

BEGC -114
Postcolonial
Literatures

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COURSE INTRODUCTION

Dear Students,

Welcome to the BA English Honours course, *Postcolonial Literatures*.

The importance of this course lies not only in the subject matter that it seeks to study but also, and more so, in the sound explanations of the multiplicity of contexts, the background readings, the literary and technical nuances of the various texts under study. The impact of Colonialism on the Colonies is as dreadful as is the enormity of its history. Your journey into the realms of *Postcolonial Literatures*, we believe, will inspire an equal amount of sensitivity for our fellow beings from across the globe as it will increase the critical sensibility in you. By the end of your course, we hope and wish, you will be more sympathetic, sensitive, sensible, and sincere to the concerns of the world—both, within and without—than you already are.

This course will discuss some of the seminal Postcolonial works written in varied genres of literature. It will offer an overview of the fundamental themes, theories and dominant ideas associated with Postcolonial period and the related literature from across the world.

From the fifteenth century onwards, capitalist ideals and racial superiority-complex of the European or Western modernity reached its helm. They enslaved a major population of the world to plunder, exploit and hoard wealth for themselves. Their colonial blueprint is still widely practised in the fields of economics, politics, language and culture worldwide by influential leaders. By covering diverse disciplines, the postcolonial literary studies aims to sow the seeds of wisdom in the fertile minds of the scholars about natives and their precepts about colonialism, hacked traditions, lost grounds, hindered mindsets, bemused legacy and juggled cultural practices.

This course introduces different literary styles and ‘world Englishes’ from former colonies of the British regime. Their local histories, politics, cultures and traditions were influenced by the Western culture and practices to redefine the future of the nations in the post-colonial era. Literature from countries like Kenya, India, West Indies and Australia provide a glimpse of the experiences of the citizens during the challenging colonial and post-colonial times. With an exposure to comparative texts from different colonized countries, the learners of this course will be able to cross-reference and interpret them better.

Block 1 of the course introduces an innovative hypothetical text supposing that apartheid has ended in South Africa. Prominent South African writer and Nobel Laureate in 1991, Nadine Gordimer, speculates fictional uprising by the Africans for their independence. The African forces defeat their white colonizers in the Liberation War, in the book *July's People* published in 1981. During the luminal period, when the old socio-political orders have been destroyed and the new ones have not been established, there arises a sense of trepidation and fear of being on the fence—and the chapters keep this as the thrust area. The uneasy gender roles of Madam Maureen's ‘good boy’, July, the black male household helper in the African patriarchal system further complicates the text. In the book, the social restructuring and power redistribution after chaos pushes its readers into an uncomfortable zone thereby intriguing them to understand the complexities of life.

In Block 2, the South African writer, Bessie Head's short story 'The Collector of Treasures' is another impressive work that spans the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial era. Published in 1977, it exposed the stance of the South African women against their exploitation at the hands of men and patriarchy. The social-injustice and neglect of women in the story help the female characters to stick together in tough times. In the story, the womenfolk provide a healing touch to each other while supporting their families through their skills and talents.

During colonialism, the unprecedented changes of intermixing of different races created more problems for the oppressed than the oppressors. With imperialist motives, the colonizers displaced natives from their lands. The exploitation imbued a sense of loss of identity in indigenous people. The colonists oppressed and terrorised them to such an extent that they lost hope and were sceptical of their abilities. Their self-expressions were distorted and group communications were hindered. Colonial rulers divided the natives in every possible way. Dominant feeling of disconnect among the people in the society penetrated to the inner selves of the individuals as disintegration and decay. Language played a major role in colonization. Strategically, the colonizers enforced their language on 'the Other' (the natives) and promoted their status, making the colonized feel powerless. The dominant language was like a powerful magnet, attracting many people to lucrative ventures like civil services and segregating the society further. Their lingual divisions brought about major socio-culture changes. The units in the course precisely discuss these socio-cultural and linguistic issues.

In Block 3, Derek Walcott's famous post-colonial poems 'A Far Cry from Africa' (1962) and 'Names' (1976) are discussed. With mixed ancestry of African and English, Walcott never took sides with a particular race but singularly opposed the gruesomeness of violence and suffering of people. He uses both the languages differently, articulates through hybridity but the ambivalence creates indeterminacy in him. His native language provided his 'food for thought' and the English language was his medium of expressions.

With the blurring of hard separations between the colonized and colonizers in the post-colonial era, Postcolonial literature provided ways to vent out and cope with the psychological distress, political instability, identity crisis, loss and upheavals for both peoples and places. It branches into new fields like diasporic studies, the study of hegemony and metanarratives published during colonial rule. This course problematizes these issues.

Accounts of personal and group struggles for decolonization, rewriting of national history, and reviving local cultural identities, also form a part of the Postcolonial literature. These texts help in gauging the extent of damage incurred by the colonized population as the natives share their experiences of dehumanization and trauma. The literary expression provides a kind of writing as therapy for the authors which could help them to recuperate, as well.

Walcott has explored the concepts of racial origin, lost culture, emotional tensions, names, and identity in the poem 'Names' published in 1976. He has compared the lives of indigenous people with newcomers or indentured labourers brought to the island mainly from China and India. Caribbean Islands were like mere vehicles for the English to hurl insults at their colonial rivals like a 'diminutive' for a pigsty was 'little Versailles'. While the slaves from different nationalities and cultures were 'adopting' and 'adapting' to the languages of their masters, they

learnt to speak in 'fresh green voices.' They found emancipation in 'adeptly' fusing the different tongues and forging their new linguistic identity.

This course introduces the kind of works by writers who exposed the so called emancipators' development of linguistic and cultural bonding in slaves. It also helped them to withstand their traumatic past of slavery and to recommit to their remnant ethnical, traditional and cultural legacy in the period after colonialism ended in their regions.

In the course, the influential Australian writer David Malouf's celebrated works are discussed. The poetry collection *Revolving Days*, published in 2008, has the titular poem "Revolving Days". It is a memoir of his 'mistake', a heart-in-the-mouth life experience of the moments when he fell in love. In the poem, he apostrophizes his ex-lover and contemplatively recollects his vivid feelings. A slightly different point of view of a lover is expressed by Pablo Neruda in his poem, 'Tonight I can Write'.

Chilean Nobel Prize recipient for Literature in 1971, Neruda wrote primarily in Spanish. In his poem, the lover pines for his lost love. Through repetition, he achieves rhythmic unity of thought and expression. With reflective and youthful melancholy, Pablo expresses in plain language deeply meaningful thoughts like 'Love is so short, forgetting is so long'. The two poems reflect individual differences in lost love and different kinds of yearnings they experience for their lovers.

Malouf's poem "Wild Lemons" (1980) is a philosophical and deeply meditative poem moving across time. When offshore, Malouf is reminded of the history of his native land and people. He nostalgically recollects memories of his ancestors. 'Someone had been there before us and planted these seeds. Nourished with nature's support 'the tough-skinned fruit', the wild lemons are like proofs of the resilient and painful existence of the natives.

The paths the aborigines travelled and their presence on the island as opposed to the British declaration of "Terra Nullius" (Latin for 'no one's land') when they first lay claim on the island continent in 1770. The poem is adorned with vivid geographical details that add to the imagery of the poem. The sharp tangy taste and the strong smell of lemons transport him to his country.

The English translation of the Marathi drama *Ghashiram Kotwal* is discussed in Block 4. It was written by Vijay Tendulkar and published in 1972. It renders the hollowness of political power and corruption. The friction between society and individual based on religion, gender and class, is the dominant theme of the drama. As a subaltern, Ghashiram had no voice of his own and was always used as a means to an end by rulers like Nana Phadnavis. Rulers have used their authority to create conventions and traditions by using pawns like Ghashiram for their greed. However, the rulers got rid of such burdens as soon as the situations went out of control and proved themselves to be innocent. In post-colonial times, the resurgence of drama in regional languages revived the traditional dramatic art forms and overtook the English language as the only medium of creative self-expression. This socio-political play offered a break from colonial restrictive formations and paved the way for regional folk theatre traditions of India. The dominant themes of power and exploitation are brought about through tragedy, satirical fusion of dance, drama and music.

Indian folk theatre, on the global level, is a compelling object of a modernist recovery that has its uniqueness. This play draws from many folk traditions of drama like Bahurupi, Dashavatari Khel, Lavani, Tamasha and Gondhal. People are used as characters as well as props (like the human wall on stage). Through the literary work, Tendulkar offered resistance as he depicted Ghashiram's aloofness to the issues of power, control, race, ethnicity, gender, trauma and displacement, just like any modern man.

With epistemological knowledge of varied kinds of multicultural texts, this course encourages decolonization of the mind by shunning rigid binaries of the 'Occidental' and 'Oriental' kinds of writings. The romantic and biased view of 'Orientals' portrayed by the European writers was produced during the colonial period as they controlled the pen and the people, the sword and the sterling. Postcolonial writers across the world challenged purity of intentions and identities, birthplace and skin colour, position and privileges of their colonizers. They rose against the Western metanarratives through 'hybridity' and 'mimicry', making their way, without opposing their pasts or internalising them but accepting and developing them.

A few units of this course have been adapted from the BDP course EEG-07 as a policy of the University, with approval of the Experts Committee Meeting and the School Board of SOH. We duly acknowledge the academic contributions of the course writers of EEG-07 to this course.

Wish you all the best!

THE PEOPLE'S
UNIVERSITY

BEGC -114
Postcolonial
Literatures

Block

1**NOVEL: NADINE GORDIMER'S *JULY'S PEOPLE***

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UNIT 2**Reading the Text** **25**

UNIT 3**Social Configurations** **43**

UNIT 4**Problematizing Gender** **53**

BLOCK INTRODUCTION

Block 1 of BEGC-114 is aimed at introducing you to the Writings from South Africa. By discussing the various contexts of the Writings from South Africa, this block sets the tone of our course on the Postcolonial Literatures. The block is divided into four units structured as below:

Unit 1 titled **An Introduction to Writings from South Africa** explains key ideas that are seminal to the making of the literature from South Africa. Incidents of the past that shaped the literature from this region—its thematic concerns have been discussed to help you contextualise the texts prescribed to you, or otherwise also.

Unit 2 Reading the text presents an analysis of the text *July's People* by Nadine Gordimer. An overview of the life and works of Gordimer has been discussed that should be helpful for you in your estimation of the various aspects of the text.

Unit 3 titled **Social Configurations** examines the power structures operating in the imaginatively reconstructed time and setting of this text by Nadine Gordimer. The juxtaposition of 'Haves' and 'Have-nots' in the text has been analysed herein. The dystopic view of the text has been discussed to give you a minute understanding of its nuances.

Unit 4 titled **Problematizing Gender** provides deep insights into gender concerns highlighted in *July's People*. The psychoanalytic reading of the mental conditions and conditionings of the women in the text has been presented in this unit.

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UNIT 1 AN INTRODUCTION TO WRITINGS FROM SOUTH AFRICA

Structure

1.0 Objectives

1.1 Introduction

- 1.1.1 How to Make Sense of the Expression, South African Literature?
- 1.1.2 Communities
- 1.1.3 Colonisation

1.2 Themes, Issues and the Influence of History

- 1.2.1 Mfecane/Difiqane
- 1.2.2 Xhosa Cattle Killing
- 1.2.3 Colenso Controversy
- 1.2.4 The Great Trek
- 1.2.5 Anglo Boer Wars
- 1.2.6 Enduring Issues

1.3 Apartheid

- 1.3.1 Looking at a Few Texts

1.4 Broad Periods

1.5 Let Us Sum Up

1.6 Suggested Readings

1.7 Answers to Exercises

1.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit, we shall briefly trace the growth and development of South African Literature, along with the socio-political and cultural context in which it acquired its pretenseless, visceral and gritty character. In addition to this, we shall also briefly look into the major historical movements and events that directly or indirectly shaped the emergence of what we understand today as South African literature.

After reading the Unit carefully, you will be able to:

- comprehend the scope of the expression, South African literature and appreciate its intricate contours;
- recognize the key historical events that carved the thematic concerns of South African writings amidst colonisation and the egregious years of apartheid;
- apprehend the role of the different communities, how their individual histories ordained their stature in the South African society and how they have been represented in South African writings; and
- distinguish the two broad periods into which South African writings can be classified.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

"I believe it is important for our writers to illuminate all aspects of our life from a central point in the social structure. That is, whatever their colour or views maybe, they must accept their presence in the country as members of one community, the South African community. After that they can choose to be what they wish." (Nathaniel Ndazana Nakasa, 1963. "Writing in South Africa")

This is the first unit of the first block in your course on Postcolonial Literatures. We are going to explore how South African literature, as we know it today, gained prominence in the global literary arena for its hard-hitting portrayal of a range of intensely thought-provoking issues and sociocultural realities. Before we start our trip through the history of South African literature, let us first clarify what we mean or what we refer to, when we use the expression, South African literature.

1.1.1 How to Make Sense of the Expression, South African Literature?

The expression, South African literature broadly covers the collection of writings as well as orally transmitted and preserved narratives, in English and Afrikaans, having their regional origin in South Africa, or as it is officially known after the 1960 referendum, the Republic of South Africa. Geographically, South Africa or the Republic of South Africa is the southernmost country in the continent of Africa. Afrikaans is the primary language used by the Boer settlers. It is a vernacular derived from 17th century Dutch and has a heterogeneous repertoire of words with borrowings from Bantu, Khoisan, Malay and Portuguese. In terms of linguistic prestige, due to this admixture, Afrikaans was relegated to the level of a *kombuistaal* (kitchen language) and the affluent section within the Boers treated it and its speakers with condescension, while themselves speaking High Dutch. Literatures originating in the other African nations, like Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria, etc., are studied under the wider category of African Literature.

1.1.2 Communities

As a nation, South Africa exhibits an intriguingly mosaic and cosmopolitan lineament with a highly creolised state of its society. Anglo-Afrikaner, Indian, Nguni-Sotho and Khoisan are the four communities whose interactions, intercourses and confrontations constitute the motley South African social landscape. The Afrikaner community consists of descendants of the early Dutch colonialists or the Boers. The Boers comprised settlers of Dutch, German and Huguenot lineage, putting down roots in the Transvaal and the Orange Free State. The Anglo-Afrikaner is the preponderant aggregation of two communities with different colonising histories and takes into account the white, tenuously creolised Afrikaners and the British, united (after the South African war of 1899-1902) against the black or the non-white South Africans. They were well acquainted with maritime navigation and industrial production besides being meticulous in their understanding of market dynamics. In terms of advent and subsequent presence, the Anglo-Afrikaner community is not very old, being extant since the 17th century. The Indian community, brought in from the erstwhile British colony of India, mainly involving members of the unskilled and the semiskilled labour class as well as those from the trading class, entered the South African population

in a state of thralldom in the 19th century. In terms of assimilation and subsequent presence, the Indian community is quite recent, arriving first in Natal after 1860. The Nguni-Sotho community includes the Nguni, the Sotho (or Suthu or Suto) and the Tswana people, all three being speakers of Bantu languages and experienced in iron production. They also rely heavily on their skills in agricultural practices, raising and maintaining livestock, herding as well as animal husbandry. Having been around since approximately the 11th century, the Nguni-Sotho group is indigenous to the region and considerably old, but not the oldest. Finally, the ancient Khoisan community is composed of the Khoi and the San (also historically known as Hottentot and Bushman) people, who were respectively dependent on and therefore characterised by pastoralist and hunter-gatherer modes of subsistence. The Khoisan community represents the oldest, distinctly indigenous group of people, until at a much later stage, an intermingling with the Afrikaner and the slave communities gave birth to the 'mixed race', the Cape Coloured community, intermediate between the 'whites' and the 'blacks'.

Each of these four communities, namely Anglo-Afrikaner, Indian, Nguni-Sotho and Khoisan, has its own oral and literary tradition. The fusion of these traditions, as a consequence of social and literary creolisation, beginning from the pre-colonial period up to the present, creates the labyrinth of South African literary forms and texts in the larger smorgasbord of world literatures, depicting the multifaceted nature of regular inter-community exchanges in South Africa ranging from brutality and ethnic conflict to the expression of love and intimate bonding. Beyond these communities based on ethnicity and indigeneity, there are super-communities constituted by homosexuals, queers, cis-gendered straight women as well as political and religious groups. There have been several influential literary movements stemming from the concerns and the lived experiences of the members of these super-communities.

1.1.3 Colonisation

Right from the moment of the 17th century Dutch colonisation, with the establishment of the first VOC (*Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie* in Dutch; Dutch East India company, known officially by the name of United East India Company) refreshment station at Cape Town in 1652 till the formation of the first democratically elected government in 1994, the South African society witnessed a number of volatile transitional phases marked by unremitting violence, communal tension, discrimination, exploitation, resistance and uprisings. The colonisation of South Africa was essentially in two waves. The first wave happened under the Dutch, who were superseded by the second contending European group of colonisers, the British. So, the second wave was ushered in by the British who enforced their authority over the Cape in 1795 to safeguard it from the invading French and its allies during the period of the Napoleonic Wars (1803–1815). There was a brief period of peace when the British relinquished their control of the Cape to the Dutch via the Treaty of Amiens in 1802. However, the British took it back in 1806 and fortified it as an operational base to administer the strategic sea route to the East.

