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## **-: Obituary:-**

### **Nadine Gordimer : Anti-apartheid Activist (20<sup>th</sup> Nov.1923 – 13<sup>th</sup> July 2014)**

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The writers who have dominated English writing with its distinguished tradition of liberalism in South Africa include Nadine Gordimer. Born on 20<sup>th</sup> Nov. 1923 at Springs, a mining town on the outskirts of Johannesburg, Nadine Gordimer was the daughter of immigrants; her mother, Nan Myers, was born in England and her father, Isidore Gordimer was a Jew who emigrated from Lithuania at the age of thirteen. Nadine was brought up at Springs and attended the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg for one year. Her father was a jeweller and something of jeweller's art persists in his daughter's finely pointed phrases and sharply driven lines of fracture in the development of human relationships. Her first marriage was in 1949, and she was married again in 1954 to Reinhold Cassiver.

Gordimer had travelled widely especially in Africa, but Johannesburg had remained her home. She had been a visiting lecturer at a number of universities, including Harvard and Princeton, and her fiction had won many prestigious awards including the James Tait Black Memorial Prize for her novel *A Guest of Honour* in 1973, the Booker Prize (joint winner, 1974) for the novel *The Conservationist*; the French Grand Aigle d'or Prize; the Italian Malaparte Prize and the Nelly Sachs Prize from West Germany. She was awarded the Noble Prize for Literature in 1991. Her first literary attempt was a poem. She wrote at the age of 9 (Nine) as a school exercise. Thereafter, Gordimer's progress as a writer was steady and sure. Her first publication in the adult world was a short story entitled *Come Again Tomorrow* (1939) which appeared in 'The Forum' when she was 15. After that, Gordimer published regularly in local journals and magazines in South Africa, such as 'The Forum', 'Trek', 'Common Sense, etc. Her only play, 'The First Circle' was published in 1949, the same year as her first volume of short stories, *Face to Face*. Many of the stories included in the latter collection reappeared in *The Soft Voice of the Serpent*, published in 1953, the same year as *The Lying Days*. When Gordimer was 10 years old, a sudden faint led to the diagnosis of an over-rapid heartbeat. Her mother promptly forbade all

physical activity, including dancing which Gordimer passionately enjoyed, eventually removing the child from school altogether. The years between 11 & 16 passed in intense loneliness without any contact with other children. Gordimer Shared with Doris Lessing the older liberal tradition in which the British were seen as the imperialists of the Boer Wars; but her greatest concern was with the black Africans whom the Afrikaners oppress. She was one of the leading and finest fiction writers of South Africa in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Racism was a distorted representation of social reality in South Africa. In South Africa, the obvious subject was black-white relations in sex and marriage since, until recently, these were by law forbidden territory. Gordimer's every novel touches upon such taboos. In recreating the freedom struggle of south Africa as a background to her novels, she had skillfully blended history, politics and fiction with a prophetic vision. In many of her novels like *Burger's Daughter*, *July's People*, *My Son's Story*, *A Sport of Nature*, Nadine Gordimer endeavours to create a portrait of reality that is human and has not been finalized in history. She had written in her novels about injustice & outrage. Her writings revolved around the black and the white, the ruler-the ruled conflicts which were often laced with impotence. Kenneth Parker in his book *The South African Novel in English* quotes that Nadine Gordimer(1978iii5),who explaining her function as a writer, has stated that she has no alliance to south Africa 'as a writer' but 'as a person.' She says, "I have no religion, no political dogma – only plenty of doubts about everything except my conviction that the colour bar is wrong and utterly indefensible. Thus I have found the basis of a moral code that is valid for me. Reason and emotion meet in it and perhaps this is as near to faith as I shall ever get." In fact, Gordimer uses so many themes in her Novel. Though she writes about Africa, She writes about the whole world. The South African freedom struggle against white dominion and apartheid had formed the subject of the epic saga of human suffering in Gordimer's *A Sport of Nature* (1987) which could well be considered her masterpiece.

Gordimer's position in the context of apartheid was unique and unenviable. She had always lived in South Africa but remained loyal to her literary, social and political beliefs through difficult times while many other writers have chosen exile or thrust upon them. One of her major novels, *The Late Bourgeois World* was banned in 1962. Even then she refused to give up her convictions and had continued to write far above forty years on a question of black and white. Hence, Gordimer who was aware of the status of the novel as an 'imagined world', was

completely different from the kind of social, religious and didactic treatise writers of the early centuries. She dedicated herself to political action, out of the most profound part of her nature womanliness, her sexual being. In her novels, she had recorded the corrosive effect of apartheid with great accuracy and honesty. Gordimer's stories and novels reveal that as a writer of prose, she was uneven. However, she was as good on the comic incongruities of human behaviour as on injustice and outrage. She committed herself to the demand of her society and remained sincere to her artistic vision. Her firm support of the freedom of expression in literature had inspired a number of black and white writers. Her setting was Africa; but as a critic remarks in Washington Post, "In her Africa we find ourselves." Her novels arised from her 'essential gesture' as a social being. Nadine Gordimer, the Noble Laureate, struck beyond 'the colour bar' peculiar to South Africa to project the vision of the noble, genial, human world. Her endeavour had always been to make us realize that our world is not 'a world of strangers' but the world which offers us 'occasion for loving'.

**Works Cited:**

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