



# MAPPING CULTURAL CONTOURS IN NADINE GORDIMER'S *JULY'S PEOPLE*

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**Abstract-** The issues of mapping culture has always been a subject of great debate as it is related with the language, culture, behavior, identity, naming of the people and their narration in the society. The greediness in man's nature and his ambition has pushed him in the very deep valley of destruction. With the result, as we are against natural resources, environment problems are increasing day by day. The most extreme causes can be seen through slavery, unemployment, low wages and their oppression. African Literature has been a record of African writers on cultural issues, identity crisis, racial problems and soil improvement. The pivotal cause is blindly imitating Western methods. Here, all these issues have been raised in Nadine Gordimer's novel *July's People*.

**Keywords:** cultural issues, environmental problems and racial problems.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Cultural studies developed in England at Birmingham in the year of 1960s. The popularity of this discipline has been reflected in the popular journals which are devoted to cultural studies. In the later years, it became more popular in North America as well as Australia. In universities, and colleges, it proved a perfect inter-disciplinary subject like political, social, musical, emotional, anthropological, cultural, and humanities, with a variety of the texts. Cultural studies have called as a complex discipline in studying contrary subjects in research fields. Dictionary of literary terms and literary theory defines cultural studies as,

Which attempts to how societies are bound together less by one class imposing its will on another than through negotiation and consent. Cultural studies practitioners' popular culture to be a principal arena through which the hegemony of the dominant class was established, but they also held that the same culture provided subordinate groups with resources and strategies for organization and resistance (Cuddon 178).

Culture is defined as a field to the assemblage of practices and beliefs that denote the contour of human lives. Culture

is represented as a whole way of life covering language, beliefs, aesthetic tastes, music, skills, and behavior in the society by the educationist and politicians. The term 'culture' derived from the Latin word 'cultura' meaning 'the natural process of tending' or the nurturing of the mind. To define cultural studies, Stuart Hall makes this point as,

Cultural studies, really begins with the debate about the nature of social and cultural change in postwar Britain. An attempt to address the manifest break-up of traditional class culture is set about registering the impact of the new forms of the affluence and consumer society on the very hierarchical and pyramidal structure of British society (Hall 12).

Thus, cultural studies used as a corrupting influence against industrialization in the year of 19th century. It uses wider system of power through social phenomena to fix the changing sets of practices and processes. Cultural studies understand how the meaning is generated within these systems of power and control.

In the present era, the scope of cultural studies has become broad, in the sense, that it has played its multi-role in literature and other areas of research for the scholars in different fields. The literary works of the writers have always been under the influence of the current situations. The political parties, rituals, morals, customs, all have their own power to control over the works that speaks about the truth of the society in the real sense. Language plays an important role in these phenomena, as a special tool to have its effect upon the readers as well as in the society. The authors, poets, journalists, and common people of the society have their cultures which denote their status according to their life style as how they live. And it becomes more complex in the sense when we broaden its areas crossing the boundaries of the states as well as countries. All the countries have their own cultures which represent their social standard and living style of life. K.W. Christopher points out about culture as, "The idea of culture in the later part of the 19th century was greatly influenced by Darwin's evolution theory" (Christopher 16).

Darwin's theory proves that the things which remain in use last long but unused or stable things lose their lives. Darwin's book *The Origin of Species* changed the



earlier established theories and facts with analysis data. It becomes much more when a country has its multi-culture as having the people from different countries like Canada, America, Australia, and New Zealand. There, we see the mingling of one culture into another. In this respect, India is already a country with multi-culture in its territory and it has so many festivals and rituals because of its multi-culturalism. Sometimes it is beneficial as we take advantages from it, but on the contrary, it has also demerits when culture clashes to one another. Writers have the chance to raise these issues in their works to represent the society. While going through the works of any writer, we are acquainted with the incidents that are responsible for cultural clash due to multi-cultures. Culture has a multi-dimensional role in the society because it portrays the whole picture of the society. Culture is displayed through the characters in the works, by using language, power, life-style, symbols, beliefs, emotions, rituals and so on. With the help of these characters, writers want to make us show how their characters incorporate the society in their realistic ways.