South African literature portrays the prodigious social and personal journey of the non-white populace from being subjugated, oppressed and dehumanised by the arm-yielding whites to earning equal respect, dignity and electoral right for all South Africans through extraordinary sacrifices and several era-defining

movements. A stirring oral account of such dehumanisation comes from ||Kabbo, an acclaimed San storyteller and visionary of the 19th century, describing his journey to incarceration at Breakwater Prison, after stealing sheep like many others from the |Xam speech community to feed their families, as more and more of their traditional hunting grounds were expropriated by the colonisers to expand the Cape Province up to the Orange river, from the earlier limit up to the Sak. As per the documentation by Bleek and Lloyd in *Specimens of Bushman Folklore* (1911), ||Kabbo narrates:

“We went to put our legs into the stocks; another white man laid another (piece of) wood upon our legs. We slept, while our legs were in the stocks. The day broke, while our legs were in the stocks. We early took out our legs from the stocks, we ate meat; we again put our legs into the stocks; we sat, while our legs were in the stocks. We lay down, we slept, while our legs were inside the stocks. We arose, we smoked, while our legs were inside the stocks. The people boiled sheep’s flesh, while our legs were in the stocks.” (p. 297)

Besides the representation of the bloody discord insulating the non-white majority from the white minority, South African literature also mirrors the unsettling opposition between erstwhile peremptory Europeanist and authentic, anti-establishmentarian Africanist interpretations of its past. We need to be careful though, about any academically-oriented attempt to categorise South African literature into English, Afrikaans, Black and Coloured streams as any such compartmentalization will compromise its contours and obfuscate the uniqueness of its texts.

We will next look at the themes and the issues that feature prominently in South African writings along with the historical events that influence them. But before we do that, let us answer a few simple questions.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) What do you broadly understand by South African Literature? Is it different from African Literature?

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- 2) Name and briefly describe the communities whose correspondences and transactions are found in South African writings.

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1.2 THEMES, ISSUES AND THE INFLUENCE OF HISTORY

The dominant themes in South African literature are influenced by a protracted culture of defiance, dissent and protest in the face of abuse of basic rights by the colonisers, anarchy, social turmoil and unwarranted violence on the colonised masses. Apart from the omnipresent note of tension between the whites and the non-whites, there is also the issue of the tragic loss of invaluable cultural systems and oral literatures through the obliteration of indigenous groups and communities by the colonisers. The annihilation of the Khoisan and the resultant wiping out of indigenous languages, oral narratives, traditional practices and belief-systems is addressed by Shula Marks in her article 'Khoisan Resistance to the Dutch in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries' in the *Journal of African History* (vol. 13, 1972). Such deplorable episodes of genocide and loss of cultural and literary heritage, are responsible for the proportionally-skewed visibility index of the different South African communities. This has motivated several important works from authors as varied as Olive Schreiner to Zoë Wicomb.

1.2.1 Mfecane/Difiqane

Apart from the damage inflicted by the colonising forces, there were also phases of sporadic internal strife amongst the local communities, civil war and communal rivalry, that weakened and laid the land bare in front of the predatory intentions of the white colonisers. Although the Khoisan were geopolitically and culturally routed by the Dutch colonisers, the appearance of the Nguni-Sotho abated the influence of the Khoisan, who could not match up to their level of advancement with respect to iron production and better agricultural practices. The ascendancy and amplifying power of the Nguni-Sotho brought about deep internal segregation. The descendants of King Phalo of the Xhosa subgroup within the southern Nguni group, formed two separate houses thereby dividing the Xhosa for the first time in the 18th century—the Great House under the leadership of Gcaleka and the Right Hand House under the leadership of Rharhabe. The Zulu subgroup, within the northern Nguni, under the leadership of Shaka (or Chaka), conjoined with the Natal Nguni to forge the fearsome Zulu empire. But Shaka's dominion was not too long and he was murdered by his half-brothers after the first quarter of the 19th century. The period from 1820 till the murder of Shaka witnessed the gruesome Mfecane (Nguni term meaning crushing) or the Difiqane (Sotho term), a fratricidal civil war that the Zulus waged under Shaka's military supervision on the neighbouring communities. These sanguinary communal clashes gradually eroded the foundations of the indigenous communities, draining them of their strength to hold out against superiorly armed colonial incursions. The valiant stance of the Ngunis undeterred by mounting colonial belligerence, is

foregrounded in works like Thomas Mofolo's *Chaka* (1931), Monica Hunter's *Reaction to Conquest* (1936), Jeffrey Peires' *The House of Phalo* (1981), Jeff Guy's *The Destruction of the Zulu Kingdom* (1994) and many others. The colonial government's covert prods to fuel genocides, veiled endorsement of slavery and ulterior land-grabbing ploys are bravely taken on through early works like Thomas Pringle's *African Sketches* (1834), comprising a prose memoir of his stay at the Cape and thirty-nine poems. Amongst the poems, "The Forester of the Neutral Ground" was highly polemical for its advocacy of inter-racial sexual relationships between the Boers and the Khois (specifically the Hottentots).

1.2.2 Xhosa Cattle Killing

On top of the destruction of communities due to prolonged infighting, there was also the inexplicable episode of self-sabotage of resources, described in history as the Xhosa cattle killing, from April 1856 to June 1857 and the ensuing famine. Interpreted as a millenarian movement, guided by the vision of the 15-year old Nongqawuse, approximately four hundred thousand cattle were butchered and thousands of acres of crop-fields were set on fire. The aftermath of it was the death of over 40,000 people due to starvation. Although early colonial historians had given the impression of this being a mass suicide, later analyses firmly suggest the Xhosa cattle killing to be the earliest instance of large-scale organised passive resistance. A considerable volume of literary work has focused on the domestic power struggles as well as resistance movements like the Xhosa cattle massacre. Zakes Mda, in his novel *The Heart of Redness* (2000), uses this very movement and its disastrous outcome, to polarise the Xhosa community into believers and unbelievers, pitting adherence to tradition against development driven by rationality, in the form of an ideological bifurcation. He also traces the history of this ideological conflict, as in a modern 21st century scenario, the two groups still cannot reach a consensus about building a casino and a tourist resort in the picturesque village of Qolorha-by-Sea. Jeffrey Peires' *The Dead Will Arise* (1989) is another noteworthy text revolving around the Xhosa cattle killing and also Nongqawuse.

1.2.3 Colenso Controversy

Another significant case of religio-political power struggle, that attracted literary attention, was the controversy courted by John William Colenso, the first Bishop of Natal, in the second half of the 19th century for being too broad-minded in his support of the Zulu belief systems and questioning the credibility of the Pentateuch (i.e., the first five books of the Old Testament) in *The Pentateuch and the Book of Joshua Critically Examined* (1862). His keen, analytic mind and his scholarly engagement with the Zulu culture enabled Colenso to learn the Zulu language. Being open to queries and arguments, Colenso contemplated the ideas of the Zulu converts problematising the veracity of the Pentateuch. He opposed the idea of eternal damnation of the heathens, refused to decry the practice of polygamy by the Zulus, debunked the biblical Doctrine of Creation, refuted the verisimilitude of the numbers and dates predicated in the Genesis, challenged the interpretation of biblical miracles and oppugned the long-standing conviction in the Pentateuch being inspired and Moses being its author. The period of controversy and outrage that followed, saw his dismissal in 1863 by the association of South African bishops led by Bishop Robert Gray, his reinstatement through his appeal to the Judicial Committee of Britain's Privy Council in 1865 and the first Lambeth Conference in 1867, and eventually the splitting of the Anglican

Church in 1869-70. Colenso's legacy lies in his liberal appreciation of indigenous cultures and his foresight to realise the need to incorporate South African religious customs to enable Christianity to creatively engage with South African, non-Christian belief systems. Olive Schreiner and Douglas Blackburn, in their novels, have satirically dealt with the Colenso controversy and its wider social implications.

Centuries-long intercommunal struggles, power struggles and struggles of resistance have, moreover, made it possible for the authentic South African history to surface and be sincerely heard via the different genres of oral performance (songs, narratives, rituals, etc.) as well as the literary memories of poets, folk artists, playwrights and intellectuals like Magesa Magwaza Fuze, John Langalibalele Dube, Krune Mqhayi, Solomon Tshekisho Plaatje, Thomas Mofolo, Herbert Dhlomo, Rofles Dhlomo, Benedict Vilakazi and several significant others.

1.2.4 The Great Trek

Migration, its accompanying adversities and moments of coldblooded desperation as well as its socio-psychological impact on community life and well-being, also feature as thematic concerns in South African writings like, Solomon Tshekisho Plaatje's classic *Mhudi* (written in 1919; published in 1930) combining song and prose in an emulation of the Bantu storytelling tradition, Stuart Cloete's *Turning Wheels* (1937), Francis Carey Slater's long poem *The Trek* (1938), Peter Abraham's *Wild Conquest* (1951), Philippus Villiers Pistorius' *No Further Trek* (1957) and many others: "There are no longer any vast open spaces to which we can go. There is no further trek possible, because there is nowhere to trek. The problem of human relations, a problem embracing all men and all races, has become as insistent as the problem of nature" (1957: 4). The Great Trek of 1835, undertaken by the Boers or the Afrikaners, was prompted by the search for new hunting and grazing grounds to stay out of the frequent, attritional confrontations between the colonising Dutch and British groups over territorial disputes, the hostile take over of pasture lands and the heavy-handed policies of the British. Reckoned as a landmark in 19th century Afrikaner history, the Great Trek witnessed approximately 14,000 Boers permanently moving from the Cape Colony to Natal and for the first time being able to access territories beyond the Orange and the Vaal river, impenetrable earlier due to the obstruction by the Xhosa people.

However, this emigration to Natal and the Highveld was not without complications and bloodshed. The Battle of Blood River or the Battle of Ncome river in 1838, between the migrating Boers and the dwelling Zulus under King Dingane, resulted in heavy casualties on both sides and capitalising on a strategically favourable position near the Ncome river, the Boers were able to achieve a significant victory under the command of Andries Pretorius and thereafter establish the Republic of Natal with Pietermaritzburg as the capital. The British greed for newer territories, after all, did not stop with the evacuation of the Cape by the Boers and the conflicts that they wanted to sidestep, returned to haunt them as the British rejected the idea of an independent state of the Boers and took over Natal in 1843. The weary and broken Boers next moved to the Transvaal and the Orange Free State.

1.2.5 Anglo-Boer Wars

Tensions between the Boers or Afrikaners occupying Transvaal and Orange Free State and the British empire reached its peak during the internecine Anglo-Boer

wars of 1880-81 and 1899-1902. The discovery of colossal deposits of diamond (specifically in Kimberley) and gold (specifically in Witwatersrand) in those regions had a catalytic influence as the British ruthlessly scampered, denying other European contenders the scope, to wrest control over these precious mineral resources. The first Anglo-Boer War or the Transvaal War, from December 1880 to March 1881, was marked by a decisive defeat of the British forces who underestimated the guerrilla tactics and the territorially superior mode of combat of the Boers. The socio-economic repercussions of the discovery of humungous natural reserves of diamond and gold, the consequential South African industrial awakening and the first Anglo-Boer War, metamorphosed the nature of conflict and caused conspicuous ideological shifts –from coveting greater territorial extension to seeking oversight of the inestimable natural troves of gemstones and precious metals; from power over people and local administrations to power over resources and the supply of those resources to form and sustain local administrations; from governance and proselytization to hypocritical deception and manipulative plunder.

A subjective perception of these changes and the manner of their manifestation can be found in Olive Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm* (1883) through the guileful, despicable character of Bonaparte Blenkins, projecting thereby how imperial melodrama can be unthinkably potent in steering racial discourse. *The Story of an African Farm* quite patently zooms in on Africa as the target for literary and ideological cogitation, and thereby Schreiner's approach in this novel is significant as a much-needed course-correction for several literary trends of the period, that were prone to leaving out Africa or enfeebling the focus on Africa. Schreiner's novel is also one of the early literary responses, disapproving and resisting Positivism as rationality not only invalidating superstition, but also casting doubt on subjective reason. Subsequent literary pieces by Bessie Head, Alex La Guma, Eugène Marais and others, deliberate upon later adjustments in the positivist outlook and their ramifications.

The second Anglo-Boer war or the South African war, from October 1899 to May 1902, involved not just the British empire against the united Boers of Transvaal and Orange Free State, but also volunteer squadrons from Australia, New Zealand, India and Canada arriving as reinforcements. The British forces were further supported by some indigenous South African allies, regiments from Cape Colony and Natal. Sadly, however, when the war ended in May, 1902, with the surrender of the Boers, physically and mentally depleted by Lord Kitchener's atrocious tactics (like Boer concentration camps and scorched earth policy), the British and the Boers or Afrikaners notoriously united against the black and non-white South Africans. This malicious alliance, together with the industrial reforms of the late 19th century to promote mining of the vast diamond and gold deposits, suffocated the blacks and non-whites. The situation and role of the blacks in the Anglo-Boer war is appraised first-hand in works like Solomon Plaatje's *Mafeking Diary* (1973; published posthumously by John Comaroff), and rigorously examined in historical studies like Bill Nasson's *Abraham Esau's War* (1991). The build-up of systematic exclusion, denial of rights, deprivation and racial subjugation led to the prolonged and historic 20th century struggle for the blacks and non-whites to mould their distinct identity, be accepted and treated with dignity as well as secure democratic representation. Poems by Krune Mqhayi, Herbert Dhlomo, David Darlow, Frank Templeton Prince, Benedict Vilakzai, Guy Butler and others eulogise the intrepid champions of resistance against colonial usurpation of land and property between 1790 and 1906.

1.2.6 Enduring Issues

A gamut of complex issues still plagues the South African social backdrop. Economic uncertainty, hate crimes, moral turpitude, malfeasance, outbreak of diseases, periods of food crises due to failed crops and no rain, pose serious challenges to survival and this vulnerable, rickety existence features heavily in South African writings. These do not only delineate the perspective of the marginalised blacks and non-whites. A number of authors like Olive Schreiner, Eugène Marais, Nadine Gordimer, André Brink, J.M. Coetzee, Antjie Krog, Rian Malan, Jonny Steinberg, Kevin Bloom and many more present the experiences and the perspectives of the whites, explore the construction and negotiation of whiteness, look at identity and belonging as a white in the fragmented South African social landscape and also highlight the heart-wrenching paradox of unjustified violence on the whites trying to make amends and give back.

The premise for perennial conflict, too, has been looked into, through the unpublished work of Christian Louis Leipoldt who was amongst the earliest to interrogate the nature of colonising influences in South Africa and how numerous wars eroded the indigenous population before the Union of South Africa came into existence in 1910. Leipoldt's play *Dielaasteaand* (1930) is a scathing critique of racial segregation introduced by the colonisers in the Cape, exposing how from the early colonial period, the seed of contemporary racial violence was sown. In the novels *Chameleon on the Gallows*, *Stormwrack* and *The Mask* (written in the 1930s; published posthumously from 1980-2000), Leipoldt delves into the factors and the circumstances that pushed the British and the Boers to the threshold in 1899, the rupture of which culminated in the South African war (1899-1902), the horrors of the war including martial injustice, war crimes on non-combatant non-whites, coercion by the Boers and the hopeless post-war context, rife with mistrust, animosity and resentment. Apart from all these compelling issues, there is also the question of alignment that perplexed South African authors in a cultural melting pot setting, as novelists like Peter Abrahams, Alex La Guma, Lauretta Ngcobo, Bessie Head and Zakes Mda have dealt with this by subjecting the white community, the notion of being white and the pervasive sense of unbelonging to critical scrutiny.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) How can we interpret the influence of the Mfecane and the Xhosa cattle killing on South African writings?

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- 2) Briefly discuss the reasons and the outcome of the Great Trek. How is it addressed in South African writings?

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- 3) How do the Anglo Boer wars impact the lives of the South African blacks?

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- 4) What are some of the recurring issues in the South African society? How are they tackled in South African writings?

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1.3 APARTHEID

The iniquities of differential treatment and incongruent exercise of rights based on racial identity reached an abominable peak with the introduction of the *Apartheid* policy in 1948. The apartheid and its effects have been and continue to be the locus of an array of influential South African writings. Racial bigotry, inequality and bias were already prevalent from much before 1948 and even after the end of the apartheid in 1994, they still quite noticeably afflict the post-apartheid race relations. What was striking about the developments in 1948, was that with the victory of the National Party (or the Re-united National Party) in the South African parliamentary election, the Daniel François Malan-led government legalised the deep-seated racially-prejudiced segmentation through the enactment of the *apartheid* (Afrikaans for apartness) policy, further consolidating the position of the advantaged white Europeans to subordinate the black South Africans, the Coloured people and other non-Europeans like the Asians (Indians, Pakistanis, etc.) as well as restrict what they could do, where they could dwell, how much they could possess, all as part of the white scheme to curb black and non-white social and political aspirations.

A number of repulsive laws were passed to buttress the ideology and the policy of apartheid, engendering a state-sponsored trampling over of the black and non-white majority by the white European minority. The Population Registration Act (1950) prepared the bedrock by racially cataloguing people and made it possible for the white minority government to allocate discrete rights and privileges to individuals on the basis of their registration as white European, coloured South African, black South African or Asian. The Group Areas Act (1950) escalated the segregation by adding a spatial dimension to it. It clearly designated residential and professional spaces in urban areas for each racial group as well as restricted the entry and movement of members of other groups in areas not stipulated for them. Together with the Land Acts (1954 & 1955) and the Promotion of Bantu Self-Government Act (1959), the black South African majority was staring at an incredible proportion (more than 80 percent) of South African land being totally under the control and at the disposal of the white European minority, with no legal way for the blacks, the coloureds or the Asians to own these lands or possess properties on them.

