



EXPLORATION OF RACIAL IDENTITY AND CULTURAL HYPOCRISY AS PICTURED IN NADINE GORDIMER'S JULY'S PEOPLE

Mrs.Poornima Immunuel

Head of the Department of English, Govt Arts & Science College, Sivakasi.

Abstract

This paper attempts to examine the role playing nature of the white Liberals and the hypocrisy ingrained in their moral outlook as projected in the novel "July's People" by Nadine Gordimer and explore the attitudes of the white Liberals towards the Blacks before and after the revolution.

Key Words :Hypocrisy, Moral Outlook, Black Culture, Revolution, Flawed Attempt, Black Community, White Liberals, Harmonious Feature.

White liberals in July's people proposes to study the role playing nature of the white liberals and the hypocrisy ingrained in their moral outlook as presented in the novel taken for study. July's people dramatize the flawed attempts and the restricted endeavours of the Whites to come to terms with the Black culture. Gordimer as M.A.Quayam says "... brings out And admonishes the liberals of their many illusions, lies, ambiguities and contradictions" (42). The Chapter explores the attitude of the White Liberals towards the Blacks before and after the revolution. Gordimer herself has commented in an interview with Boyers that

"... 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 illusion in order
Fully to understand the basis staying in
South Africa. Unfortunately there aren't enough people
Who have the will to attempt this. It's hard to peel
You like on onion, without producing a lot of
Tears in the process" (13).

The background of the novel is set in a revolutionary situation, when South Africa is on the verge of becoming a non-racial country. The focus of the novel is however not on the revolution which remains in the background throughout the novel. But it is rather on a single White family the Smallness. To be more practices, the focus is on Maureen, the wife of Bamford Smales and her encounter with the Black community to which the Smallness escape because of the civil war. Maureen Sands out as an archetype for the author to explicate the 'moral authenticity' of the liberals.

In July's people Gordimer uses the relationship between Maureen (White) and July (Black) to intensity the clash of cultures in the future South Africa, for she believes that "that's where the virility is these days in areas where Black and White cultures clash" (Thurston 51). She says in a Liberated South Africa:

"... Whether it is the old Question about
What the whites are going to do about the Blacks, or the
New question of what the blacks are going to do
About whites, or the hopeful question of how to set
About letting the whole thing go, and living
Together is still THE question." (Parker 114)
For the peaceful and harmonious future in South Africa both the whites and Blacks have to adapt and accept

Themselves fully to the emerging situation, like the Smallness children. The children are prepared to make the best of the conditions in which they find themselves. Anyone either adults or the young ones, who are like the children in July's people will have no problem in living in unity in the future non-racial South Africa, when the country will be "liberated from the iron shackles of apartheid" (Quayam 57). The children represent the ordinary folks who are not bound to any ideologies and they are the ones who will survive to see the future. Others like Maureen will have to face a lot of problems and run frantically towards their past which is uncertain to be found.



Black natives in the novel July's people are taken for study namely July and his people. These natives in the heart of hearts, for their own personal reasons refuse to accept change, even if it is for their good.

The revolution which takes place forms the backdrop of the novel. The whites are not the only ones who face conflicts and revelations but also the blacks, namely July and his village community. July's dilemma is to choose between his acquired self his original self the July of the town and the Mlawate of the village. July lurches between these two roles throughout the novel. Even though he seems to have identified himself between these two roles throughout the move. Eventhough he seems to have identified himself with his real self towards the end of the novel, his status as the true citizen of the future South Africa still remains questionable. His family's reaction to the arrival of the whites is that of astonishment and the same time of anger. Though they do not undergo any change or get caught in conflicts as the ones faced by July, they are shocked, and find it impossible to live together with white family.

The opening of the novel presents the Smalesees, already given refuge in July's village and July, as usual performing his duties to them. "July bent at the doorway and began that the day for them as his kind has always done for their kind" (JP 1). July's performance of his duty as a servant seems anachronistic while the blacks in the city are revolting for their freedom. Outside his village, the blacks are fighting against the government for their freedom and power but July still likes to be a servant of the whites, just as they way he was in the city. It is not that July is unaware of the revolution taking place outside but he is so used to the old habit that he doesn't care about the change that has been taking place in the city. The adverb "always" towards the end of the above quoted lines emphasizes the fact July could not think of himself as anyone but as "their servant" (JP 1). This has been the system for almost three centuries, i.e., the whites as masters and blacks as servants and slaves, and July wants to continue that way.

July's act of giving refuge to the white family is a part of his own selfishness, though it seems outwardly generous in risking his life. Not even at one point in the novel does July assume the role of "frong prince, Savior" (JP 9), which the whites are willing to confer upon him. The truth is July does not want to lose all the material security that only the smalesees could provide him. He does not want the money inflow to stop because that is the only thing that made his family respect him and obey him. Without money he will not be able to boss around the village. He is willing to sacrifice his own pride for the sake of gifts and money from the white family. Even though he is aware of the truth hat,

".... when she handed some new object onto him it was
Because it was shoddy or ugly, to her, and if it
Were some old object, it was because she no
Longer valued it (JP 67).

July could not reject them firmly and whole heartedly. This is not only because he didn't want to offend his master but also because of the fact that those useless things are, to his village people, a luxury they could get only in their dreams.

In the village, the Smallness could not give him anything. They are helpless at his behest and penniless July knows it better than anyone. The acquisition of power by the blocks has made everything topsy turvy to him. The whites are dispossessed by all means. July could have stayed in the city as a free man, joined the revolutionaries and could have made a better future for himself. Instead, as Maureen comments, "he took his whites and ran" (JP 128). July is afraid of losing all the comforts and the security that the whites provided, that he escapes to his bush with only the Smallness family. He is the man as Maureen remarks, who ".... 'll profit by others fighting" (JP 153). He does not care about his fellow South Africans. He doesn't even thing of ".... What might have happened to Ellen? She washed your clothes and slept with your. You want the Bakkie, to drive around like a gangster, imagining yourself a big man" (JP 153). The Bakkie, a constant symbol for the white's sophisticated life, stands as a testimony, in the hands of July to prove his reluctance to leave his urban past.