A little description is given about the culture through which how the writers are able to picture of the society and put light on the issues as displayed in the works of the writers. Everyone would have acquainted with the name of the noble laureate White African American female writer Nadine Gordimer whose distinguished work *July's People* has its especial effects on the issues of cultural conflict among the relations between the white and the black. In the story, these two races are introduced as master and servant, having their cultural causes and effects upon the characters, as how they live during 1980 racial riots in Johannesburg, South Africa. During racial riots, families in the city begin to escalate and also to ponder for their future. The story is about a black servant named July who rescues Smaleses 'his owner's family members'.

Bamford and Maureen Smales, have rich family with their children, enjoyed the life fully in big hotels not caring about money. They have a loyal servant named July, who is doing his service from last fifteen years in their house. The Smales family often gives him their used household items for his family. July is a trustworthy servant who relies on the Smales family for a pay check and his family subsistence. No one knows the coming events as Johannesburg falls prey to racial riots, how July manages to bring the Smales to a safety place in his village some 600 kilometers away from the riots hoping that they will establish new diagram with the mingling of the two races and their cultures. But it becomes uncomfortable for the Smales family as their living ways of lives, behavior, relations all are different in the black territorial. The blacks have their own culture and style which is not suitable for the Whites. In this context, we see that one culture cannot be as the same digestive as the other.

Nadine Gordimer's *July's People* envisions the

collapse between the two cultures of the White and the black, and wishes the emergence of a new political, social and ritual to fashion the contours of new identity. She is in dilemma as thinking for the whites and now will be ruled by the black. Because the black are new emerging power in South Africa and this will affect the culture of the whites as well as their norms in the new environment. She reminds the epigraph of the title of the novel from where it was taken and culled from Antonio Gramsci sets the tripartite timeframe of the narrative, "The old is dying and the new cannot be born; in the interregnum there arises a great diversity of morbid symptoms." With this quote, she wants to teach that one, who will attempt to establish, will remain for better future.

Although *July's People* is not a traditional utopian work but it adumbrates the racial and cultural interactions in 1960s South Africa. Gordimer sets the plot of her famous novel *July's People* in a dystopian future to avoid the catastrophic consequences of the two cultures through the exploitation of one race to the other. She portrays the incidents of South Africa's of the fifties, and disruption of social structures along with cultural clash, and turmoil of the social norms and faiths.

She has been the native of the country and all the events have happened before her eyes. Her wish was to change those social and cultural bondages which create diversity among the people and their cultures. She has always supported the medium way for the society for all human beings.

The story of *July's People* opens with white South African family Maureen and Bamford Smales where their black servant, named July, does his duty. The relation between the master and the servant is presented in the story with their values, culture, and feelings. July's loyalty shows here, how punctual he is towards his owner? During the time of riots, July paves the way for them leading in the night. As the Smales family leaves their home place and accompanies July to new home in the night sitting in their vehicle 'bakkie'. Gordimer writes in these lines as,

The vehicle was moved from the bush, at night, to a group of abandoned huts within sights of but removed from those of July's family. Bam did not use the headlights and was guided by July moving along in the dark ahead of him, as he had been certain stretches of the journey (Gordimer 13).

July's humanity shows even when the circumstances were against him but his loyalty expresses that the Black have their own customs and feelings they cannot set them free for selfishness. But for the whites this life is a far cry in comparison to their recently lives which were comfortable and enjoying.

July had a joint family as it was in the old custom to live all family members in one place. Gordimer writes, There were several others young women and half-grown girls, in the hut. His sister, wife's



sister-in-law, one of his daughters; he introduced them with a collective sweep in terms of kinship and not by name (Gordimer 20).

Here, we see that the Smales family finds themselves between cultural problems because they do not have joint family, and they feel in the same situation of deprived Africans have suffered for years having no more rudimentary comfort of modern living. Through the story it is clear that Bam and Maureen both have dissociated themselves the whites as it appears from their behavior, how they treat their black servant decently. We know from the history of the white how they remained unstable in accepting the South African nation-state under white rule. Respecting the rules and accepting the cultural conventions of the country makes the citizen better for using the resources of the country. As culture is not bounded to any particular state but it emerges everywhere breaking the borders of the states, and countries.

Racial discrimination has caused great disparities between the different racial groups, especially the black and the white. The black people have been aware about their future. So they knew that they could not put their coming generation's future in the darkness as they had passed themselves. We know that South Africa has the majority of the black. By this they can play their role in changing the circumstances which are against them in their own country. Their lives had been spent in fear and suffering since years. But now, by God's grace they have gain power to overcome from those difficulties which had made them slave. So it's time for us to struggle and survive. In this respect, July took care of his master for driving along with his friend to purchase grocery from the shop. But in his own country he says to his friend as,

He laughed, who's going to catch me? The white policeman is run away when the black soldiers come that time. Sometimes they take him, I don't know...No one there can ask me, where is my license. Even my pass, no one can ask anymore (Gordimer 73).