1.3.1 Looking at a Few Texts

This jarring process of inferiorisation, delegitimisation, dispossession and dehumanisation of the black and non-white majority is both chronicled and satirised by a large number of South African authors, alongside the depiction of windows of resistance as glimmers of hope. *Let My People Go* (1962), the enlightening autobiography of Chief Albert Luthuli, delved into how theological apathy and political stranglehold were together squeezing the life-breath out of the blacks, reduced to slaves in the very land they belong to. Moreover, Luthuli's masterpiece provides a first-hand account of several milestones in the persistent 20th century South African liberation struggle –the 1952 Defiance Campaign with the public burning of apartheid pass-books, the 1955 drafting of the Freedom Charter through the Congress of the People Campaign, the following 1956-1961 Treason Trial, the January–June 1957 Alexandra Bus Boycott (Azikwelwa), the 1957-1959 Pound-A-Day Campaign by the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU), the 1958 and 1961 mass stay-at-home strikes, the 1959 Potato Boycott, the 1960 Sharpeville Massacre –through the astute eyes of the 15-year President (1952–67) of the African National Congress. In the words of Luthuli, the admonishable socio-political reality required organised resistance and lent the backdrop for the story of the African National Congress to unfold, as “[w]e Africans are depersonalised by the whites, our humanity and dignity is reduced in their imagination to a minimum. We are “boys,” “girls,” “Kaffirs,” “good natives” and “bad natives.” But we are not, to them, really quite people, scarcely more than units in a labour force and parts of a “Native Problem.” Now, I refuse to lend myself to this degraded outlook” (1962: 155).

The theological thorn grievously wounding and paralysing South African socio-cultural ethos, as pointed out by Chief Luthuli, is further probed by William (Bloke) Modisane in his poignant autobiography *Blame Me on History* (1963). Modisane laments how a distortion of the biblical narrative in Genesis 9:18-27 blatantly continues to ideologically exonerate the white European colonisers for centuries from enslaving, disenfranchising and fettering multiple generations of black South Africans:

“The purpose of the religious instruction which I received was to educate me into an acceptance of the irrefutability of the scriptures of Christendom; they revealed to me that God in his infinite wisdom singled out the sinful issue of Ham for punishment even unto the thousandth and thousandth generation. This issue of Ham was invested—for the purposes of easy identification—with visual differences in skin colour and damned to eternal servitude. If God had not intended us to be different He would have made us all the same, and in His infinite wisdom He has invested with a high visibility for whom no redemption is possible; even the dying of Christ on the cross shall influence no change upon their condition....

I could not accept this faith which was demanding my obedience, was plundering my body and would not embrace; I was appalled by its tyranny and its honeyed words which taught me to seek for peace and comfort in bondage. The harbingers of this faith revealed to me that ‘man was made in the image of God’, then proceeded to dehumanise me; they taught me to repeat the Ten Commandments, with particular emphasis on, ‘love thy neighbour as thyself’, but in practice they showered denunciations on me, defined me as a savage and classed me among the beasts; there was one morality standard for white Christians and another for

black Christians, and even the sermon they preach is a colour-bar one" (1963: 183).

The seeming unchangeability of this discourse and correspondingly the condition of the blacks, chokes Modisane as he experiences fatherhood and yet is far from being happy: "...for me it was also the moment of recognition: I was responsible for a life, the confrontation terrified and depressed me. I began to brood, as my father must have brooded over the future of his son. I was a slave in the land of my ancestors, condemned to a life of servitude, into which life I had inadvertently committed my daughter; the life I held in my hands was my personal offering to the jackals of South Africa, my individual contribution placed at the foot of the master; it was my investment towards the maintenance and the continuance of the slave dynasty, I had added my share to the nourishment of the cosmic life of the slave" (1963: 74).

The biblically-scaffolded vilification of the South African blacks, the question of 'colour' and its generational reiteration through the institution of the church, to perpetuate the servile status quo of the non-whites, is evident in Sarah Gertrude Millin's *God's Stepchildren* (1924). The trope of miscegenation and its conundrums are broached, as the progeny of the missionary Reverend Andrew Flood and his Khoi (specifically Hottentot) wife Silla, is derogated as non-divine creation: "...not God, but Satan, had made them evil..." (1920: 20), "[f]or the brown people, the yellow people, might be as abandoned of hope as the inhabitants of Hell" (230), "...nothing but an untidiness on God's earth" (293) and this perverse irrationality even makes pregnancy for a mixed couple, a predicament: "to know suddenly that there was that growing within her hitherto pure body that was akin – however distantly – to these *unnatural* creatures" (275).

The point of racial purity is also invoked as "...one preferred a real, straightforward black man to a half-caste. Whatever else the black man might be, he was, at least, pure" (227), whereas those with mixed racial genealogy were disdained as "mongrels", "...worse than the real black people....[b]ecause, whatever they are, they aren't pure.... they've got all the bad of both sides.... It stands to reason...that the white in them can't be good white. And the black can't either.... the decent natives don't like to be mixed up.... So the coloured people must be worse than any one else." (123–227). The final nail into their already troubled conscience and the completion of the cycle of self-anathema happens with: "What would you do if you found out you had coloured blood in you...with that dark skin and all? I'd drown myself or something, wouldn't you?" (123).

Furthermore, the complexion spectrum is illogically and subversively yoked with the mental capacity spectrum as "[t]hey were, in the main, stupid and indolent" (19), with "a capacity for imitation" (63), unable to "...hold his own against white competition" having "...not the brain, the persistence, the temperament" (229). Millin's remorseless choice of words exposes how the limits of the potential of the coloured people, were also smotheringly demarcated: "...nowhere an obviously coloured man in a big commercial enterprise, in a learned profession or an artistic endeavour. They were many of them astonishingly capable with their hands, they made good masons, or carpenters, or mechanics; but there they ended. Either they had not the heart or they had not the head to strive for anything else. They often remained to the end of their days gamins by disposition, imitative and monkey like" (229). Ultimately, across successive generations, there is a growing sense of alienation, self-hatred owing to racially-

hybrid parentage and the psychosomatic stench of uncertainty.

The long-spun contortion of the biblical yarn of Ham, Shem and Japheth is further deconstructed by Barbara Trapido in *Noah's Ark* (1984) as she disparages the role of the bible through brief yet incisive commentary. The protagonist Alison, brought up in an apartheid-ridden South Africa but later on married to the American scientist Noah, has an illicit carnal attraction for the nonconformist South African freedom-fighter and activist, Thomas of coloured ethnicity, whose entrance into her life since their non-consummated, unexpressed longing for each other during their college days. Thomas, while imprisoned, was handed the Bible, the unspeakable depravities contained in which, profoundly unsettled him: "I have read it twice through and I must tell you that it's gripping. It's nothing but rape, incest and vengeance from start to finish" (1984: section 11). Even the piquancy and jitter of committing adultery cannot obscure the trauma of Alison's lived experience and how it affected her judgment: "There were too many things which poisoned the time and the place for us...being young in a place which manifestly denied the most basic personal freedoms to most of its people –how could one have hung up one's tender youthful conscience and pressed one's own personal causes? I believed, I think, in some half-formulated way, that I had no right to care about whom I married. That was wicked rubbish, of course, but I believed it" (ibid). The imprint of the unscrupulous theological dismantling of indigenous belief systems is undeniable as "[f]alse-consciousness was everywhere and Methodism, along with a variety of more extreme manifestations of patriarchal Victorian evangelism, appeared to be rife among black woman machinists and garment workers.... whereas once in South Africa the whites had got the Bible and the blacks had got the land, the thing was now reversed: the blacks had the Bible and the whites had the land.... As far as the women's movement was concerned, a preoccupation with the after-life was a severe impediment to the way forward" (section 19).

In conjunction with theological atrophy and moral bankruptcy, interrogating the issue of colour or the colour problem is a formidable thematic concern in the South African literary corpus. William Plomer's pièce de résistance *Turbott Wolfe* (1925, reprint 1965) quite sensationably, at its time, pioneered in its rumination of miscegenation as a possible panacea for all colour problems and questions of race, while also blowing the lid off the ugly hypocrisy in the treatment of the blacks by the whites, whose benevolent pretence had been dealt a fatal knock. The protagonist Wolfe, a British trader having recently arrived in South Africa, starts operating a general store in Lembuland, whereby he is confounded by the superiority-driven attitudinal constructs of the colour-obsessed, fusion-phobic whites and has to painstakingly come to terms with his own impotence to ameliorate the situation:

"There would be conflict between myself and the white; there would be conflict between myself and the black. There would be the unavoidable question of colour. It is a question to which every man in Africa, black, white, yellow, must provide his own answer" (1965: 68).

The inevitability of this question is apposed with the experience of being-in-Africa from the pivotal fairground scene, which structures Wolfe's subsequent experiences: "Round us as we talked circulated a crowd of black, white and coloured people: English, Dutch, Portuguese, non-descript were the whites; Bantu, Lembu, Christianized and aboriginal, Mohammedan negroes were the blacks; and the coloureds were all colours and all races fused. It came upon me suddenly in that harsh polyglot gaiety that I was living in Africa; that there is a question of

colour”(62).The prolific influence of *Turbott Wolfe*, specifically in propelling the evolution of the South African novel, is succinctly elucidated by Laurens van der Post in the Introduction to the novel's 1965 edition: “For the first time in our literature, with *Turbott Wolfe*, a writer takes on the whole of South African life. Suddenly, the barriers are down and imagination at last keeps open house in a divided land. The black people of South Africa are no longer just a problem...Nor, in*Turbott Wolfe*, are the black people used merely as an incitement to adventure and romance. They take their own place in their own rights as individual human beings.”

1.4 BROAD PERIODS

Beyond these pressing issues and ideological undercurrents, South African literature is broadly about two main periods:

(i) the period before 1960, characterised by the socio-political clout and intellectual arrogance of the whites with slowly flourishing literary initiatives by the blacks as well as nascent recognition and acknowledgement of their literary prowess;

and (ii) the period after 1960, marked by a surge of the blacks as literary fountainheads and stalwarts, with the white authors too demurring to the scandalously wrongful apartheid.

We have already discussed the crucial historical events of the period before 1960 and elaborated on how they sculpted the thematic concerns of South African writings of that period and beyond. The spirited literary initiatives in the pre-1960 period rose to a crescendo in the 1950s with the publication of *Drum*, a magazine that thoroughly transformed the manner of representation of the blacks and the coloured in the South African society, so much so that *Drum* became the most popularly read magazine and was reported about in the TIME magazine's December 1952 article, “South African Drumbeats” which extolled its brilliant reception, as *Drum* had quickly become the mouthpiece for the grievances of the informed urban blacks and a springboard for burgeoning African nationalist movements:”In the teeming Negro and coloured shanty towns of Johannesburg, where newspapers and magazines are a rarity, a truck piled high with magazines rumbled through the unpaved streets last week. Wherever it stopped, hundreds of people swarmed about it, buying the magazine:

“The African Drum. A Life-size monthly, Drum has in less than three years become the leading spokesman for South Africa's 9,000,000 Negro and colored population. In South Africa, torn by racial strife, Drum's popularity is easily explained.”

The second period, i.e., the period after 1960, entails the exhausting socio-political haul for the liberation of all South Africans, spanning thirty-four years. After the Sharpeville Massacre of 1960, in which 69 unarmed, non-violent protesters were killed and 180 seriously injured in an unprovoked attack by the police using live ammunition rounds, the nature of resistance underwent a radical change with intensification of the process of arming the protestors and integrating guerrilla units like the Umkhonto we Sizwe (abbreviated as MK) into the African National Congress. The turbulence, antagonism and suspicion-laden atmosphere that prevailed never allowed any inter-communal stability and amity to materialise, the irrepressible nature of socio-psychological scarring across generations

negating even further any such scope. Ergo, Desmond Tutu's vision of a 'rainbow nation', as evinced in *The Rainbow People of God* (1995), in the post-apartheid era, never really had the soil suitable enough for its germination. The unrealizability of harmonious co-existence preceding the sense of despair and disillusionment with the lure of unabandonable existential hope, occurs as the characteristic crux in South African writings of the period after 1960, specially in post-apartheid literature. A diverse range of works in this period like, Miriam Tlali's *Muriel at Metropolitan* (1975) (retitled as *Between Two Worlds*), Lewis Nkosi's *Mating Birds* (1986), Breyten Breytenbach's *The True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist* (1985) and *Memory of Snow and of Dust* (1987), John Maxwell Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980), *Life & Times of Michael K.* (1983) and *Disgrace* (1999), Ivan Vladislavic's *The Folly* (1993), Achmat Dangor's *Kafka's Curse* (1997) and *Bitter Fruit* (2001), evoke myriad emotional responses leading to an overwhelming, yet curious, juxtaposition of ebullience and despair.

The period after 1960 is also vital because of the copious international attention garnered by the absorbing works of authors like Nadine Gordimer, John Coetzee, Alan Paton, André Brink and others. Nadine Gordimer and John Maxwell Coetzee were honoured with the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1991 and 2003 respectively for their illustrious contributions to South African literature. In fact, Gordimer is the first white African woman to be awarded the Nobel Prize and the first South African to get it in the field of Literature.

In this Block, we are going to study one of Nadine Gordimer's most famous novels – *July's People*, first published in 1981 and banned by the apartheid-era government in South Africa for its depiction of a fictional civil war, the vicious overthrow of the apartheid state by armed black South Africans and the reversal of roles.

Now, that we have an idea about South African writings and the historical influences shaping their present state, we will move to the next Unit to discuss the various aspects of the novel *July's People*.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) How did the apartheid policy affect the black and the coloured South Africans?

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- 2) On what ground was the apartheid justified by the white European minority? How do South African writings throw light on this aspect?

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- 3) Briefly talk about the two main periods under which South African writings can be broadly grouped.

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1.5 LET US SUM UP

In this introductory Unit, we have provided a brief overview of the history and the typical concerns of South African writings across the 19th and the 20th century. We have given you:

- an idea of how rich and multitudinous the inventory of South African writings is, with a number of indigenous communities and their distinct literary traditions contributing to it.
- a bird's eye view of the cardinal historical events and turning points across the period of colonisation, the apartheid and the South African struggle for liberation, all of which heavily influenced the theme, style and characterisation of South African writings.
- a taste of the explicitly honest lexical choices and brutal mode of narration by looking at certain quotations from salient texts.
- an understanding of the two broad periods in South African literature, i.e., before 1960 and after 1960, and how they differed.

Before heading over to the next Unit, please make sure that you have answered all the questions given in 'Check Your Progress'. This will help you revisit the events and issues we have already talked about while giving you some practice in expressing yourself in your own words. We hope that you have enjoyed learning about South African writings and are excited about reading *July's People*.

1.6 SUGGESTED READINGS

If you would like to read more about South African writings, you may consult:

Michael Chapman, *South African Literatures* (London: Longman, 1996)

Rita Barnard, *Apartheid and Beyond: South African Writers and the Politics of Place* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007)

Guy Butler, *A Book of South African Verse* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1959)

David Attwell & Derek Attridge, *The Cambridge History of South African Literature* (Cambridge University Press, 2012)

These are only suggested as additional readings and are in no way compulsory.

1.7 ANSWERS TO EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

For all answers refer to 1.1

Check Your Progress 2

For all answers refer to 1.2

Check Your Progress 3

For all answers refer to 1.3 and 1.4

UNIT 2 READING THE TEXT

Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Nadine Gordimer: Life and Works
- 2.3 Reading *July's People*
 - 2.3.1 Analysing the Plot
 - 2.3.2 Narrative Framework
- 2.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.5 Suggested Readings
- 2.6 Answers

2.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit, based on our understanding of the influence of colonisation, inter-communal violence, repugnant policies like the apartheid and movements of resistance, in shaping South African writings and their typical concerns, we are going to primarily discuss the themes, plot, narrative technique and characterisation of *July's People*. We will realise that in her creditable attempt to seek a sincere, plausible voice to articulate the lived experiences and histories of deprivation of the marginalised and systemically excluded South African blacks, Gordimer in *July's People* stirring projects the possibility of the once-incapacitated subaltern, being able to reclaim the space to refute and authoritatively engage with the whites, as power hierarchies implode and long-established roles are reversed in the backdrop of a raging civil war.

After reading the Unit carefully, you will be able to:

- outline the life and works of Nadine Gordimer;
- understand the intricacies of the plot of *July's People*;
- comment on the roles of the major and the minor characters in the novel; and
- appreciate the nuances of the novel's narrative framework.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

“As a writer and as a human being, Nadine Gordimer responded with exemplary courage and creative energy to the great challenge of her times, the system of apartheid unjustly imposed and heartlessly implemented on the South African people. Looking to the great realist novelists of the 19th century as models, she produced a body of work in which the South Africa of the late 20th century is indelibly recorded for all time.”(John Maxwell Coetzee)

This is the second Unit of the first block in your course on Postcolonial Literatures. In the previous Unit, we have briefly discussed the nature, concerns and trajectory of South African writings through the 19th and the 20th century. We have also looked

at the different communities along with their historical roles in determining the course of South African writings. In this Unit, we are going to study the novel *July's People*, written by Nadine Gordimer, the bulk of whose works belong to the period after 1960.