July's willingness to pay the role of the servant is because of the expectations of his village family. To them ".... the sunrises, the moon sets; the money must come' the man must go" (JP 83). So it's no wonder July takes pleasure in keeping himself as "their servant, their host" (JP 1).

In the course of the novel, July shows some sign of changes gradually. However, his family still clings on to the ancient system. Even though the blacks have become powerful, the village family is not willing to accept their new status. July's family still thinks of the Smalesees as their masters and providers. Martha and July's Mhani (mother) are not impressed by the



whites' narrow escape from the city with nothing. This is not how they imagined the all powerful whites to be. They cannot believe that the whites are now powerless. This is because, as Sheila Roberts observes,

“... the blacks are largely ignorant of the
Real significance of the new events, of
The fighting. Like most people, they
Cannot understand the implications of
History while they are enduring them. (JP 213)

July hopelessly tries to explain to his people of what is happening in the city.” “...You can't imagine those houses. I've seen it the whole thing just blew up, walls, and roof” (JP 19).

July's mother refuses to believe that. “Who shot? Black people? Our people? How could they do that?” (JP 21). She believes firmly that her people are incapable of doing such acts, “... white people. They are very powerful my son you'll never come to the end of things they can do”, (JP 21). She thinks that whites are still power holders. Her objection to the whites stay at the village is also because of her resentment at the inconvenience which is caused by the white's arrival that has stopped her from re-thatching her house for the season and made her stay in another place, she is angry with them. “They have money; let them go to their relatives, to other white people, if they're in trouble ... (JP 132). She does not show any signs of sympathy but simply shows her disapproval towards the whites by smirking at their helpless condition. She secretly laughs at the whites who could not exert power but submit to it. July's wife could not believe that the whites have no place to go to, except their village.

“... his wife jerked her chin in exaggerated parody of accord.... white people here! Didn't you tell us many times how they live, there, a room to sleep in, another room to sit in, a room with books, now you tell me nowhere (JP 19).

Martha's problem is that without the white family in the city, she would not be getting letters, gifts and money, which she would like to show off to her friends in the village. She is upset because “there'll be no more money coming every month” (JP 22). Instead of feeling happy for the presence of her husband at home, she broods over the loss of money. She could not understand the black's new found freedom nor could she understand the Smaleses present pathetic predicament.

The blacks always want to receive grace and favors from the whites even if they do not really want the things themselves. Centuries of slavery has embedded this kind of feeling not only in the adult psyche but also in the children. At one point in the novel 'Maureen offers a piece of sausage with the tip of the knife to a black child who

“... before she took the food ... brought her
Hands together as if to pray, then opened
Them and cupped the palms in an attitude
Of receiving grace” (JP 43).

The blacks do not realize that they are no longer in the condition to receive anything from the so called superiors. A peep into the psychology of Africans would throw some light into the problem as to why the African's being the majority allowed them to be treated so downtrodden. Gurleena Mehta observes that,

“... an African who was born and has
Lived the police states take a long time
To get convinced that he is as good as
Any other human being, regardless of
Color and language.” (21).

They consider themselves as inferior because they are downgraded to such an extent, to them white means ultimate power, supremacy and sophisticated life and the blacks are subject to it. The blacks themselves do not want the whites to come down from their pedestal and they find it difficult to accept the fall, even after the whites have fallen from their position.

July himself believed in white supremacy before he accepts the change. In the novel, bam, in his attempt to mingle with the community goes to a family gathering of July's relatives. He tries to share their pleasure by dancing to their Gumba-Gumba music and drinking beer. But July “intervened with a mug for him while others drank from a clay pot” (JP 35). July does not allow bam to drink beer from the earthenware like his relatives. To him bam is not to do so because he is the master.



The history of South Africa is being rewritten. But the smaleses and July cannot participate in the re-writing; they cling on to their previous roles, which are revealed to them in conflicting circumstances. This becomes evident at the beginning and end of the novel. The novel begins with a sentence that defines the two divisions of human races living together in South Africa. It begins with July performing his duty as a servant which no longer applies in the village. But July couldn't help it. He always wants to think of him only as the whites' subordinate human being. It begins with the performance of an unnatural and rather an anachronistic duty. The novel ends with a refusal of the most intimate relationship in the family. The end of the novel shows Maureen who runs like,

“.... a solitary animal at the season where
Animals neither seek a mate nor take care of
Young, existing only for their lone survival,
The enemy of all that would make claims of
Responsibility” (JP 160)

Maureen denies the most timeless of all human obligations and tries to escape for her lone survival. What happens between these two totally opposed moments namely; the anachronistic duty of July and denial of Maureen, leads to the destruction of a whole system of social relations. The incidents that happen between these two moments reveal their true colors. If they want to come and integrate with their new society like the children or run frantically like Maureen.

Works Cited

1. Bailey, Nancy. “Living without the Future: Gordimer’s July’s People” *World, Literature Written in English* 24.2. (Art 1984) 215-224.
2. Gordimer, Nadine, *July’s People* London: Penquin Books, 1981.
3. Green, Robert. “From the Lying days to July’s People: The Novels of Nadine Gordimer”. *Journal of Modern Literature* 14.4 (Spring 1988, 543-563).
4. Laredo, Ursula. “African Mosaic: The Novels of Gordimer”. *Journal of Common Wealth Literature* 8.1 (1973) 42-53.