Here his natural anxiety comes to tell the white that they should not misunderstood them as weak and timid as their ancestors were.

In most of her novels, Gordimer presents the picture of the white people who are liberal and decent in cultural community to establish new norms and rules which may be easy for all the humans in the society. Maureen and Bam belongs to a multicultural society, but even they have jealousy for having the material wealth and possessions. But it becomes critical for them in the racial riot when they have to associate themselves in the cultural condition of South Africa and to follow the policies in the country. The cultural differences cannot be assimilated in one because of the racial discrimination and material possessions between the white and the black. But *July's People* does not appear as victims or villains of the Smales family; but it is their

unwillingness to collude themselves according to the present situation, with the natives of the country. Rosemarie Bodenheimer who puts her views in these criteria of cultural issues rose in the novel. She writes as,

Struggling unsuccessfully to maintain the rights of possession, the Smales couple manifests the 'morbid symptoms' of a dying consumerist culture in which identity is created by ownership and relationships are mediated by objects (Rosemarie 109).

This proves true when they refuse to share their bakkie, their vehicle, because of their ancient regional symptom which represents their culture.

The conflict over the bakkie represents their cultural inclination for the old things which belong to their ancestral heritage. The vehicle 'bakkie' is used here not only as a symbol but also represents their culture and way of life in the society. For some time, they forget themselves that July is their servant and one of the obedient to follow their orders. But they are unable to make compromise with their social norms, beliefs, feelings through which they represent their cultural dogma in the society. July has no intention to steal their car even he possesses the keys which the Smales family give him. This, he wants to show about the culture, dutifulness, and loyalty which separates him from other members of the society. But on the contrary, the Smales family insists on saying that July has stolen the car from them. Here, between the black and the white, we see a cultural clash which differentiates the mentality of these people. Gordimer has full faith that the White will not share their power and property easily.

With respect, the novel clears the property and safety of the Smaleses because of their fear caused during the state violence. Their theft of the gun is also a reason which makes them weak in the city. Having with a gun represents the power of one's safety and the white people believe and show about their culture through the weapons and other things. Maureen's reaction is always against the black as she feels ego into herself. July takes the car not for driving but he has the purposes to purchase for grocery for the children. Their vehicle also represents a bad luck to them. Since it has brought them to this new place, they lack freedom which is necessary for a married couple. Gordimer writes as,

They have not made love since the vehicle had taken them away. Unthinkable, living, and sleeping with the three children in the hut. A place with a piece of sacking for a door. Lack of privacy kills desire; if there had been any to feel - but the preoccupation with daily survival, so strange to them, probably had crowded that out anyway (Gordimer 97).

We also notice that for some time leaving the culture aside everyone needs privacy not for meeting but for solace and peace which is a remedy for all evils.



Maureen shows of her liberal views in order to making others believe that she has the same kind of suffering and pain with them. The show of culture and sympathy can only be substituted in the nature of Maureen. In one place of the story, she commands July to come in her hut to clear the relationship between them in Johannesburg and in reply he appears before him without any conceded defeat. Here, we study the superiority of the white over the black, master and servant, and their natural and cultural problems which are hidden in their characters. Here July shows his gratitude and loyalty to obey his master. His divisiveness also unveils the paradigms of the black culture in the white community. He says, "You could always tell me. You had only to say so. I had never made you do anything you don't think it was your job to do (Gordimer 86).

Maureen's inquisitiveness to visit the village of July is only to know about the life style and living culture of the black. Gordimer possesses much more guts to make her characters able to speak as she has; Maureen visits the village of July before the revolution. Her attitudes are the perception of her material reality by which she detaches herself from the Africans. Their stay in the hut makes them feel for from sufferings and pains of the black Africans. Here, once again, Maureen represents the culture of the white and their beliefs, language, living style that they are superior from the black. She thinks of her failures of the past, and admits the sufferings and pains of the black through the character of July. We are introduced the double character of Maureen as her treatment with July before war and after the revolution. Gordimer makes it clear through sharing the cultural aspect in South African Liberal position. Her attempt was to make a stand upon which both the black and the white can stand properly. She opposes the fact as "Love one another or perish" as a medicine to the disparities between the two cultures. Her most believable fact lies in changing the circumstances of the majority, and nurturing the symptoms of the society to the purpose for honesty.