July's People, first published in 1981, is Gordimer's eighth novel and one of her most influential works, set in the volatile context of the Soweto uprising (1976) and the Elsie's River Killings (1980) of the immediate past as well as the sombre atmosphere engendered by the post-Sharpeville (1960) state of resistance. The novel was immediately banned in South Africa by the erstwhile National Party-government for its audacious and vexing portrayal of sweeping sociodynamic ripples and upheaval of power equations in the eventuality of a violent toppling of the apartheid regime. Gordimer's troubling prophetic vision was also motivated by promising geopolitical developments in the vicinity, with the declaration of independence in neighbouring countries like Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Angola.

July's People, along with several other works like *A Guest of Honour* (1970), *The Conservationist* (1974), *Burger's Daughter* (1979), *My Son's Story* (1990), *The House Gun* (1998), corroborates Gordimer's position as one of the most illustrious writers to emerge in the 20th century. Clearly oriented as anti-apartheid, *July's People* is a compelling piece of resistance literature that challenges convenient assumptions on race, identity, power and gender, while deliberately dispensing with shells of indifference in the envisaged incendiary scenario engulfing all communities across the country.

The title, too, adds to the unease by subjecting the socially advantaged identities of the liberal Smaleses to be obliterated in an imagined, yet highly probable, reality; a reality where the lofty pedestals of the whites have crumbled in front of the avalanche of black revolutionary onslaughts; in this palpability, a liberal white family slowly loses its markers of privilege and superiority, and their recognition is now attached to their black servant, Mwawate, whose real name had been inert under the foreign sobriquet July, mirroring the coma that had rendered the black majority supine and destitute in their own country. In this radical twist of fate, the Smaleses become July's 'people', dependent on July, for shelter, protection and survival, putting July, for the first time, in a position to claim responsibility over the Smaleses. The nub of Gordimer's prognosis is this dreaded relegation, even the hypotheticality of which, was too unsettling for the apartheid government.

Before analysing the plot and looking at the different characters in *July's People*, we will briefly talk about Nadine Gordimer, her personal life and her invaluable contribution to not just South African literature but World literature.

2.2 NADINE GORDIMER: LIFE AND WORKS

Born in the mining town of Springs, near Johannesburg in South Africa, on the 20th of November, 1923, Nadine Gordimer's early awareness of issues of racial inequality and political subjugation, was due to the formative influence of her European Jewish immigrant parents, Hannah Myers and Isaac Wolf Gordimer, as well as the first-hand teenage experience of witnessing a bizarre police raid on her family home to confiscate letters and diaries from a servant's room. Being

vulnerable and having no choice but to weather the ubiquitous overlay of violence muffling voices of resentment, are common to her characters, whom she brings to life with a rare degree of artistic sincerity and integrity.

Schooled in a Catholic convent till the age of 10, she spent her early adolescent years, due to a minor cardiac ailment, largely at home, in the company of acclaimed texts by literary giants like D H Lawrence, E M Forster, M Proust, L N Tolstoy, F M Dostoevsky and others. This experience, in the words of Gordimer herself, of “living the life of other people in books”¹, pushed her firmly into the world of books and was responsible to a great extent for her introversion as well as her preference to lead a private life away from public gaze. Being intimately bonded with books, she acquired a stupendous command over the English language and its nuances. She started writing just at the age of nine and had her first publication on 13th June, 1937, in the form of the short story, “The Quest for Sun Gold”² in *The Sunday Express*, the jubilation of which was unparalleled for her as she aptly reminisces many years later: “to see this story in print –and they didn’t know it had been written by a 15-year-old girl –there’s never been a moment like it. I don’t think even the Nobel Prize was as thrilling”³.

Through her extensive reading and scholarly engagement, Nadine Gordimer transformed the period of her home isolation and dearth of physical activity into one of intellectual enrichment and earnest forays into the realm of writing. Her style, sensitivity and acumen were taken note of and her short stories kept appearing in South African magazines with the eventual release of her first collection of short stories, *Face to Face* in 1949. In between, she was an occasional student at the University of Witwatersrand in 1946, studying English literature and language. Although she did not complete her course at that time, she was conferred with an honorary Doctorate by the university, later in life, in 1984.

She became involved in the 1950s’ Sophia town renaissance, placed in a historically critical interval between the 1952 Defiance Campaign and the 1960 Sharpeville Massacre. Together with Nathaniel Nakasa as the founding editor, she oversaw the glorious struggle of the Quarterly Literary and Cultural Review, *The Classic* (started in 1963) as a crucial member of its Board of Trustees and Editorial Advisers, in a period rife with trauma, cynicism and muzzling of anti-apartheid voices, noticeably in the form of proscription of black South African literature.

Nadine Gordimer was resolute in her opposition to the debilitating apartheid, actively participating in demonstrations, delivering speeches and becoming the literary conduit for the silenced black South African writers, whose spirits she renewed as she remained true to her commitment to black liberation. Beyond her subjective engagement with the issue of apartheid, she was a founder member of the Congress of South African Writers and was associated with the African National Congress while it was still outlawed. Her entry into politics as a partisan and her long connection with the African National Congress, which she made

¹ Quoted from “A writer’s life: Nadine Gordimer” as per her interaction with Marianna Macdonald and published in *The Telegraph* on 4th June, 2003.

² As recorded in the entry titled *Gordimer mss., 1934-1991*, available electronically at Archives Online of Lilly Library, Indiana University. The title of her first published short story is widely miscited as “The Quest for Seen Gold”.

³ Quoted from “A writer’s life: Nadine Gordimer”, *The Telegraph*, 4th June, 2003.

official in 1990, were triggered by the barbaric 1960 Sharpeville shootings and the incarceration of her "closest female friend"⁴ Bettie du Toit, who had a remarkable influence in shaping her socio-political awareness: "...face-to-face, fist-to-fist reality of apartheid politics and practice came from the intimate presence of Bettie..."⁵.

Although she lived through a period of intense political turmoil and intercommunal violence, and her anti-apartheid stance made her susceptible to state-sponsored punitive measures, she never sought refuge in Europe or the United States of America, continuing to stay in South Africa, amidst the very people whose personal lives and regular ordeals found penetrating expression in her writings. Her political activism and writings edified Nelson Mandela about "white liberal sensibility"⁶. She worked closely with Mandela's lawyers during the 1963 Rivonia Trial, edited Mandela's 1964 "I am prepared to die" speech and testified at the 1986 Delmas trial to protect 22 African National Congress members. In due course of time, Nadine Gordimer entered the circle of Mandela's closest friends and was one of the first he wished to meet when set free from Victor Verster prison in 1990.

Over the years, she received countless awards, honorary doctorates and international accolades. She became the first South African writer to win the Booker prize in 1974 for *The Conservationist* and subsequently, the first South African writer to win the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1991. Her death in 2014 has left an unfillable void in the global literary arena.

Selected Works

One-act plays

"The First Circle", *Six One-act Plays by South African Authors*, Pretoria: JL van Schaik, 1966.

Short Story Collections

Face to Face. Johannesburg: Silver Leaf Books, 1949.

The Soft Voice of the Serpent. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1952.

Six Feet of the Country. London: Gollancz, 1956.

Friday's Footprint. London: Gollancz, 1960.

Not for Publication. London: Gollancz, 1965.

Livingstone's Companions. New York: The Viking Press, 1971.

Selected Stones. London: Jonathan Cape, 1975.

A Soldier's Embrace. London: Jonathan Cape, 1980.

Something Out There. London: Jonathan Cape, 1984.

A Correspondence Course and Other Stories. Helsinki: Eurographica, 1986.

Crimes of Conscience: Selected Short Stories. Portsmouth: Heinemann International, 1991.

Jump and Other Stories. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1991.

Why Haven't You Written?: Selected Stories 1950-1972. New York: Penguin,

⁴ Quoted from the article "The Life of a Revolutionary for Freedom" written by Nadine Gordimer for News 24, dated 19th May, 2012.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Mandela, Nelson. *Long Walk to Freedom*. Little, Brown and Company, 1994.

1992.

Loot and Other Stories. London: Jonathan Cape, 2003.

Beethoven Was One-Sixteenth Black and Other Stories. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2007.

Novels

The Lying Days. London: Gollancz, 1953.

A World of Strangers. London: Gollancz, 1958.

Occasion for Loving. London: Gollancz, 1963.

The Late Bourgeois World. London: Gollancz, 1966.

A Guest of Honour. New York: The Viking Press, 1970.

The Conservationist. London: Jonathan Cape, 1974.

Burger's Daughter. New York: The Viking Press, 1979.

July's People. New York: The Viking Press, 1981.

A Sport of Nature. New York: A.A. Knopf, 1987.

My Son's Story. London: Bloomsbury, 1990.

None to Accompany Me. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1994.

The House Gun. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1998.

The Pickup. London: Bloomsbury, 2001.

Get a Life. London: Bloomsbury, 2005.

No Time Like the Present. London: Bloomsbury, 2012.

Non-fiction, Essays, Reporting

The Black Interpreters: Notes on African Writing. Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1973.

What Happened to Burger's Daughter or How South African Censorship Works. Johannesburg: Taurus Publication, 1980.

The Essential Gesture: Writing, Politics and Places. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1988.

Writing and Being: The Charles Eliot Norton Lectures. Cambridge: Harvard University press, 1995.

Living in Hope and History: Notes from Our Century. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1999.

Edited volumes

Telling Tales. New York: Picador, 2004.

Telling Times: Writing and Living, 1950–2008. London: Bloomsbury, 2010.

We will now begin our discussion of the various aspects of the novel *July's People*. But before doing that, we want to remind you to carefully read all the sections and answer the questions given in 'Check Your Progress'. This will help you revisit what has already been discussed and give you some practice in expressing

yourself in your own words. We do hope you enjoy working through this Unit.

Check Your Progress 1

- 4) How did Nadine Gordimer develop her interest in writing?

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- 5) Briefly discuss Gordimer's role as an anti-apartheid activist and author.

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2.3 READING *JULY'S PEOPLE*

July's People is set in a transitional period marked by political turbulence and clamour for a thorough social revamp. The intrinsically racist apartheid policy, though still functional, had lost all validity and was nearing its end along with the very regime, which had sanctimoniously brought into force such a disgraceful policy. However, the nature and character of the regime to come cannot also be clearly mapped in this interlude; the premise for the formation of a new government is explicit but its manner and aftermath are speculative. It is in this capricious context that Gordimer foresees an extremist insurgency by the blacks, pushed to the precipice, and how the resultant collapse of the apartheid regime metamorphoses the existing social equations between the non-whites and the whites. Correspondingly, Gordimer resorts to Gramsci's sagacity in the novel's epigraph: "The old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum there arises a great diversity of morbid symptoms". But the interregnum here is not simply socio-political; it is also personal and ideological. Even for Gordimer as an author, the writing of *July's People* is in that transitional phase of her life when she ceased to be the lighthouse of white liberal perspectives and consolidated her position as a staunch, unyielding proponent of racial justice as well as anti-apartheid activism.

In her essay 'Living in the Interregnum' in 1982, a year after the publication of *July's People*, Gordimer bluntly confesses: "I was a coward and no doubt shall often be one again, in my actions and statements as a citizen of the interregnum; it is a place of shifting ground, forecast for me in the burning slag heaps of coal mines we children used to ride across with furiously pumping bicycle pedals and flying hearts, in the Transvaal town where I was born". Gordimer's admission is not only indicative of her seriously heeding and engaging with locality, but it is also suggestive of how the mining town of Springs furnished the mental premise for realising the sort of change chronicled in the novel. Moreover, *July's People* is momentous as it evinces a paradigm shift in Gordimer's characterisation, specifically in the stance of her white protagonists. The novel traces a clear swerve

in the white protagonist's allegiance from the overpowered whites to the in-control blacks, something which can be interpreted by readers as circumstantial rather than intentional. Before *July's People*, Gordimer's novels situated white female protagonists in their private lives with privileged appurtenances while identifying with the blacks at the politico-intellectual level.

2.3.1 Analysing the Plot

Although *July's People* was first published in June, 1981, approximately thirteen years before the end of the apartheid which Gordimer sensationally predicts without being specific about its manner, the plot of the novel brilliantly anticipates the new socio-political realities that would make it imperative for the whites, unaccustomed to this state of powerlessness, to go through a baptism by fire. This realignment and remaking, however agonising, was the need of the hour as in Gordimer's own words, "we whites have been brought up on so many lies; we've been led up the garden path, or sold down the river by our ancestors in South Africa. In other words, whites have developed a totally unreal idea of how they ought to live, of their right to go on living in that country. Consequently, they must undergo a long process of shedding illusions in order fully to understand the basis for staying in South Africa. Unfortunately, there aren't enough people who have the will to attempt this. It's very hard to peel yourself like an onion, without producing a lot of tears in the process. Yet, it is absolutely necessary for anybody who wants to stay."⁷

Despite how wuthering the political climate was and how much pent-up social frustration was aggregated, *July's People* does not shock readers through the depiction of any form of ugly, visceral brutality, rather the undoing is ethico-political, socio-cultural as well as material in the form of gradual loss of all the mechanical tokens of power. Gordimer's literary acumen is unquestionable as although she treads tricky territory, she is wise enough to not offer any exact outline to the dissolution of the apartheid and thereby deny the white regime's racist propaganda the chance to exaggerate any sort of fallacy about how black majority rule would be baleful and dismal.

The story of the novel is hinged on a futuristic sense and quite interestingly it is sensory bewilderment that grips us, as we, as readers, enter the world of Maureen, Bamford and July, the protagonist-trio, of which Maureen "is the pivot"⁸. Their associations undergo an iconoclastic revision in the grossly unfamiliar setting of July's mother's hut as Maureen Smales, Bamford Smales and their children Victor, Gina and Royce are forced to flee Johannesburg, move north and seek shelter in the village of their black servant July, in the event of an extremist Black revolution and ensuing murderous riots that brutally unseat the apartheid government. The novel is set in motion quite abruptly with July's question, "You like to have some cup of tea?—". Readers gather after a while that it is in fact the morning after a physically tiring and mentally draining three-day journey through bush country, with the Smaleses hiding on the floor of the truck driven mainly by Bamford. Such drastic measures became exigent in the grim context of transportation hubs like airports and ports being under siege and white people

⁷ Quoted from the 1982 two-part interview *A Conversation with Nadine Gordimer* by Robert Boyers, Clark Blaise, Terence Diggory and Jordan Elgrably.

⁸ Quoted from "An Interview with Nadine Gordimer: Harare, February 14, 1992" by Biodun Jeyifo.

being attacked on sight. Their desperation and panic are evident in the hasty manner in which they had to pack their belongings, forgetting and being unable to include several things in the process. After the exhausting and tense transit to July's village, the psychophysiological brunt of this flight is evident as Gordimer places the Smaleses in the zone of 'sensory dislocation' and 'delirium'. Beyond the literal, Gordimer's intention here is to deliberately push readers into an unfamiliar, inconsistent and phantasmagorical domain, to enable them to grasp the ramifications of landing in the terra incognita of an unprivileged existence, where the uninitiated liberal whites like the Smaleses need to undertake a painstaking array of adjustments to be able to accept the changed reality and thereby inhabit their new home. In fact, Gordimer's candid engagement with these perspectival and ideological changes is discernible from her own words: "...to work with blacks not for blacks –no patronizing proxy –in a productive and progressive way..." as "...it became necessary for young whites to move in among blacks, to offer their expertise..." and "...stepping out of leadership as soon as people could take over themselves".⁹ Gordimer puts this across unambiguously to show "that there are some whites who, one way or another, are looking for ways to prepare themselves, to live differently under a black majority government in a non-racial state"¹⁰. For the liberal Smaleses, acquainted with the ground reality and decades-long simmering tension, arguably things unfold distressfully fast and they are unprepared to confront the inevitable, let alone live it. This unreadiness is construed through the malaise, the 'delirium' and the flashbacks that continuously pit vivid glimpses of their past against the present.

Having to come to terms with the unconventional structure of July's opening question is the very first cue to a multifaceted adjustment process. The question perplexes readers not only due to an unsound quantification of what July is offering but also due to the absence of a fathomable context. Parallel to Maureen's jerky egress from the state of slumber, roused by July's question, we as readers too are jolted without caution into an unfamiliar space where we falter and flounder as we gradually figure out its contours and intricacies. This sense of unfamiliarity is set in contrast to the sense of familiarity in the way July still performs his role of the Smaleses' servant, "that day for them as his kind has always done for their kind"¹¹. The opposition between the known and the unknown, the experienced and the unexperienced finds recurrent reinforcement, the first of which deconstructs the etiquette of door knocking as Gordimer prudently makes her readers aware of the plethora of changes surrounding the displaced Smaleses, whereby such customs and formalities lose relevance and practicality:

"The knock on the door

no door, an aperture in thick mud walls, and the sack that hung over it looped back for air...

No knock; but July, their servant, their host, bringing two pink glass cups of tea..."¹²

⁹ Quoted from the 1982 two-part interview *A Conversation with Nadine Gordimer* by Robert Boyers, Clark Blaise, Terence Diggory and Jordan Elgrably.

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ Gordimer, N. *July's People*, p.1.

