



# Cultural conflicts in Nadine Gordimer's "July People"

Divya Kaushik, Department of English, Chaudhary Ranbir Singh University, Jind

## Abstract:

His desire to achieve greatness has led him down a path of ruin that reaches as far as the deepest pit in which man has ever fallen. As a result, environmental issues are on the rise as a result of our opposition to natural resources. Slavery, Culture has long been a hot topic of controversy because it has a lot to do with language, culture, behaviour, identity, naming, and narration of individuals in society unemployment, low wages, and other forms of oppression are examples of the most extreme causes. As a record of African writers' thoughts on cultural, identity, race and soil improvement matters African Literature has been an invaluable resource. The root of the problem is a complete lack of self-confidence. July's People by Nadine Gordimer addresses all of these topics.

**Keywords:** Nadine Gordimer, July's people, Cultural Issues, Environmental Problems, And Racial Problems, cultural fusion.

## Introduction:

In the 1960s, Birmingham, England, became a centre for cultural studies. Journals dedicated to cultural studies have shown that this field is becoming increasingly popular. Later on, it gained traction in both North America and Australia. For example, in universities and colleges, it proved to be an absolute trans-disciplinary subject that covered a wide range of topics, from political to emotional to anthropological to cultural. As a multifaceted field of study, cultural studies has been dubbed "the study of opposites." "Cultural studies" is defined in the Dictionary of Literary Terms and Theory as,

This study aims to show that social cohesion is more closely tied to negotiation and consent than it is to the imposition of one class's will on another. The dominant class's hegemony was established in large part through popular culture, but cultural studies practitioners also believed that the same culture offered subordinate groups with resources and techniques for organising and resisting the hegemony (Cuddon 178).

The term "culture" refers to the collection of activities and beliefs that define the shape of human existence. Educationists and politicians use the term "culture" to refer to a way of life that includes language, beliefs, artistic interests, music, expertise, and behaviour in the community. The Latin word 'cultura', which means 'the natural process of tending' or 'the nourishing of the mind,' is the origin of the term 'culture.' Stuart Hall offers the following point to describe cultural studies:

The argument over the nature of postwar British social and cultural change is where cultural studies really gets its start. An attempt is made to document the impact of the new affluent and consumer society forms on the highly hierarchical and pyramid structure of British society in order to deal with the seeming breakdown of traditional class culture (Hall 12).

Thus, cultural studies were employed as a vicious influence against industrialization in the 19th century. Changes in practices or processes can be stabilized through a wider structure of power. Understanding how these systems of power and control generate meaning is an important part of cultural studies.

For researchers in a variety of academic disciplines, cultural studies have taken on a greater scope, in that it has played a variety of roles in literature and other areas of study. The contemporary circumstances have always had an impact on the writers' literary works. The rituals, ethics, and morals of political parties, as well as other social constructs, exert influence over the kinds of works that reveal the real truths of a society. When it comes to these issues, language plays a crucial role as a unique weapon for having an impact on readers and society at large. Authors, poets, journalists, and members of the general public all have their own distinct cultures that indicate their rank in society based on how they live their lives. It becomes even more complicated when we expand the scope of the problem to include states and countries. There is a distinct culture in every country, one that reflects the norms of its people and the way they live. "The idea of culture in the late 19th century was strongly impacted by Darwin's evolution theory," says K.W. Christopher (Christopher 16).

There is a brief description of the culture in which the writers are in a position to draw a picture of society and highlights the concerns that are depicted in their works. Nadine Gordimer, a White African American female writer, is a household name, and her work *July's People* has a specific impact on the cultural clash between the white and black communities. Cultural differences between these two races are depicted in the story as they are depicted in the characters' daily lives in Johannesburg, South Africa. Racially-motivated violence causes families to rise and think about their futures during riots. Black servant July saves Smales "his owner's family members" in the story. The story is narrated by July.

Despite to be well, Bamford and Maureen Smales, together with their children, indulged in excessive luxury in upscale hotels. They have a long-serving servant named July who has been working for them for the past fifteen years. When he needs something for his family, the Smales family frequently provides him their unwanted goods. July is a dependable servant who depends on the Smales household for financial support and food for his family. No one knows how July manages to get the Smales family to his town some 600 kilometers away from the racial rioting in Johannesburg, but he hopes that the mingling of two races and their cultures might lead to a new way of thinking about race relations. As a result, the Smales family's manner of life, conduct, and relationships all alter in the black territories they find themselves in. The Whites do not fit in with the culture and style of the blacks. We can see from this that no two cultures have the same digestive tract.

A new political, social, and ceremonial identity is envisioned in Nadine Gordimer's *July's People* if the two cultures of the White and the Black are dissolved. She's caught in a bind because she used to stand up for the whites but now she's under the thumb of the blacks. There will be a significant impact on white culture and norms in South Africa as the black population grows in prominence. It is a reference to the novel's title, which she cites in the author's epigraph. A large variety of sick symptoms occur in the interregnum, which is put up by Antonio Gramsci as a tripartite timeframe for the story: "The old is dying, and the new cannot be born." She wants to convey the message that those who work hard to build a better future will be there for the long haul.