In *July's People*, Nadine Gordimer condemns the cultural and interracial relations through behavior and communication. She foresees that traditional values should be respected and both of the races must live within the circle of compound without blaming or harming. The novel also contains Maureen's racial discrimination as she does not enter into the hut while she had been there. The line runs in the novel as, "She had lived for more than two weeks within steps of that huts and could have lived there forever without going inside it" (Gordimer 81).

Through this we note that the cultural differences are visible everywhere even is the condition of such as when life falls in opposite circumstances. The ending of their novel tells nothing the reader that what will happen to her at the last of the story. Only helicopter hovering over them indicated the identity of the people of the country. They may be White soldiers or revolutionaries whether they harm

them or give them salvation. Her fluctuating nature comes in the end of the novel how she began to think about the challenging condition of the South Africa where racial riots have made the city a place of massacre and dread land.

Despite the limitations of the views, Ruth Levitas argues that Maureen runs towards the helicopter is her dreadful nature as represented in the novel. Her running is not from the fear of the helicopter but from the old structures, relations, cultures, social issues, and natural situation. Perhaps she is unable to seeking the new identity in the opposed culture of the Africa or the one that is different from the liberal identity she has cultivated within herself. Now she has no wish to make a compromise with her own impasse in the oppositional political and social arrangements of the black of African country. She has been conscious that future lie within the interregnum and not in the utopian alternatives. But all the people of the country seek helicopter as an exhilarated rather than frightened. They all show their exclamations, joys and discuss with laughter. For Maureen, helicopter is a symbol which can harm their family as well as their social status. It is clear through the novel that the white South Africans believe in the faith and embrace the future unknown while the Black does not think so.

Gordimer's *July's People* identifies the morbid symptoms of the White South Africans and she hopes to establish a new culture ruled by the native Africans. In comparison to her other novel *Burger's Daughter*, character Rosa comes to realize that the problem with the white in the South Africa against the black of the country is that they want to express the terms of the struggle for the black. It takes a vexing but enlightening argument the other character of the novel, Zwelinzima Vulindela, who represents the Black Conscious Movement in South Africa. They want to realize Rosa that dissident whites should be willing to follow the black rather than to lead them. Gordimer has always criticized the white who had been liberal for the black in the matter of social and political order.

On the one hand, the narrative generates cultural and social understanding of the characters and the nature how they express themselves during opposite situation. Gordimer hopes from the reader to recognize the substance of the reality in the novel. The politics of culture, anticlosure, social status all crumbles with its aims in *July's People*. Gordimer does not believe in prescription but it becomes necessary to express her views through the characters with feelings and emotional power. She has always insisted for the white to make themselves fit to live in Africa with liberalism not with aggressive nature. The Gina's role is important is this regard as she defies the fear of the White racist. Her mother rebukes her for learning the Fangalo, the black South African lingua franca. Gina becomes a metamorphosis into an African girl, immersing herself in African language, culture, manner, food, and perceptions so much so that her new world has become the



yardstick through which she perceives the rest of the world. Gina learns native language with her friend Nyiko, a black African child. "Gina wavered through a lullaby she had learnt from her companions, in their language" (Gordimer 96). Gordimer herself accepts this that we must change ourselves according to the need of the time and it is the rule of evolution which has the facts.

Cultural differences cannot be separated as we perceive in the characters of Maureen and Lydia. Maureen regards Lydia as her best friend and her confidante, but cultural and social issues of their own racial cannot be differed from themselves for being colored as white and black. Gina, on the other hand, breaks these norms of the society of the White in this regard. Gina also adopts the cultural and traditional issues of the Africans in their own way as the younger children help the little one in raise. Through this we come to the point that in social space transculturation takes place. The subordinate culture is transmitted to the dominant culture in the theory of Charles Darwin.

Subordinate groups always construct the differed identities by writing the history of their own. Gordimer expresses her feelings for the white as she wishes that they should accept the values and systems of the South Africa to make them able for living in the society. If they want to live in that country, they must be ready to assimilate the culture, language and values of that country. In this way, they can be able to digest their culture and rituals to make them livable in other country. For this, Gordimer takes the example of Gina who hybridizes her identity by mixing her own identity and cultural background with that of the Africans. Most of the countries have their own culture, myths, histories, geography and languages. If we want to establish ourselves in that atmosphere, we have to change according to the atmosphere. Most of the people, who settle in different part of the world, make themselves able to adopt that country's culture, language and life style.