¹² Ibid

The novel progresses with Maureen taking cognizance of the present as July appears with tea for Maureen and Bamford, and breakfast for Victor, Gina and Royce. The children are asleep on the seats removed from the truck instead of a proper bed and this is one of the many patent indications of the loss of corporeal perquisites, entitlement as well as material security. The stark opposite of how the Smaleses lived back in Johannesburg now stares them in the face as Maureen grapples with altered realities like black rural life, subsistence in a mud hut with a lot of insects and muck, poles apart from being on leisurely camping trips. Still reeling from disorientation and disillusionment, Maureen enquires about their truck, the “bakkie”, the retention of which was somehow mollifying to her otherwise shaken perception of the changed milieu. Bamford’s reply of him having hidden the truck in the bush, in accordance with July’s instruction, reflects their ironic dependence on and adherence to July’s counsel for survival in a grave inversion of their snug white middle-class existence. In fact, the sheer difficulty in foregoing their settled life in Johannesburg, in order to stay alive, is steadily reiterated through Maureen’s recollections of the unreclaimable and retracing herself mentally to a point in her childhood where she recalls the objects in “the room in the shift boss’s house on mine property”¹³. This is her way of coping with the present and in Gordimer’s words, regaining ‘equilibrium’. The changed nature of dependence on July is distinct as it is no longer the master-servant spectrum where the Smaleses earlier relied on July for help with domestic chores. Within this new dynamic of dependence, the interplay of language and power is unmistakable as Maureen slowly but surely apprehends the pertinence of now listening to July’s articulations.

July’s family members too become involved as they solicit an explanation for the curious arrival of the Smaleses in the village. July’s disclosure of the havoc being wrought by the black dissidents in the country, is not adequate to convince his wife Martha as well as his old mother, both of whom sort of discredit July’s summary because of their own separate understanding of white superiority from whatever exposure they had till then. The historic impression of the blacks being totally at the military mercy of the whites is so deep-rooted that July’s mother is totally unwilling to believe the news of armed insurgency by the rebellious blacks: “Who shot? Black people? Our people? How could they do that.”¹⁴ Furthermore, she gets anxious about the possibility of white retribution, lacking the optimism of even imagining a systemic overhaul being now possible and warns July: “White people. They are very powerful, my son. They are very clever. You will never come to the end of the things they can do.”¹⁵ This widespread general mindset, saturated with reluctance, trauma-induced pessimism and dismissiveness, is one of the ‘morbid symptoms’ in the Gramscian ‘interregnum’, that Gordimer explores while zeroing in on the personal trials that accompany a staggered transitional process.

Bamford and Maureen’s routine of religiously listening to the news bulletins on the radio corroborates their state of despair and yearning for the situation to change. Beyond this routine, Bamford puts his resourcefulness into action and builds a water tank for the village. Maureen too, in an attempt to get out of the feeling of doom and gloom, tries reading Manzoni’s novel *The Betrothed* when

¹³ Gordimer, N. *July’s People*, p.3.

¹⁴ Gordimer, N. *July’s People*, p.20.

¹⁵ Gordimer, N. *July’s People*, p.21.

July does not allow her to work. However, the throbbing realisation that dawns upon her is that no textual fiction can quite match up to her present knotty situation: "No fiction could compete with what she was finding she did not know, could not have imagined or discovered through imagination."¹⁶ Correspondingly, overwhelmed by a trance of nostalgia, Maureen travels back in time to her girlhood days and conjures the memory of walking back home from school whereby she had the company of Lydia on many an occasion when she would be out too. Lydia was Maureen's family's black servant. She would relieve Maureen by carrying her school case on top of her head and they would engage in long conversations. On one of such days when they were together and Lydia was carrying Maureen's case, a photographer clicked their picture with their consent. Several years down the line, Maureen found that photograph printed in a *Life* coffee-table book and for the first time questioned the ritual of Lydia lugging her case.

Tensions gradually start soaring between Maureen and July as her liberal shell begins to crack, now that she suspects July's intentions with him having disproportionate power over the status quo of the Smaleses. This depletion of trust is revved up when on one night as Bamford tries in vain to mingle with the locals, he and Maureen discover with extreme trepidation that July has left the village in their bakkietagging a friend along. Already at the end of their tethers, Bamford and Maureen get embroiled in a heated argument and blame one another for the messy situation. Later in the night, after Bamford goes to sleep, Maureen attempts to soothe herself by standing naked in the rain. She witnesses their bakkie returning to the village. Subsequently, she goes to sleep without informing Bamford about this.

The aftermath of the edgy night is felt the next morning when Bamford confronts July with the now defunct authority of their previous accord as soon as July comes to their hut on that day. July clarifies that he had gone to the shop to fetch supplies like paraffin, salt, tea, jam, matches, etc., without paying attention to the conspicuous shift in Bamford's tone. A disturbing convergence of habitual white dependence on the blacks, present defeatist inertia and gratitude is observed when Bamford and Maureen do not tell July to handover the bakkie's keys even after a harrowing night. Although, the pricking concern is quite plainly July not asking for permission and approval to use the bakkie, the Smaleses remain inexplicably reticent about it.

July starts taking driving lessons from his friend while practising on the bakkie. When Bamford predicts the possibility of July being caught without a license or people presuming the presence of whites, July tries to allay his worry through the assurance of him claiming the possession of the bakkie now, as he got it from his employers in town. Maureen, however, gets the keys to the bakkie at this point of time, citing the need to bring the rubber floormat to make a warm bed for Royce who was sick with cough.

Later on, Maureen goes to return the keys to the bakkie to July, underscoring their reliance on him to procure stuff for them while also emphasising the prerequisite of 'asking' instead of just 'telling'. The charged exchange between them leads to July venting his feeling of being distrusted even after fifteen years of service and how he could gauge Maureen being unhappy about him having the

keys to the bakkie. July reminds her of the gamut of things tended by him and how he had always been entrusted with the house keys as he was her 'boy'. Moreover, he relates his present feeling with the manner in which his housework had been minutely scrutinised in the past, resonating Maureen's chronic suspiciousness and paranoia. Greatly taken aback, Maureen tries to counter July's assertions by highlighting how she has never saddled him with work that was not for him to take care of. She also spells out how the situation is entirely different now and he is no longer under their employment as the nature of their old relationship is obsolete owing to the mutated state of affairs. July's shocking retort of "You not going pay me, this month?"¹⁷ lays bare the precise economic thread that actually tied them. Additionally, this puts to rest Maureen's delusive notion of mutual respect, reciprocation and understanding being the cornerstones of their protracted association. For July, it has always been a matter of providing for his family and his commitment to that is indubitable. As July revolts by giving back the bakkie's keys, Maureen snaps back at him referring to his town mistress Ellen and casts doubt on his sense of duty towards her as well as Martha's opinion about Ellen. While Maureen succeeds in making July keep the keys, his non-verbal relay of taking umbrage does resoundingly convey to her that he will never forget this episode.

Bamford's hunting initiatives result in two warthogs being killed with his shotgun. He indulges the intrigued Daniel, his black hunting companion, by politely suggesting to let him use the shotgun on some occasion, although it is manifestly prompted by an intersection of being amiable and being powerless. Bamford subsequently offers the larger warthog for the villagers to gorge on while he keeps the smaller, tender one for his family. The Smaleses finally get to eat meat after two weeks, an awkward gap that they had never experienced before. The meat is relished by all in the village and its stimulating effect, coupled with sexual abstinence since their arrival, push Maureen and Bamford to make passionate love in the limited space available.

Parallely, as July and his family savour their share of meat, they discuss about the Smaleses. July strives to exert his clout and alleviate Martha's concern about the Smaleses being harbingers of trouble. Martha lingers on her trajectory of woes as Gordimer paints in retrospect the testing times when July, like other breadwinners, would be working in the city, away from the rigours of rural family life. This not only hardens Martha but also grants her a number of marital prerogatives in the rural domestic space. Followingly, Gordimer brings us to the crux of partnerless existence as a married black woman; to be able to endure and acquiesce to the cycle of absence of the spouse as inexorably as the seasonal cycle.

As the novel moves on, Gina's kindred connection with Nyiko, a local black girl, comes under focus. Her close rapport with Nyiko, enables Gina to easily pick up the local language and even get the drift of the cultural subtleties. Contrary to Bamford and Maureen, Gina is often invited by the villagers. One day as Gina and Nyiko share a frivolous moment, messing around with new-born kittens, Maureen rebukes them. Afterwards when Bamford and Maureen are done scouring the radio channel for news, he asks her if she has been able to find

¹⁷ Gordimer, N. *July's People*, p.71.

¹⁸ Gordimer, N. *July's People*, p. 89.

¹⁹ Gordimer, N. *July's People*, p. 90.

someone to shelter the kittens. Maureen appallingly divulges that she has "drowned them in a bucket of water."¹⁸ The crudeness of this act of "reduction of suffering"¹⁹ and its outright impassive acknowledgement do perturb Bamford while illustrating Maureen's shouldering of responsibilities driven by desperation.

This desperation to get rid of the shackle of dependence and take charge, prods Maureen to try working with the local women in the fields. Subsequently, in the afternoon, she goes over to where the bakkie is hidden. July, who is repairing the exhaust pipe, is not interested in Maureen trying to update him about the situation in the city and the mounting death toll. In fact, July attempts to defuse the jittery build-up through an empty appeal for divine intervention and dispassionately hoping "everything will come back all right."²⁰ Maureen is confounded and tries to understand why July would want to be thrown back into the abyss of racial segregation, crawling out of which has taken so much effort and time. It is at this delicate moment that the second stormy exchange between Maureen and July takes place. July reproves her for toiling with the local women and sarcastically remarks about her state of hunger which must have driven her to pick spinach from the fields. However, Maureen dismisses it simply as a pursuit to while away the time. She also stresses the reason of not wanting to burden other women to gather food for her family. But the hollowness of her statement lies exposed in view of how July and his family have been their providers since their arrival. Unable to sway July in her favour, Maureen in a fit of recklessness needles his sore point by inquiring if he is scared about her revealing 'something' to Martha, slipping in a covert reference to Ellen. July explodes and strongly contends how Maureen can only tell Martha that he has worked fifteen years for her and that she is satisfied with him. Maureen for the first time is affected by fear of a man; this fear is not of physical harm but of flawed estimation and misplaced regard: "...that the special consideration she had shown for his dignity as a man, while he was by definition a servant, would become his humiliation itself..."²¹ Moments later, July informs her about the chief of the villages having summoned him along with the Smaleses. Although July exercises authority over his village, the chief has dominion over all the villages in the region. Therefore, it is obligatory for them to plead for the chief's endorsement of their asylum. All these directions suffocate Maureen as she wrestles with this subservience to July. There is also the symbolic relinquishment of the bakkie's ownership as Maureen tries to mitigate July's tacit worry about seeking Bamford's assistance to fix the bakkie: "You don't have to be afraid. He won't steal it from you."²²

On the morning of the next day, when the Smaleses visit the chief, Bamford quails at the thought of them being evicted. The chief desires to comprehend the reason for their arrival and questions them about the situation in Johannesburg. On being apprised about the black revolution and the crippled white government, the chief goes into a state of disbelief as the impending capitulation of the apartheid regime brings to fore his own insecurity-ridden toothlessness, reeking of white propaganda that instilled the fear of losing control over his traditional lands in black majority rule. It is obviously too unpleasant for the chief to believe in the tumbling of the white government, as he pledges support to the whites against

²⁰ Gordimer, N. *July's People*, p. 95.

²¹ Gordimer, N. *July's People*, p. 98.

²² Gordimer, N. *July's People*, p. 101.

²³ Gordimer, N. *July's People*, p. 119.

the black insurgents. According to him, these anarchist blacks do not represent them: "They not our nation. Ama Zulu, ama Xhosa, ba Sotho...I don't know."²³ Quite stupefyingly, the chief presupposes that the whites will accouter him and his men with weapons which they will put to full use to exterminate the rebels: "If they coming, the government it's going give me guns. Yes! They give us guns, we going kill those people when they come with their guns."²⁴ In accordance with his stance, the chief insists on Bamford teaching him how to shoot with his gun. Astounded by the chief's pitch, Bamford incredulously tries to ascertain whether he plans to kill the black rebels, those who have sacrificed so much to accomplish the vision of Mandela, Sobukwe, Luthuli and others. Contrary to the black chief's apathy and petty divisiveness, Bamford underlines the need for unification, although this outburst is infelicitous given the chief's attitude and the exiled condition of the Smaleses: "You mustn't let the government make you kill each other. The whole black nation is your nation."²⁵ Eventually, the chief allows them to be in July's village and it is here that July's actual name, Mwawate, comes up as reference and this unclogs the Smaleses' unapologetic, self-imposed ignorance of fifteen years. While being hospitable to the Smaleses, the chief neatly tucks in the deal of Bamford having to train him how to use his gun.

On their way back to the village, July tries to ease the Smaleses' consternation by disparaging the chief as just a man of words and not a man of actions. Recounting the past, he describes how the chief has been too gutless to hold out against white taxation, erratic claims over livestock and being bossed around. So, for all his loquacity, the chief is just too poor and too weak to thwart the armed black insurgents. Returning to their hut, Bamford and Maureen try futilely to get updated news from the radio channel. Thereafter, they engage in a stinging back-and-forth over the chief's gun lessons. It is in this context that they decipher how the expressions and ideas from their previous life, do not suffice in the unforeseen circumstance, as the apartheid had moulded white lives into totalitarian blackholes unruffled by anything beyond their own liberal convenience: "...the words would not come. They were blocked by an old vocabulary...it was an experience that couldn't be forethought. Not with the means they had satisfied themselves with. The words were not there."²⁶

Correspondingly, Bamford dissects July's behavioural evolution especially his new-found confidence as well as him boldly critiquing the chief's bootlessness. Maureen finds it dichotomous wherein July has alluded to his own predicament and helplessness: "*Healways* did what whites told him. The pass office. The police. Us. How will he not do what blacks tell him...."²⁷ July is inferred as a detached figure, neither at the chief's disposal nor a minion of the rampageous black horde. On top of that, his unerasable fifteen-year linkage with the Smaleses and him concealing them in his village, portray him as an expendable 'sell-out', highly likely to be killed for treachery. Although, there is a glaring threat to July's life, Bamford breathes a sigh of relief deducing how July might not yet be conscious of this hazard. Maureen, on the other hand, feels that they should leave whereby they both come face-to-face with the bleakness of their situation

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Gordimer, N. *July's People*, p. 120.

²⁶ Gordimer, N. *July's People*, p. 127.

²⁷ Gordimer, N. *July's People*, p. 128.

–the unanswered ‘where’ and ‘how’ elucidate how they are out of options not only in terms of their next destination but also with regard to the means to move.

When Maureen goes back to work with the local women, she feels that they are gathering spinach whereas they are indeed cutting grass for thatching July's mother, Tsatsawani's hut, the very hut occupied by the Smaleses, much to her disgruntlement. Maureen is unable to follow the exchange between Martha and July's mother due to the language barrier. Subsequently, as Martha and July discuss about the Smaleses and the chief's assent to their sanctuary, July sidesteps the issue of their further stay by pointing out how Martha has erred in safekeeping the grass bundles. Placed outside the Smaleses' hut, they will be damaged by the children playing with it. The conversation moves on to July's onerous past and his work in Johannesburg spanning the last fifteen years. While July is eager to return to the city with Martha and their children once normalcy is restored, Martha tries to coax him to stay in the village, work the lands and open a trading store. She cites Daniel to propound how in the near future, without white taxation and tedious government regulations, he can smoothly open a store in the village and run it successfully with his metropolitan experience. July, however, attributes the need to collect his money to go back to the city and thereby has to disclose the amount in pounds, the British currency understood by Martha and the other villagers.

A man in short trousers arrives in the village with a battery-powered amplifier. The villagers drown in a night of unbridled merriment and get sloshed on the thin beer being passed around in plenty. The Smaleses refrain from the intoxicated celebration and return to their hut. Bamford and Maureen are horrified to discover that the gun and the boxes of cartridges are no longer there. Bamford feels clueless and powerless with no police to investigate the theft and recover the gun. This incident splinters his morale as he slumps into bed and "...at once suddenly rolled over onto his face, as the father had never done before his sons."²⁸ Divested of the bakkie and now the gun, Bamford's crashing into bed is symbolic of the demolition of his masculinity, having lost both its external tokens. Maureen springs into action and looks for July near the bakkie. Her perennial reliance on him to retrieve things is reinforced once more as she demands that he has to get the gun back. July admits that Daniel has teamed up with the rebels and since he was the only one missing from the drunken revelry, it is rational to conclude that Daniel is culpable for the disappearance of the gun. Aggravating all of this, Daniel has now left the village and as Maureen keeps pressing July to do something, he loses calm attesting that he has had enough of the Smaleses' problems. She thunders back at him reminding him of petty household thefts from the past, which she found too distasteful to condemn, as her own rosy impression of his honesty would be torn asunder.

At this moment, we witness the most emotionally fraught scene with July fulminating in his own language. As Gordimer puts it, Maureen cannot understand the language "...but she knows that what's being said is an absolute rejection of her...not horrible, but painful."²⁹ Maureen is sapped of all figments of her liberal imagination and appreciation of July: "She understood although she knew no word. Understood everything: what he had had to be, how she has covered up to

²⁸ Gordimer, N. *July's People*, p. 145.

