ball and hockey at the same time - that is the truth. Sonny was simultaneously committed to the greater Cause - the political struggle, then to the family he had so carefully nurtured. He realised it very late, and that too in a different context when he refers to Baby's marriage with a little reservation.

Marriage, these days. In their circumstances, the instability, exile, no home-what for? Marriage implies certain social structures and we're busy breaking up the existing ones, we have to, it's the task of our time, our children's time....

Marriage is for one place, one way of life.

The passage is rather ambiguous. Does he indulge in introspection a bit? What is he doing? He seems to give greater importance to political matters - these days. Does he justify his own neglect of his family? NOT for commitment to the struggle, but to his commitment to sexual passion- the cause was the lover, the lover the cause; and perhaps he thought, as the narrator puts it, that, "sexual happiness and political commitment were one."

Political Career in Menace

Sonny's sexual passion takes hold of him and he becomes almost a whole-time lover; NEEDING HANNAH becomes his heart-beat. He violates his own instilled principles, at first when at the graveyard ceremony; he abandons the comrades shot dead lying in his way, grasps Hannah's hand and makes a run for the safety of his car. His Comrades had great oratory. They knew about his regular affair with Hannah, though they had words of praise for her. Yet - But he had not told his peers-

Who had shown their confidence vested in him - about the man he had found sleeping on her soft, the man she had sent with an intimate password he couldn't refuse to acknowledge, whom he fed and guarded - yes! Not knowing who he was or what he was doing, some piece of adventurism, probably. Hannah had been deceived into.

And they knew about it, that was the explanation. He had lent himself to an action-some sort of mission that his movement had not authorized about which it had not been informed.(p.131)

Then there was objection to his attachment to Hannah:

They were men, some of them avers of women-which means they took their chances when these presented themselves. But he was not a lover of women, in that accepted sense-a weekend or a night when a woman looks at you in a certain way in another city, and you come home and forget about her. Revolutionary activities are whole men and women, only human. Such marginal encounters have nothing to do with dedication and dependability....

Sonny, who had been the most disciplined of men, knew that about her, however close he allowed her to come, and to come close to him was to come close to the movement... (p.132)

Such were the remarks. And Sonny found him cast out, side lined, though he remained in the caucus. But he had lost the key position he had occupied so far. The movement needed him for his oratorical skill; he was able to infuse new strength among his fellowmen. But he did not have the tactical and strategic acumen – required of a political leader, especially at such a time.

With Baby gone, Aila jumping the bail, Sonny was left alone with his son will. The trial of Aila had created further trouble, all the neighbours in his white suburb turned hostile and after a scuffle with will, they petrol – bombed the house.

Smoke! That was the end of the matter. What next? It is for the readers to guess. One thing - will has his 'current new girl' to sleep with, when Sonny is detained again.

Conclusion:

The novel reveals the personal sacrifices of the common people to change the social and political condition of the country. Gordimer is recognized all over the world as the representative of South Africa who outlets the rigid realities of her country about political turmoil and social segregation of the people. Her work shows her firm support to the freedom struggle of the oppressed class. Presenting Hannah Plowman, she depicts her wish about the support of whites in the liberation struggle of the blacks.

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