Victor's role in the novel is presented as an aggressive of ownership that Gordimer finds objectionable in white South Africa. He wants to impress the children with his car which is the cultural symbol for the white in the novel. But his impression shows racial difference as he tells his mother that his car should not be touched by the black of South Africans. His sense for his material wealth shows only a persistent remnant of the system.

In *July's People*, we find that the two impulses run throughout the novel. One is uncertain, the other one is unequivocal. Upon these two disparities, Gordimer has characterized the racial and cultural problems with a great deal. Gordimer, as being the member of the oppressive race has no right to dictate to the black the course of their struggle in the African racial riot. She wants to guide the white how they can be able to fit in the country like Africa where they are in minority. She says that White African writers cannot separate themselves from the demands of the

society which has been put upon them. But they are also connected with their historical background of the country.

Gordimer has been a political activist in South Africa as well as a writer. She was acquainted with the political upheavals that are why she expects from the White to assimilate the culture and language of their native which will enable them to be the citizen of the country. She portrays the incidents in her stories with the ideological convictions. As a writer, she has a private view in her eyes to establish a general feeling and deep, intense, thinking for making a balance between the two cultures without oppositional factors in South Africa. She also favors for the black that they must have the authority to participate in civil, economic, political rights that they themselves may not think about the racial clash between the two cultures. Black African writer Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, also locates intellectual endeavors within the matrix of social and cultural responsibility, speaking language against power and advocating the rights of the oppressed. He observes,

Our pens should be used to increase the anxieties of all oppressive regimes. At the very least the pen should be used to 'murder their sleep' by constantly reminding those of their crimes against the people, and making them know that they are being seen. The pen may not always be mightier than the sword, but used in service of truth, it can be a mighty force (Thiong'o 69).

Being a white writer, Gordimer has experienced the pain and suffering of the black in their own land. In comparison to black writers like Achebe and Ngugi, she believes that a writer can play a better role in uplifting human beings from the controversies of their cultural and social problems. Writer cannot participate openly in the riots but he can act as a spokesperson for the oppressed one. For this purpose, she admits that art is the medium through which we send our message into the society to resist the abuses which are borne during the racial riots. There may be other medium to balance between these social problems, but we forward this message through poetry, literature, fiction and novels. In her own writing, Gordimer has taken upon herself to educate people and informing them about human and moral cost in the oppressed society. In this way, we can have a new society where there is no cultural and social discrimination upon which humans make line of their own territory.

*July's People* is one of Gordimer's best novels focusing upon the cultural diversions between the black and the white in South Africa. With a foresight, she teaches us a lesson that everything has a balance to make its existence in the nature. So we should also make such kind of social and cultural, linguistic and ritualistic, natural and material balance as nature has. She believes in sharing equal rights and material property between the black and the white. In doing so, they can hope for a future state where both of the community would decide on one stage for their society and the nation. She does not shy in discussing about the real



democracy which can only be true on equal beliefs and faiths, rejecting the privileges based on solely on race and color.

## II. CONCLUSION

We can say that the importance of cultural studies has become a milestone in studying literature. By this, we know about the differences and similarities between social and cultural dogma prevailing in the society. And more important is that this theory also studies gender, race and ethnicity of the human beings through the medium of characters which are being presented in the works of literary figures. This genre is also related to Diaspora study of the text and engaged with structuralism and postmodernism. These factors create hybrid identities in the globalization.

Gordimer's *July's People* has all the tenets and causes which tell truth of the South African racial riots during 1970s. As culture cannot be defined within the limitation of words it studies in multiple areas of human fields. As Chris Barker writes defining 'culture' that,

The concept of culture is a tool for exploring human conduct from a variety of perspectives. Indeed, no story concerned on the meaning of culture is 'just' a description; it is also an evolution and implicit justification of concerns contemporary to that account (Barker 67).

Culture is always a reflection of the engaging reality. The facts, fiction, myths and aspiration of the ethnic populace at any time under any geographical settings catalysts of making the culture of the same. And very truly, it is evident from the *July's People's* literary trajectories that the author has paid significant heed upon the cultural negotiation.

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