²⁹ Quoted from "An Interview with Nadine Gordimer: Harare, February 14, 1992" by Biodun Jeyifo.

herself for him, in order for him to be her idea of him. But for himself—to be intelligent, honest, dignified for *her* was nothing; his measure as a man was taken elsewhere and by others. She was not his mother, his wife, his sister, his friend, his people.”³⁰ Maureen ultimately realises that her mental schemas to exalt July are pointless as it is not up to her to assess him or mentally defend any such assessment. She goes on to puncture his ego by specifying how he has deserted Ellen and is after the bakkie to rise in importance amongst the locals. However, it will all fade once the money for the fuel dries up and the bakkie will just be a rusting spectacle for the kids to play around. When this jibe fails to gnaw at July’s fresh sense of autonomy, Maureen’s next strategy is to bring herself into July’s fold by trying to seduce him: “The incredible tenderness of the evening surrounded them as if mistaking them for lovers. She lurched over and posed herself, a grotesque, against the vehicle’s hood, her shrunken jeans poked at the knees, sweat-coarsened forehead touched by the moonlight, neglected hair standing out wispy and rough. The death’s harpy image she made of herself meant nothing to him, who had never been to a motor show complete with provocative girls.”³¹

Maureen’s impetuous attempt at enamouring July is to reattain her symbiotic state of being. As Gordimer introspects, it is the ‘handed’ nature of her existence that makes her crave a cloistered life, ever aching for a scaffold, growing like bindweed:

“She has been handed from father to husband. And she has had, in effect, two husbands—though she didn’t realize it—because July does so much for her. July is so protective of her, takes care of her, takes all sorts of burdens off her...And then, of course, both husbands turn out not to be able to protect her anymore, because her own husband, Bam, without his car and his gun and his office, is absolutely unable to do anything for her—to protect her, or to feed her, or to do anything. And July turns out to belong to his own people, to be able to offer temporary shelter but not the kind of reverse dependency which she had hoped for...in a subconscious way and in the most unlikely and dangerous of circumstances, she rejects this and realizes that she’s really not a person on her own.”³²

When Maureen fails to become July’s mistress using her sexuality, she becomes aware of how her present dependence on July is not ribboned with his intuitive respect or covert lust; it is the sort of adaptive dependence that July had upon the Smaleses when he was hired by them in Johannesburg; an anomalous dependence reined in by an anomalous socio-political environment.

In the final chapter, we find that a persistent sound from a distance ruptures the serenity of the village. As Gina and her friend Nyiko smilingly go out to play and Bamford takes Victor and Royce on a fishing trip, a helicopter painted with cryptic symbols, swoops over the village creating a furore among the locals. Crossing the river, it seems to land somewhere behind the trees. Maureen is conflicted, yet being at the peak of despondency, she is ready to take a dire leap of faith as she

³⁰ Gordimer, N. *July’s People*, p. 152.

³¹ Gordimer, N. *July’s People*, p. 153.

³² Quoted from “An Interview with Nadine Gordimer” by Nancy Topping Bazin, as published in *Contemporary Literature*, Winter, 1995, Vol. 36, No. 4, p. 571–87.

³³ Gordimer, N. *July’s People*, p. 158.

abandons her family and starts running towards the helicopter. This devil-may-care transmogrification of demeanour coincides with the uncertainty of character of those onboard the helicopter, "whether it holds saviours or murderers"³³. The stripping away of all those roles in which Maureen has been ensconced so far, tilts her to the point where she covets empowered concubinage more than being positive about her wellbeing; she does not blanch at the prospect of being sexually violated or physically abused by those in the helicopter as her guiding impulse is that of regaining a mighty buttress to straddle on. This urge is bestial and for women like Maureen, with sagas of multiple transferences of custody, it is also instinctive whereby "[s]he runs...alert, like a solitary animal at the season when animals neither seek a mate nor take care of young, existing only for their lone survival...."³⁴ Maureen's cognition of survival, for a very long time, has orbited around Bamford and July; the unnerving decision to forsake her family signals a deviation in the way she now chooses to survive which, in Gordimer's observation, surfaces as "...she goes through a form of cleansing, of baptism, when she's born again in a sense, when she goes through the river, running away. She simply wants to make choices of her own. And of course there's a political aspect to it, because Bam wants to go back to town, which means that they would be holed somewhere with whites defending themselves and their women."³⁵ The novel comes to an end with Maureen still frantically pursuing the helicopter, still in the process of running towards its location.

2.3.2 Narrative framework

This masterpiece of Gordimer's speculative fiction is in the objective, third-person narrative style; her pen does not flinch from its commitment to expressive neutrality while dispassionately detailing the most minute of elements, with a keen eye for the vacuous liberalities and flagrant pretences of the time. As the narrative voice progresses in the third person perspective, readers find a clear yet esoterically worded delineation of Gordimer's pragmatic observations, that concoct an uneasy documentary sense of an intractable future. The outlandish punctuation, weird syntactic configurations and a certain jumpiness of the narrative are to destabilise readers, as we often need to pore over several sections more than once, to better grasp what Gordimer is projecting with respect to both linguistic form and literary plot. The purpose of unsettling readers through her wordsmithery is to immerse them in the travails of the interregnum. A creeping uncertainty seeps into our kindled senses as the narrative keeps all factual information to a negligible minimum whereby there can be no cogent explanation for the chaos to comfort the flustered readers. This uncertainty is diagnostic of a cultural transition, a tectonic shift whose tremors would be felt for years to come and which would extract a soul searing cost from the white survivors to tailor their expectations in the new normal. As Zoë Wicomb analyses the reference to Gramscian interregnum: "The epigraph, describing the transitional as a process bound up with time, displacement, and ambiguities produced by the in-between condition of delay, readily translates into narrative indeterminacy."³⁶

³⁴ Gordimer, N. *July's People*, p. 160.

³⁵ Quoted from "An Interview with Nadine Gordimer" by Nancy Topping Bazin, as published in *Contemporary Literature*, Winter, 1995, Vol. 36, No. 4, p. 571–87.

³⁶ Quoted from "Rereading Gordimer's *July's People*", chapter 11 of *Race, Nation, Translation: South African Essays, 1990–2013* by Zoë Wicomb, published in 2018 by the Yale University Press.

The narrative flow mostly zooms in on Maureen as readers are made aware of her complex emotions and tortuous thought processes. Consequently, the story is coloured through the socioculturally tinted lenses, Maureen has matured with. Her worldview, philosophies and realisations sculpt much of the narrative story line. The temporal back and forths in conjunction with Maureen's repudiation of the crisis, obfuscate the narrative's linearity. Due to Gordimer's ardent focus on Maureen and July, we often forget the critical political angle to the story and are engrossed with the author's intrapersonal exploration of possible post-apartheid racial dependency. Sporadically, the narrative spotlight shines on Bamford and we get brief windows into his mental state. These however are insubstantial in comparison to the depth with which Gordimer sketches the characters of Maureen and July.

Gordimer's fastidiousness is sublime in the way a number of leitmotifs³⁷ have been manoeuvred for a range of effects; for instance, the novel's background score, comprising the sound of the insects, the mundane chatter of the locals, the playing of the radio, is a recurring reminder of the flipped reality, the melody of which, like an acquired taste, needs time and unavoidable repetition for the Smaleses to get used to. Another instance is of the reappearing pink teacups and July offering fruits to the Smaleses at the end of their meal, both not in sync with their uprooted, makeshift existence and both thrust to prolong the reverie of their bygone urban affluence, the utter incongruity of which in the present impasse becomes increasingly transparent.

Now, that we have a good idea about the plot and the narrative framework of the novel, we will move to the next Unit where we will look at the characters and their interactions in greater detail. We will also try to better understand the conclusion which has multiple critical interpretations.

Check Your Progress 2

Read the following questions and answer the questions in the space that follows:

- 1) How does the loss of the bakkie and the shotgun affect Bamford? Why do you think this happens?

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- 2) "She understood although she knew no word." What does Maureen realise at this juncture? Comment on Maureen's transformation from the time she left Johannesburg till this very realisation.

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³⁷ Leitmotifs are frequently repeated expressions or features in literary works or musical compositions. Leitmotifs foreground an emotion or highlight a character or accompany particular scenes.

- 3) Comment on the use of the third person point of view in the narrative framework of *July's People*.

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2.4 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit, we have discussed in great detail the plot of Gordimer's *July's People* to facilitate an easier reading experience at the undergraduate level. We have given you:

- a brief account of Nadine Gordimer's life, her sources of motivation, the milestones of her life as an author and her celebrated works.
- a thorough discussion of the plot of *July's People*, analysing its complexities and following the interactions between the characters.
- a clear understanding of the choices made by the characters, their emotional states and their personal evolution with the progression of the plot.
- an idea of the narrative framework of the novel and Gordimer's use of language.

2.5 SUGGESTED READINGS

If you would like to explore more analyses of *July's People*, you may consult:

AndréBrink, "Complications of Birth: Interfaces of Gender, Race and Class in *July's People*". *English in Africa*, 21 (1/2), 157–180(1994).

Edward Powell, "Equality or unity? Black Consciousness, white solidarity, and the new South Africa in Nadine Gordimer's *Burger's Daughter* and *July's People*". *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 54(2), 225–242(2019). (<http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0021989416687349>)

Mahmoud Ibrahim Ibrahim Radwan,"The Dystopian Vision of a Revolutionary Surge: A Study of Nadine Gordimer's *July's People*". *English Language and Literature Studies*, 5(3), 12–24 (2015). (<http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/ells.v5n3p12>)

These are only suggested as additional reading and are in no way compulsory.

2.6 ANSWERS

Check Your Progress 1

For all answers refer to 2.2.

Check Your Progress 2

For answers to 1 and 2, refer to 2.3.1.

For the answer to 3, refer to 2.3.2.

UNIT 3 SOCIAL CONFIGURATIONS

Structure

- 3.0 Introduction
- 3.1 Objectives
- 3.2 Apartheid and Civil War in the Text
- 3.3 Interregnum and Locating Power
 - 3.3.1 Relationship of Smales and July
 - 3.3.2 Rural Versus the City Binary
 - 3.3.3 The Bakkie and the Gun
- 3.4 Reading the Dystopia
- 3.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.6 Check Your Progress: Possible Questions
- 3.7 Suggested Readings

3.0 INTRODUCTION

July's People (1981) can be read simultaneously as a social and political story historicising racism and the struggle against it. Written in 1981, the book envisions the fall of White supremacy in South Africa. It is the story of a White family, estranged from their lives in the city, now settled in the rural bush lands of South Africa. The Civil War, between the Black rebels and the White rulers, that leads to their displacement is a foreboding presence in the life of this family. Nadine Gordimer sketches the lives of the privileged middle class Smales family -Bam, Maureen, and their three children Victor, Royce and Gina- who flee Johannesburg and now attempt to learn the ways of the village of their servant July. It was July, their Black servant, who rescued and sheltered them in the war like crisis. July now a free man decides to help 'his people' without realising the changing nature of the term 'his people'. The text dwells upon the restructuring of power and the consequent disquiet in the lives of these characters. The narrative explores the fear and uncertainty of both the Smales family and July in the period of dislocated power. For the Smales to coexist in the village there needs to be a dual step of acceptance- one on their part and the other on the part of the Black community.

3.1 OBJECTIVES

In the last unit you learnt how to read the text. This unit will help you to add a critical lens to the story and contextualise the meanings generated in the language of the narrative. At the end of this discussion you will be able to

- locate the text in the historical and social context of South Africa
- understand the dynamics of racial and colonial politics in Apartheid
- comprehend the myriads of social configurations of class, urban and rural
- understand the tropes of writing the country and the city, nation and war
- appreciate the critical nuances in the writing of Nadine Gordimer

3.2 APARTHEID AND CIVIL WAR IN THE TEXT

Gordimer's *July's People* (1981) was banned in South Africa for its envisioning of the fall of the White rule and the rise of the Black people's power. Predicting the history of the fall of White supremacy about 13 years before the real advent, the text opens up debates about Apartheid or racial discrimination in the South African nation and the privileges of the White colonisers and settlers. In fact, the history of colonisation and slavery was at the root of the racial discrimination. The early slave traders and colonisers in South Africa were the Dutch. Their descendants Afrikaners and later British were the white settlers who ruled the nation for years to come. Despite the abolition of slavery, the ruling White coloniser exploited the Black majority on grounds of race and colour. The ruling National Party instituted the practice of Apartheid or 'apartness' from Blacks in 1948. In simple terms, Apartheid was a systemic segregation of the Black community. Laws were passed to disenfranchise the Blacks from all spheres of politics and social equality. It was an ideology premised on exploitation and racial prejudice. For example, laws were introduced for stripping them of working right unless endowed with a pass. All public areas were segregated making the presence of Blacks in these areas illegal. There was forced evictions of Blacks from White residential areas. Shops, beaches, schools in White areas were cleansed of Black presence. Inter race marriages were prohibited and education, recreation and even medical care was restricted. Despite international and regional opposition to this inhumane codification, these laws persisted till 1991. A long resistance movement and civil unrest led by Black leaders clouded the nation till Apartheid was finally ended with the majoritarian rule of the African National Congress under Nelson Mandela.

With such an intense history, the text *July's People* can be read in the light of the political foresight. As a South African native, Nadine Gordimer both understood and condemned the Apartheid as a political rule that would be inevitably replaced with a Black majority government. Several of her early books like *An Occasion for Love* (1963), *Burger's Daughter* (1979) and *My Son's Story*, touch upon this theme. In *July's People* book, the white Smales family escapes the Civil war (fictitious) that finally overthrows the White governance. Gordimer writes:

It began prosaically weirdly. The strikes of 1980 had dragged on...Riots, arson, occupation of the headquarters of international corporations, bombs in public buildings-the censorship of newspapers, radio, and television left rumours and word-of-mouth as the only sources of information about this chronic state of uprising all over the country. (10)

When the riots in Johannesburg escalate and the people start fleeing the city for safety, Bam Smales realise that "(t)here was nothing left to do but the impossible, now they has stayed too long." (17) Once offered shelter by their Black servant July in his native village, they escape with him and some provisions in the yellow bakkie with an uncertain plan for the future. Their arrival in the village is viewed with doubt and July's mother asks him "*White people must have their own people somewhere. Aren't they living everywhere in the world...Don't they go anywhere they want to go? They've got money.*" (28) July's wife is also suspicious of the white presence that her husband has brought to the village as 'his people' and she echoes uncertain sentiments when she says: "*White people here! Didn't you tell us many times how they live there...Now you tell me nowhere...*" (26) It is hard

for July to explain the violence and loss of Whites in the city to a Black community that disenfranchised by the Whites themselves. He tells his wife how the houses were burnt down and roofs blown off.

In spite of the disintegration of white power, the racial gap is vast. The book charts how the subversion of power structure by the defeat of the Whites was not a direct decolonisation of the minds of the existing communities. July's mother shocked asks: "*Who shot? Black people? Our people?*"(28) To her mind the gun belongs to Bam who hides it under the roof like the other Whites who are powerful. The white presence in the village is seen as a threat as the history of colonisation and racism is not easy to shrug off. Despite their liberal stance the Smales are seen as July's white masters. July's mother reiterates "*White people. They are very powerful, my son. They are very clever. You will never come to the end of the things they can do.*"(29)

The foreboding sense of danger of violence for the family is a recurring theme in the book and the reference to the war outside appears several times. Their only source of news from the city is the radio which they tune into. They do not cross the water limits of the village and lay low to avoid trouble. When July's drives off in the bakkie unexplained, Bam Smales and Maureen are worried if the bakkie is seen in the outback it will reveal their hiding location to the police or government. Bam feels an uncanny threat and an urge to flee with "*nowhere to run. Nothing to get away in.*"(55) Maureen's fears that "*we were mad to run*"(66) and hand over their lives to this uncertainty. Later the local chief wants July to bring them to seek permission to stay on their land. This is direct inversion the White practices in the city. In their visit to the chief they are asked questions about the nature of violence they have fled. When the chief expresses a disbelief of their story of escape which exposes their vulnerability, Bam explains: "*It is war. It is not like that anymore... The blacks have also got the guns.*"(163) He adds "*Us and them. Who is us, now, and who them?*"(164) explaining the transforming nature of the political and social configurations in the text.

3.3 INTERREGNUM AND LOCATING POWER

The destabilised binary of us and them that Bam posits is a direct reference to the shift in loci of power post the overthrow of the Whites. Gordimer believes a new political and social system must give way to the new future. The epigraph to *July's People* is Antonio Gramsci's envisioning of this political and social shift in the Fascist regime of Italy. He writes in *Prison Notebooks* (1926) "*The old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum there arises a great diversity of morbid symptoms.*" This Interregnum in the book is crucial in locating the transforming nature of power and where to locate it. The interregnum is an interlude in between shifting rulers, with a slow change in power structure. When the white Smales escape from the city, they are rendered powerless in the hands of their Black servant July. Now a free local, July becomes the point of mediation and protection for the Smales in times of crisis. The text dramatises this shifting power and the anxiety of the community. Both July and Smales acknowledge the ruptures in authority and struggle with this new dynamics of privilege. This is best examined in three aspects in the novel:

- 1] Understanding the pre- and post-revolutionary relationship between the Smales and July

- 2] Locating power in the country versus city binary
- 3] The role of the *bakkie* and the gun as symbols of power

Let us explore these themes in the following pages.