As opposed to a classic utopian work, however, *July's People* depicts the racial and cultural interactions in South Africa throughout the 1960s. *July's People*, one of Gordimer's best-known works, is set in a dystopian future in an attempt to avoid the potentially calamitous outcomes that could result from exploitation of one

race by another. She depicts the events of the fifties in South Africa, and the social and cultural turmoil that ensued as a result of this event.

She is a native of the country and has seen everything that has happened. That which divides people and cultures is a result of social and cultural bondages that need to be reformed. Throughout her life she has always advocated for a more balanced stance to society, which she thinks is best for everyone.

White South African couple Maureen and Bamford Smales had a black servant named July working for them as the story begins in July's People. Their ideals, culture and feelings are depicted in the story to show how they relate to one other. July's dedication to his master can be seen here, as he is always on time for his visits. July sets the stage for nighttime riots during the riot season. Sitting in their 'bakkie', the Smales family packs up their belongings and heads out into the night to follow July to her new home. Gordimer pens the following:

A series of abandoned cottages near but far from July's family was chosen for the vehicle's final destination when it was driven from the bush at night. Rather of using the headlights, bam followed July's route into the darkness, as he had done on previous sections of the journey (Gordimer 13).

Even though the odds were stacked against him, July's humanity shone through, and his dedication and loyalty showed that the Black have their own traditions and feelings that cannot be trampled on for the sake of self-interest. While this is a better life for the blacks, it is a far cry from what they were used to in the previous.

July had a large family, as was customary in the past, when all members of the family lived together. Several additional young women and half-grown girls were also present in the hut. In terms of kinship and not by name, he referred to them as his sister, his wife's sister-in-law, one of his daughters (Gordimer 20).

Cultural issues are evident in this case because the Smales family does not have a joint family and feels like they are in the same position as deprived people in Africa for years. Bam and Maureen appear to have separated themselves from the whites, as seen by their handling of their black servant. A lot may be learned about white attitudes about South Africa's independence from white dominance from the past. Citizens are better able to utilise the country's resources when they follow the rules and adhere to the country's cultural norms. People can't be limited by the borders of their own states or countries because culture is not confined to any one place or time period.

Gordimer often depicts white people who are liberal and fair in their cultural community as establishing new standards and regulations that are easy for all humans to follow. Even though Maureen and Bam live in a multicultural society, they nevertheless feel envy of those who have more money and belongings. This is crucial for them in the riot because they must conform to South Africa's cultural norms and adhere to its policies. Differences in cultural values can't be overcome due to racial prejudice as well as disparity in material wealth. They appear to be victims or villains of the Smales family, but it is their reluctance to cooperate with the indigenous of the region that is the real problem. Rosemarie Bodenheimer, a character in the novel who expresses her opinions on cultural matters using these criteria, rises to prominence. She expresses herself this way:

Struggling miserably to protect the rights of possession, the Smales marriage shows the 'morbid symptoms' of a fading individualistic culture in which identity is generated by ownership and relationships are mediated by objects (Rosemarie 109).

When they refuse to share their bakkie, their vehicle, because of their ancient regional symptom, which reflects their culture, this is exactly what is happening. The fight over the bakkie is a symbol of their affinity for antiquated objects that are a part of their cultural heritage. To the people of South Africa, the "bakkie" represents more than just transportation. For a while, they lose sight of July's role as a servant and one of their most obedient subordinates. Despite this, they are not able to bargain with their cultural dogma's social



norms, beliefs, and feelings. Even though he has the Smales family's car keys, July has no intention of stealing it. This is a way for him to demonstrate that he is different from the rest of society because of his culture, courtesy, and commitment. The Smaleses family, on the other hand, maintains that July stole their automobile. We notice a cultural conflict between the black and white people here, which reveals the differences in their mindsets. Gordimer has complete faith in the White's refusal to give up their wealth and power.

Fear caused by state violence compelled the Smaleses to clear their property and safety, which the novel does with respect. The fact that they stole the gun also makes them vulnerable in the city. Having a gun in one's hand symbolises one's ability to protect oneself, and white people believe and display their culture through their firearms and other possessions. When Maureen feels ego in herself, she constantly reacts against the black. July uses the car to go grocery shopping for the kids, not to go driving. Their car is also a bad omen for them, as it represents poor luck. They don't have the freedom that a married pair needs because it's brought them here. Gordimer expresses his thoughts in the following manner:

They haven't had sex since the car took them apart. Living and sleeping in the hut with the three children is unthinkable. A door made of sacking serves as the entrance to this room. Desire dies in the absence of privacy; if they'd felt any, the obsession with daily life, which was so foreign to them, had likely pushed it out anyhow (Gordimer 97).