3.3.1 Relationship of Smales and July

The Smales family with Bam, his wife Maureen and three children- Victor, Royce and Gina live in a middle class Johannesburg community. As a family that is not racist but complicit in the bourgeois values of its times, Bam and Maureen do not see their treatment of July as problematic. Their liberal worldview blinds them to the dark side of the Apartheid. In fact in the text they pride the 'indulging' comforts they provide their staff. Maureen refers several times to lavish room July as a servant lives in back at their house and the small charities she made before he left for home. Their master slave relationship dwelt on the unsaid compliance of the Black man as most of pre-Apartheid South African labour regime did. July on the other hand plays the subservient master slave relationship well too. He works hard, keeps his papers in order and lives with family and his city woman Ellen.

This happens until the civil unrest posits violence and overturns power. When July sees the White Smales family helpless in their own home, he offers to assist their escape, but till then neither the Smales nor July had imagined a role reversal. Smaleses realise that "(t)he decently-paid and contented male servant...-he turned out to be the chosen one in whose hands their lives were to be held; frog prince, saviour July." (14) The political restructuring unfolds the social reordering in the story and the White master is now at the mercy of the Black servant to save his family. This reversal of authority unfolds as the basis of the anxiety in the text. Gordimer begins the novel with "*July bent at the doorway and began that day for them as his kind has always done for their kind.*" (1) July their servant and now host now decides what is best for them. This is also the start of the steady loss of authority for the Smales.

As the story unfolds we see the complexity that this shift in power entails. Bam and Maureen are now dependent on July's judgement and discretion to use their time and effort. From working in the fields, to procuring daily needs, chauffeuring the bakkie, to meeting the local chief, each assessment is made by July. This is the 'morbid symptoms' of disenfranchisement, loss of privilege and authority shakes up Bam and Maureen. Their discontent and resistance is ironic and evident when Bam says "*I would have never thought he would do something like that. He's always been so correct*" (81) and he later adds "*In town?— He was affable, deprecating his own ability, or reminding them that they knew he had known the limits of his place.*" (88) In the village this limit is redefined. July now owns the house they live in and his people now provide for the Smales family.

Not being used to such an arrangement Maureen complains how July who had been living on their casts offs has become a person of opinion. When she confronts July about his other woman Ellen to provoke his guilt and humiliate him, his anger and discomfort makes Maureen realise how she is no longer his master who would "*pay him that month*" (99). Her relationship with him now bears a mark of equality and though July is hesitant, he is aware of the transformation. She unwittingly lies to him "*The Master. Bam's not your master...Nobody ever thought of you as anything but a grown man.*" (99)

Despite this in the story, there are moments when Maureen recognises “we owe him everything” referring to July’s risky proposition of harbouring his white people in his Black village. This reordering of hierarchy makes Maureen more adaptable to the social change and she finds it a refreshing change to go out and work with the local women in the fields. She notices how the children have adapted more organically with the rural surrounding without much hint of racial prejudice. The children make friends, learn the village ways and thrive. She recognises her lack of power and agency in this new structure. Her flight towards the helicopter at the end of the novel is also an attempt to flee this inevitability of change.

Bam, on the other hand, is the least adept to his new surroundings. He too realises that his masculine role of the protector has now moved hands. He attempts to exercise his knowledge by building useful things just like the colonial master. He shoots the pig to feed the village. Yet his failure to provide and assert is apparent, much in contrast to July who seems in control. In contrast, July’s recognition of this turnaround that ‘his people’ are at his mercy, in his village, with the dynamics of political power changed makes the tension more apparent. July too acknowledges “*They can’t do anything. Nothing to us anymore.*”

3.3.2 Rural Versus the City Binary

The shift in power is most apparent in the spatial change that the Smales family experiences. They flee from the city to the village about 600 kms from Johannesburg. The rural African bush land is a radical departure from their seven bedroom house in the city. Here living in the borrowed space of July’s mother’s hut, they feel like the outsider. From affluent architects in the city with servants and cars, they become refugees in July’s village. Moreover, they are seen as threat by July’s mother and wife who cannot fathom “*Why do they come here? Why to us?*”(25) Later in the text the chief also expresses his disbelief that the Whites did not have a place to escape and the Smales family were threatened murder by Blacks. In the text, Gordimer explains a gap so vast and historically entrenched cannot be filled overnight. The Whites are now ironical victims.

The text also drives home that the material possessions of Bam and Maureen have little or no value in the village and their way of life is not conducive to a rural existence. Maureen bemoans their loss “*(t)hey had nothing.*”(40) The lack of space and resources is new to the family and children cannot understand why they cannot get a coca cola or go watch cinema. Gordimer’s subtle critique of the white man’s privileges cannot be ignored. She points out to the reader how the power of possession and wealth was a driving force of the South African Whites. By disenfranchising the Blacks of homes and basic needs, the Apartheid was a cruel and humiliating system of segregation. Now possession less and being killed in their own homes, the Smales too feel equally powerless. July sums up the dilemma when he says “*They looked different there—you should have seen the clothes in their cupboard. And the glasses—for visitors, when they drink wine. Here they haven’t got anything—just like us.*”(31)

In July’s equating of the sameness, Bam and Maureen are simultaneously stripped of their racial and class superiority. Now in the village without money and possessions, the couple have nothing to claim them apart. Maureen says “*(S)he was already not what she was. No fiction could compete with what she was finding she did not know, could not have imagined or discovered through imagination.*”(40) The village for the Smales harbours flies, malaria and chores.

For the subservient July who has seen their days of glory feels obliged to help them procure small luxuries like chocolates, soap and toilet paper. He even tells Maureen not to work in the fields like his women or give her son native medicines. Yet the social reshuffle compels Smales to learn the new way of life in the village. From eating mealies, to sleeping without beds, children playing in the mud they adapt to the new surroundings. They realise they are *"Lucky to be alive...that was how people lived, here, rearranging their meagre resources around the bases of nature, letting the walls of mud sink back to mud and then using that mud for new wall..."*(35) When Bam shoots the hog, they partake in the celebration of small luxuries by the villagers: *"they had not known that meat can be intoxicating"*(110)

Yet most of their native know how comes from July and his folks who decides what they can do. The interregnum was giving way to new ways of life that the bourgeois urban Whites had discredited. This is another layer of powerlessness the city bred folks like Smales felt in the rural Africa. The last conversation of Maureen and July indicates this discontent and horrific realisation for Maureen:

"Suddenly he began to talk at her in his own language, his face flickering powerfully. The heavy cadences surrounded her; the earth was fading and a thin, far radiance from the moon was faintly pinkening parachute-silk hazes stretched over the sky." (213)

Africa was now as much his country, the village was his and the shift in hierarchy was something Maureen had not yet accepted.

3.3.3 The Bakkie and the Gun

In the narrative of power and possession, Bam's *bakkie* (truck) and his gun gain symbolic significance. The *bakkie* not suited for the city was Bam's leisurely pursuit back in his days of prosperity and the gun was his self-defence when he escaped the war torn city. In the text both these possessions are the only two material things that help Bam assert his masculine bourgeois white self in his otherwise restructured world. They are also his only source of possible escape when need be. Eyed with curiosity both objects become desired as symbols of power. July wants to own the *bakkie* and the local chief wants the gun.

The *bakkie* is first introduced to us as a vehicle of escape but soon to be a burden to the Smales family. The yellow *bakkie* is sure marker of something foreign in this rural outback. July suggests they hide the vehicle to shield the presence of the family in the village and he keeps the key. In time, Bam and Maureen find out that July is not only learning to drive the *bakkie* to assert his new found prowess in the overturned power structure but has also taken off with the vehicle with his aid Daniel. The Smales are disconcerted at this disobedience of July but they realise their powerlessness when they confront him words like "a minefield". When they are too embarrassed to ask Gordimer writes *"Here was the moment to ask him for the keys. But it was let pass."* When they warn him about his lack of license, July shrugs off the proposition with a laughter pointing out *"...No one there can ask me, where is my licence. Even my pass, no one can ask me anymore. It's finished."*(84) The tide has turned and the Smales realise the fruitless attempt at power. Later we see Maureen contests July's attempt at appropriating the *bakkie* and he reminds of her dependence on him by undercutting their ability to pay him as their servant. His implies that Maureen she does not trust him and fails to

see him as an equal. His gesture of indulging Bam by letting him drive the *bakkie* to the Chief's house takes Bam by surprise. Bam, too, can sense July's desire to appropriate the vehicle as his own. The struggle concludes with July telling the Smales that he would tell his people he took the *bakkie* from them, reasserting the new power equations.

The gun that Daniel escapes with is the other symbol of power. In their meeting with the chief, the leader blatantly asks Bam the favour of using the gun in times of crisis and wishes to learn how to use it. Bam realises the gun is a fascinating object for the local chief who is trying to understand how the Black rebels had procured the white man's tools. He tries to reason with the Chief when he says "(y)ou're not going to shoot your own people"(168) for land and power? Bam's possession of that tool then becomes both an asset and the bone of contention for the chief. In the final scene when it is stolen, Bam is miserable in the loss of any chance of escape. His only possessions the *bakkie* and the gun have been taken away from him.

The relationship of the Smales-July power was also constituted on language. July can speak the white man's language but his vocabulary becomes a marker of his race and class. It is this ambiguity of usage that July eventually holds as power in his village. Whether communicating with his family, or the chief in his native language, or the use of broken English and Afrikaans, he uses it to his advantage. To Maureen he asserts that the "place"(135) is not hers when she goes to the fields with his wife, making his statement unclear. Later he similarly declines the knowledge of the stolen gun. Both Maureen and July know he is lying. He is aware that Daniel has stolen and escaped with the gun while the family was watching the *gumbagumba* show. Furthermore, Daniel probably joins the Black rebels with the guns, jeopardising the existence of the Smales in the village. His silence is possible change of loyalty and a threat to the Smales family. He tells Maureen "...trouble from you. I don't want it from you. You see?"(196) She is confronted with the idea that she is not related to him and the overturn of power has reshaped his priority to please her. The moment of crisis is symbolic of the Smales fall from the power to powerless in state of interregnum.

3.4 READING THE DYSTOPIA

Nadine Gordimer's book can be read as a dystopian vision of the South African Apartheid. The futuristic fall and the reshaping of the political and social structure is the book's critique of the Apartheid. The text anticipates the inevitable fall as an outcome of the exploitation that cannot be justified on any moral grounds. The tensions arising from the social restructuring makes the core of the text as discussed in the earlier sections. The fear and uncertainty of the community marks the dystopia. The authorial politics is markedly anti-Apartheid but the ambiguity in the text lies in Gordimer's use of the dystopian genre. The interregnum is seen as a violent revolution, discrediting the real violence in the history of colonisation and racism itself. The underlying sense of fierce rebellion the text proposes is negated by the Smales liberal values. Their complicitness with apartheid yet not racist attitude is ambiguous, much like Nadine Gordimer's insider outsider position in South Africa. As a White anti-Apartheid writer, she was often seen an outsider in the Black struggle.

The novel is a challenging read in this framework. Smales are shown as tolerant but equally capable of inherent racism against their servant and his way of life. Maureen can loot in times of crisis but she questions July's choices in appropriating the car or wanting to be "a big man"(91). Her unaware racist self accuses July of abandoning his city woman Ellen in crisis, yet she tries to flee in the last chapter. Her life was so unassuming that she failed to recognise why her friend Lydia carried her case. The coffee table book with their picture highlighting the racial discrimination was the social realism that escapes Maureen. Gordimer leaves the meaning to be teased out. The reader can very well see the equating sameness in human nature irrespective of race and colour and how White privileges assumed a moral superiority. In Maureen and July's final confrontation, one ends up with a realisation that Maureen has:

She understood although she knew no word. Understood everything: what he had to be, how she had covered up for herself for him, in order for him to be her idea for him. But for himself- to be intelligent, honest, dignified for her was nothing...(197)

3.5 LET US SUM UP

July's People is an anti-Apartheid dystopian text. It is a futuristic collapse of the White rule in South Africa and the coming to power of the Blacks. Rooted deeply in the history of unfair racial segregation, the text anticipates the fall of the White community in Johannesburg traced through the lives of the Smales family. The family becomes homeless and is rendered powerless in the hands of political and social changes that ensue from the fall of the White rule. The role of their Black servant July is significant as he rescues and shelters them. However the changing times has also freed July who is no longer a subservient. The tension, fear and loathing, created by the social reordering, are captured in the interactions of July with his former masters Bam and Maureen. The inability of the couple to accept this equality is manifested in their hanging onto the *bakkie* and the gun as tools of White man's power. The loss of these material possessions along with the loss of other privileges in the text marks the steady downfall of the Smales in power. This is in stark contrast to rise in July's rise in confidence and power. The text beautifully captures this transformation through the interregnum of power.

3.6 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS: POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Answer the following in about 200 words each:

- 1) What are the social groups that we see in the text?

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2] What do you understand by Apartheid in the text?

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3] How are the Smales treated in July's village?

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4] Does the Smales's relationship change with their servant July post the revolution?

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5] Why does Maureen confront July?

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6] What changes for the Smales family in the village?

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7] How does the ownership of the car keys become an important power struggle in the text?

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8] Who steals the gun in the text? Why does July lie about knowing who stole it?

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9] In the text Bam and July's relationship changes. Explain how and why.

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10] How do you see Bam and Maureen's political viewpoint in the text *July's People*?

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3.7 SUGGESTED READINGS

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UNIT 4 PROBLEMATIZING GENDER

Structure

- 4.1 Objectives
- 4.2 Introduction
 - 4.2.1 About the Author
 - 4.2.2 A Short Summary of *July's People*
- 4.3 Locating the Protagonist
- 4.4 The Relationship of Maureen and July
- 4.5 The Other Woman Ellen
- 4.6 Maureen's Marriage
- 4.7 The White Woman in a Black Village
- 4.8 A Novel Ending
- 4.9 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.10 Suggested Readings
- 4.11 Check Your Progress: Possible Questions

4.1 OBJECTIVES

This brief study of Nadine Gordimer's *July's People* (1981) shall enable you to:

- Gather a brief summary about gender roles in the text
- Understand the author's background and writing styles
- Locate the text in a fictional time when Apartheid has ended
- Study in depth the characterization of Maureen
- Maureen's relationship with the Black women in the text
- Analysis of the climax with the protagonist rushing towards a helicopter

4.2 INTRODUCTION

4.2.1 About the Author

Nadine Gordimer was a South African writer, political activist and the first South African recipient of the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1991. Gordimer's writing managed moral and racial issues, especially politically sanctioned racial segregation in South Africa. Under that regime, works, for example, *Burger's Daughter* (1979) and *July's People* (1981) were banned. She was strong in the anti-apartheid movement, joining the African National Congress during the days when the association was banned. The arrest of her closest companion, Bettie du Toit, in 1960 and the Sharpeville slaughter prodded Gordimer's entry into the anti-apartheid movement. Gordimer additionally served on the directing board of South Africa's Anti-Censorship Action Group. That Gordimer should evolve into a revolutionary writer is not very surprising. Her radicalism is predicted through a very secular upbringing that she had received right from her salad days. Her father was a Jewish immigrant from Russia but he was hardly sympathetic towards the cause of the blacks. It was her mother, a political activist

of her times and working for the emancipation of the blacks that Gordimer draws her most inspiration from. Gordimer emerged as a writer of two dozen works of fiction, novels and short stories but it was the genre of the short stories that she thought defined her time and age. She wrote a collection of short stories at a very tender age of fifteen. Till her death in 2004, Gordimer continued to write provocative works, raising voices against unjust ideologies even in an anti-apartheid regime and perhaps *July's people* though written before Apartheid ended is a precise visualization of what the world of tomorrow shall unfurl.

4.2.1 A Short Summary of *July's People*

The novel opens up with Maureen, the third-person narrator of the story recollecting how they had spent the last three days manoeuvring their way from Johannesburg to a black village of their black servant July. The sudden and drastic change of events happen with the outbreak of violence and bloodshed in their city, the blacks have finally stood up for their rights and freedom and are employing every possible means to take charge. In the process, there is widespread rioting, looting and burning of ports, houses and market places. Maureen, her white husband Bamford Smales and the three children are left with no other choice but to flee from their suburban existence and take refuge in their servant's home village six hundred kilometers from their town. What follows is a gradual, painful and a frustrating process of their adaption into a black community that reveals the inherent racism of the white couple. The author introduces them right at the start of the novel as someone who themselves claim to be liberals and to have always taken up the charge of black people's emancipation. Yet the falsity of statement is very obvious.

We follow the journey through Maureen's vision as she does her regular day activities while attempting her best to understand her situation around. Bamford Smales, her husband and the three children are least affected and quickly adjust to the situation after a fit of tantrums and Maureen is left isolated with no one around to express her situation to. What comes to the light in the short narration is the complex relationship between July the black servant and Maureen the white mistress. While the former, because of the psychic and the emotional conditioning of always being subjugated still imagines himself to their servant the latter sees the entire episode as a more egalitarian one, creating fresher bonds of friendship. However, the couple is still very disturbed by the loss of power and privilege and being at the mercy of a community whose language they do not understand and whose world they do not wish to inhabit. There's hardly any interaction between the characters because of the lack of a common language and each work with their own levels of intuition until the frustrations start taking voices. July's mother and Martha, his wife who gets little voice in the narration depict their own fears and uncertainties at having encountered such an unusual situation. The significant episode is the missing of the bakkie, the yellow truck on which they had travelled from Johannesburg to the village. All suspect July revealing their inherent racism when the culprit is Daniel, July's friend. July himself is in a complex situation unable to understand the new dynamics until one day they all hear a helicopter flying overhead. Each comes with their own amusement at having seen a helicopter in a primitive environment. It is only Maureen who understands it the least and in a fit of anxiety rushes towards it. The novel closes at this juncture with the author inviting interpretations of Maureen's mental state when the novel closes.

4.3 LOCATING THE PROTAGONIST

Maureen Smales occupies the central position in the plot, and it is most evident for it is her vision that occupies the reader's imagination. We follow her imagination as the plotline manoeuvres deep into the psychic complexities of other characters. Her characterization depicts that even when the social and geographical conditions have altered with migration from Johannesburg to July's remote village, the women's roles still remain the same. Maureen is still seen doing the household chores as the lady of the house perhaps with many more challenges and fewer privileges. She's bathing the kids, cooking with the bare minimum, picking up the wild greens and ponders over her situation in her remaining time. The opening chapters describe Maureen to be respectful, attentive and gracious for having being saved. It takes her a while to understand that her unconscious fears are now her conscious reality as she scans the mud hut she wakes up in. Despite the drastically changed scenarios, she doesn't forget her motherly duties. She's seen worrying about the children, their hygiene and health. The author hints at how irrespective of the race and the privileges, the woman is always a nurturer echoing Beauvoir's statement how 'one is never born a woman but becomes one'. Her utilitarian outlook never escapes the readers even for a moment. From the very start she analyses the gross worth of each object and even humans, from the bakkie to the book comes under her scrutiny. The author takes a conscious effort to describe the difference in motherly instincts and how privilege makes the ideology more complex. Maureen worries about the quality of water her kids are consuming, goat's milk over the sterilized milk in their suburban homes while the black children hover around their mothers barefoot. What worries a mother with lesser privileges is something that the author consciously skips.

In the text, Maureen picks up wild greens, flowers and leaves. The gendering in the text is limited not only to the category of labor but also to objects. Everything primitive, natural is feminine while hunting, helicopters, radios and guns are masculine. When Maureen is sewing; Bam, Daniel and July are riding in the bakkie, experimenting with the rifle, and fidget with the radio while working to pick up fragments of the outer world. What they are expecting is perhaps a black suppression and the restoration of power to the white, an ideology that hints at how superficial their ideal of black emancipation is.

The unsettling idea that runs throughout the novel is the fact that no cannot do away with psychic oppression, gendered or racial. Tension and contestation of identity in the novel appears most frequently between Maureen and July and therefore, there is a complex interplay of race and gender. K Anish in his essay, *Reflections of Social Realism in Nadine Gordimer's July's People and My Son's Story* explains how Maureen considers herself to be a liberal member of the social standing up for the cause of the black emancipation but it is truly her children who are more liberal. They adjust seamlessly to the norms, lifestyles and value systems of the black community and soon forget what it is to live in suburban societies and go for the movies. Anish writes: "...while coming to Maureen respond is totally slower to their environment than their children. But their children Gina, Royce, and Victor are adapted easily to the environment. In other words, it is not Maureen who is qualified for taking a leading role in the new South Africa but it is her children who have absorbed the African ideologies, traditions, values, language and emerge both consciously and unconsciously delving in the African society to be accepted by them...."(Anish,183)

It hints at the relevance of social upbringing. Maureen's children have consciously been brought up in a liberal environment where both their parents have championed for humanitarian rights while Maureen herself has spent her days in extreme Apartheid conditions.

4.4 THE RELATIONSHIP OF MAUREEN AND JULY

The primary tension in the plot is the relationship between Maureen and July. While we see a certain companionship between July and Bam as "they work together more or less as they did when Bam expected July to help him with the occasional building or repair jobs that had to be done to maintain the seven-roomed house and the swimming pool"(Gordimer 25). However, the relationship of Maureen and July is more strained now. Her actions in the regular course of the day are quite evident of the same. She offers to wash her own clothes and when July insists that his wife will do so, she offers him a few banknotes in return. Even in a displaced position, her unconscious sprouting of privilege both as a white woman and as the mistress of the house who has been expecting things out of a black servant never really escapes her. The point of irony in the plot stems from the fact that in spite of being propagators of anti-apartheid movements, they continue to have a black servant in their suburban house. Gordimer describes with nuances how he is well provided for yet he does not occupy the same position as that of the Smales. He has a separate living area, with a washroom and a kitchen but he never indulges with the family. Hardly has he entered the living area of Smales' house and the one time he did, as his bleak memory would recall was again for work. Gordimer perhaps makes a conscious choice by addressing July as the black servant rather than a house help.

Tensions surmounts when Maureen's latent racism comes forth when she shifts into July's village. In the changing scenarios, Maureen is unable to do away with the employer-employee dynamic. For her July is a safety net- that is physical and momentary but never psychic or emotional. He is their Black servant after all. This is especially prominent in Maureen who grows more distrustful of July and his people the moment she enters his village. It seems as if the person who has been tending to their needs for more than fifteen years suddenly is the most distrustful person for her and her family. This culmination of the pent-up fear and frustration presents itself in the climax where she rushes towards the helicopter in the hope to save herself. The array of the things the Smales hurriedly pick up when they flee Johannesburg is an indication of the idea of power they attach to things. The author states explicitly that they do not forget to carry a gun. In reality, it might not have served any practical purposes but it does evoke a sense of safety for the Smales. July's wife, Martha is worried about the fact that the Smales possess a gun. Yet, while the man carries a gun, the woman carries a book. Maureen picks her copy of book *The Betrothed*. It might be an unconscious act but it does hint at what the two individuals attach power to. Like the gun, the book was brought is never read. Maureen is also troubled by the fact she would soon finish the text and would not have much to do. It's not only the idea of reading for leisure that Gordimer is hinting at but reading to be in a familiar zone, to understand a language, to occupy a zone which is not questionable every moment. She writes:

But the transport of a novel, the false awareness of being within another time,

place and life that was the pleasure of reading, for her, was not possible. She was in another time, place, consciousness; it was pressed in upon her and filled her as someone's breath fills a balloon's shape. (29)

The anxiety and fear of the Smales family becomes heightened when the gun gets stolen one night. It leaves the two in a state of anxiety, fear and shock. All these days without serving any utilitarian purpose, the gun was their symbol of power and the absence of it represents their lack of power in an alien community. It hints at their entrapment in a foreign land without any resources or aid. Maureen's confrontation of July thereafter, is the outpour of her frustration and a reflection of how she never really trusted her even in her white household setup. July on the other hand is hurt beyond measure. The focus is no more the gun but the generalization we attach to each community.

Much like the bird rifle, the bakkie becomes a symbol for the freedom of the Smales. As long as they possess it, their dependency on July and the larger black community is lesser but when the latter has the keys and takes it around without their permission it becomes a matter of disobedience. The possession of the keys of the bakkie by July makes them aware of their dependency on him. They cannot survive without him. Maureen and July's heated conversation over the tangible keys of the bakkie becomes a manifestation of their relationship which is shaky and uncomfortable. July considers himself to be their service even in his village, looking after the needs, bringing them water, petrol and groceries, guarding them for security and expecting a pay at the end of the month. For Maureen, however it has become a more egalitarian relationship. She tells him:

If I offended you, if I hurt your dignity, if what I thought was my friendliness, the feeling I had for you—if that hurt your feelings... I know I didn't know and I should have known. (72)

4.5 THE OTHER WOMAN ELLEN

The steady collapse in Maureen's power over July is evident. The transformed nature of post-Apartheid power makes July a free man who needs no paper to drive the bakkie, neither does he need permission to appropriate the vehicle. Unaccustomed to his disobedience and disconcerted with his taking the keys, Maureen confronts July who reminds her he is no longer paid by them. Her humiliation is complete when he exposes her distrust in him and her assumption of being her master. To take the last dig she accuses him of pretending is a 'big man' who incidentally has a keep/other woman named Ellen in the city, hidden from his wife. She also alludes that he abandoned Ellen just like he has given up on her. July's anger at this accusation shakes her faith in any moment of personal fondness they have had back in the city. In her final confrontation with July, Maureen realises she is not relation of his. Neither was Ellen. They both were just meaningless and he rather sees them as 'trouble'. This inversion of power that allows July to reject Maureen, helps her realise what powerlessness means. The final scene when she runs, she too abandons all ties.

4.6 MAUREEN'S MARRIAGE

The conversation between Maureen and her husband is anything but emotional or romantic. It is artificial, tailored and bare minimum. The two accuse each other, label names and constantly bring up the past. When we compare the relationship between Maureen and July is definitely distrustful but her relationship with her white husband is equally toxic bordering on nothingness. There is hardly a conversation and whenever there is one in the times of crisis, it is ridden with shame, guilt and complaining. Bam realises that his failing masculinity lies in inability to protect his family from the external threat of violence. His wife too see that in his failure is July's rise in power. The provider now is July. The final loss of the gun and the bakkie is complete emasculation of Bam. He has no tool or possessions to assert his bourgeois White supremacy in the village. The only moment of passion in the couple we see is the night after the intoxicating meat festivity. The morning after Bam realises the blood on his penis is his wife menstruating. Like the racial tension, the gendered discrimination in the text is a moot point. This helps the readers comprehend Maureen's urge for an all independent identity. She is living in complex lives of revolutionary changes and no form of existence provides her solace.

4.7 THE WHITE WOMAN IN A BLACK VILLAGE

Once placed in the black community, Maureen's racial and gendered identity doesn't escape her either. Her whiteness stands in stark contrast against a black wife and mother. She's tall and constantly stooping, bowing to greet as if with the intention of each one around. It is especially evident when Martha, July's wife admonishes how her imagination of the white women has always been overhyped. Martha imagined the white women to be beautiful but she can hardly call Maureen beautiful with her tall posture, frayed hands and coloured streaks of hair. Maureen's white legs, with her varicose veins, becomes a private joke among the black women, who see it as an unspoken sisterhood with the white woman. The criticizing of Maureen's appearance can be Gordimer's entry plot in establishing how deep-rooted the psychic patronization of the whites has been in the mind of the black.

Maureen, on the other hand, in her new environment tries to gel only with the womenfolk of the village. She digs up roots and leaves in the field with July's wife and tries to establish a bond of sisterhood which a male counterpart of the story- July grows uncomfortable with. The sisterhood she feels is expressed in the lines:

It was early morning but in their hut the women were dreamy, as at the end of the day...perhaps they had been since the first light gathering wood or working in their fields. Maureen was aware, among them in the hut, of not knowing where she was, in time, in the order of a day as she has always known it.(9)

July however treats her outside his women- his mother and wife. He hints that it is "not her place" in the fields, probably indicating her class and racial otherness. It is one of the first instances where Maureen becomes uncomfortable and in fact conscious of how July has come to occupy an upper hand in her daily chores. His gendered identity overarches his racial identity leaving Maureen at the loss of words.

Maureen faces a linguistic incongruence in the village community. When she attempts to interact with the other women in village, there can hardly be any conversation thereby. They understand and misunderstand each other through gestures, actions, July's commands and instincts. July is the one person in the black community who understands English owing to his fifteen-year long stay in the town. It makes it but natural that the only possible conversation between the Smales and the blacks is through July for he acts not only as a linguistic mediator but also as the one responsible for them.

It is a dislocation, therefore at all level and therefore, the only language that Maureen is left to understand is that of *The Betrothed*, the single book she has managed to carry with her in a rush. The process of reading, therefore, becomes a means of conversation for her and the inherent fear of having to run out of that is evident when she initially shy away from it. It much, however, be noted that Bam doesn't feel a similar linguistic exclusion. There's hardly any linguistic incompetence that he is depicted to undergo as July is always next to him. This linguistic demarcation is also gendered. Even the Chief of the village points out why he should learn the master's language. His source of power comes his political role as a leader and a man in the text.

Gordimer, however, takes a moment to describe July's wife. Martha is educated, depicted by the fact that she reads the letters that he must have sent her to form the town. She prides herself over the fact that July would not have married her otherwise. However, her education is only vernacular and never cosmopolitan. She can perhaps never step into Johannesburg, sustain herself like July's town mistress and eventually learn English. The layering of social constructs and boundaries is best depicted here.

In another such instance Maureen's relationship with her childhood friend Lydia is evoked. A photographer clicks their picture for a coffee table book that years later is used to depict the way of life of the Whites. Maureen's relationship with her Black friend is so naive that the racial act of Lydia carrying her bag on her head, escapes Maureen. Gordimer writes:

Did the photographer know what he saw, when they crossed the road like that, together? Did the book, placing the pair in its context, give the reason she and Lydia, in their affection and ignorance, didn't know? (46)

Now with the transformation in the hierarchy she is reduced to a cognizant White woman.

4.8 A NOVEL ENDING

Like many other works of Gordimer, the novel provided has an open ending igniting thought and imagination. Most critics like the Erritouni view the ending of the novel as only being limited to the appearance of the helicopter and Maureen rushing towards it. He calls the ending working 'on the principle of hope' (Erritouni, 69) where Maureen is rushing towards a future that is more hopeful and identity driven. The entire image is pleasing to the visualization and represents hope. However, Erritouni is conscious enough to read the novel both as a utopian and a dystopian novel. He calls it a dystopian imagination because the readers are made aware of the underlying racism of the Smales. They understand that struggles of the black community but cannot be a participant to it. The Smales

continue to hire a black servant and are unwilling to share their economic wealth with the other community. Erritouni also calls it a utopian novel because he feels that a redistribution of wealth will give enough impetus to do away with years of suffering. He doesn't account for the emotional, psychic and mental oppression of the blacks that have seeped in and out of generations. Abdullah K Shehabat and Hussein H Zeidanin, among many other critics can see the flaw in this proposition. They explain how

They tightened their grip on their own properties and decided not to abandon their past...they were not convinced that the past was over and that there was no use crying over spilt milk (Shehabat, 134).

Clingman provides a complete different outlook to the final scene. He proposes how Gordimer makes an attempt to describe the present through the trope of the future which is ridden with riots and violence. He is not very confident in seeing hope in the helicopter and even in the least probability it does represent any resolution, Maureen is seen only waiting for it and could never approach it. Clingman's approach though interesting present an image of no better future, of nothingness and unfulfilled hope. The most interesting argument lies in the argument of Shehabat and Zeidannin. They do not attach the climax only to the helicopter that would possible denote a postmodern world and Maureen rushing towards it but the confrontation of July and Maureen right before. The confrontation is crucial not only because of the issues already discussed but because it polarities in one image, a male and a female, a black and a white, an employee and an employer and a bond of egalitarianism, now displayed by July versus a bond of subjugation represented by Maureen. This ending would perhaps provide a better understanding of the novel in its totality.

4.9 LET US SUM UP

The above analysis has allowed us to conclude that

- Gordimer's *July's People* marks a shift from her initial writings. This text is a visualization of the future, providing a utopian image with hints of underlying dystopia. It probes the readers to re-think how one ideology and power structure gets replaced by another
- In her characterization of Maureen and her relationship with various people and objects around revealing layers of the protagonist's personality
- We can make an analysis of how the irrespective of race and privilege, gendered roles are defined and rigid
- The utilitarian approach of most characters in the novel reveals how we attach power to different objects
- An analysis of the closing scene and how it can be read and re-read to provide various perspectives.

4.10 SUGGESTED READINGS

- 1) Gordimer Nadine, *July's People*. New Delhi Bloomsbury Publication, 2005.
- 2) Visel, Robin. *Othering the Self: Nadine Gordimer's Colonial Heroines*. Print
- 3) Madden, Mike. *Planting the Seeds of a Non-Racial Society: white women*

- 4) Anish K. *Reflections of Social Realism in Nadine Gordimer's July People and My Son's Story*. Bodhi International Journal of research in Humanities, Arts and sciences. Vol 2. 2018. <www.bodhijournals.com>
- 5) Shehabat, Zeidanin. *Maureen between Criticism and praise: Reading the Ending of Nadine Gordimer's July People*. International journal of Humanities and Social Sciences. Vol 2, No 11. June 2012.
- 6) Erritouni, Ali. "Apartheid Inequality and Postapartheid Utopia in Nadine Gordimer's *July's People*." *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 37 no. 4, 2006, p. 68-84. Project MUSE, doi:10.1353/ral.2006.0087.
- 7) Clingman, Stephen. *The Novels of Nadine Gordimer: History from the Inside*. London: Allen & Unwin (Publishers) Ltd, 1986.

4.11 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS: POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

- 1) Is Maureen's daily routine in the village any different from her work in the city?

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- 2) Do you feel that Maureen distrusts July? Why?

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- 3) How does the July-Maureen role invert in the village?

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- 4) Is Maureen's marriage with Bam a happy one?

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5) How do the Black women perceive Maureen?

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6) Can you explain the unspoken bond of sisterhood between the various women in the text?

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7) Who is Ellen and what is her significance in the text?

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8) How does language distance Maureen from the other women in the novel?

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9) Why does Maureen run at the end of the text? Can we understand the run through a feminist prism?

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10) Does *July's People* attempt to draw linkages between gender and racial segregation? Are both forms of marginalisation according to the author?

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