In effort to convince others that she feels the same way they do, Maureen displays her liberal leanings. It is only in Maureen's personality that the demonstration of culture and empathy may be substituted. When she demands that July come to her hut in Johannesburg to settle out their relationship, he appears before him without conceding defeat. The white man's supremacy over the black man, the master and the servant, and the inherent and societal issues that these people face are all explored in this book. July demonstrates his gratitude and devotion to his owner by obeying him. Also, his divisiveness reveals the black culture's paradigms in the white world. "You could always tell me," he says. You only had to say it once. Nothing that you don't think it's your job to do has ever been imposed on you by me before (Gordimer 86).

It is just to learn about the black people's way of life and culture that Maureen intends to travel to the village of July in July. She has considerably more courage to let her characters speak like she does; Maureen visits July's village before it was overrun. Her views are the means by which she isolates herself from the Africans' experience of material reality. They are able to escape the pain and suffering of the black Africans by living in the hut. Again, Maureen is a symbol of the white culture and its beliefs, language, and way of life that it is superior to that of the black. In July's character, she reflects on her previous mistakes and acknowledges the sorrow and suffering of those who are darkened. As a result of her treatment by July both before and after the revolution, we are introduced to the dual personality of Maureen. By highlighting the cultural aspects of the South African Liberal perspective, Gordimer makes it plain. It was her goal to create a platform on which both the black and the white could be heard. In her opinion, "Love one another or perish" is not a remedy for cultural differences. One of her most plausible claims is that she is able to influence the majority of people and encourage the symptoms of society as a whole to strive for honesty.

Nadine Gordimer criticises intercultural and interracial relations in July's People. For her, she sees a future when traditional values are preserved and both races live peacefully inside a circle of compound. Maureen's racial discrimination is also depicted in the narrative, since she refused to enter the hut while she was there. For more over two weeks, she had lived within a few feet from the huts and might have stayed there indefinitely (Gordimer 81).

To develop a new African culture, Gordimer seeks to identify and treat White South Africans' morbid illnesses in her novel, July's People. Rosa, in Burger's Daughter, learns that the white South Africans' difficulty with the black South Africans is that they wish to articulate the terms of the battle for the black. Rosa, in Burger's

Daughter, doesn't learn this lesson until much later. A thorny but enlightening argument is made by Zwelinzima Vulindela, who represents South Africa's Black Conscious Movement. Dissenter whites should be prepared to follow the black rather than lead them, they tell Rosa. On the issue of social and political order, Gordimer has consistently chastised whites who had been liberal with blacks.

Contrary to what our heroines Maureen and Lydia seem to suggest, cultural differences cannot be erased. Although Maureen considers Lydia to be a close friend and confidante, cultural and social difficulties specific to their own race prevent them from seeing eye to eye. On the contrary, Gina defies the societal norms of the White race. It is Gina's own way of adopting African cultural and traditional issues as Gina's younger children help raise the baby. This leads us to the conclusion that social space is a site where transculturation happens. According to Charles Darwin's idea, the dominant culture inherits the subordinate culture.

As a white South African, Gordimer sees Victor's role in the novel to be an antagonistic form of ownership. He wants to show off his car, which is a cultural symbol for whites in the story, to the children. However, his racial bias is on display when he informs his mother that the black people of South Africa shouldn't touch his car. Despite his affluence, he shows merely a remnant of the system's influence.

throughout every chapter of the book. Confusion discretizes them, while hardness divides them. On these two points, Gordimer has elaborated extensively on the issues surrounding race and culture. As a member of the dominant race, Gordimer has no right directing to the blacks how their racial riot should proceed. She wants to show whites how to adapt to a nation like Africa, where they are a minority, so that they can feel at home there. She claims that White African writers are unable to separate themselves from the expectations placed on them by society. In addition, they form a part of the country's rich cultural heritage.

Gordimer has been a South African political activist and a writer. She was aware of the political turmoil, therefore she expected the White to adopt their original culture and language in order to become a citizen of the country. In her stories, she presents events according to her personal ideologies. As a writer, she has a unique perspective on how to create a sense of harmony between the two cultures in South Africa by focusing on the commonalities rather than the differences. There must be a level of civil, economic and political involvement for blacks that they are not aware of because of the racial tensions that exist between them and whites. To Ngugi Wa Thiong's credit, he places his intellectual achievements in the context of social duty, advocating for the rights of oppressed people in his writings. he observes,

All oppressive governments' fears should be stoked by us with our pencils. It should be utilised to "murder their sleep" by continually reminding individuals of their crimes against the people, and making them aware that they are being observed. As long as it's employed in service of justice and truth, the pen can be an effective weapon (Thiong'o 69).

A white writer, Gordimer is well-versed in the hardships faced by African Americans in their own country. A writer, she believes, is better equipped to help people overcome the complexities of their cultural and social problems than a black writer like Achebe or Ngugi. An oppressed person's voice can only be heard through the eyes of a writer. As a result, she recognizes that art is a means through which we may transmit our message into society to defy the abuses that are endured during riots of color. Poems, literature, fiction, and novels serve as a vehicle for conveying social messages that can't be conveyed in any other way. Gordimer has taken it upon herself to educate and inform others on the human and moral costs of living in an oppressive society through the medium of her own writing. It's possible to create a new society where there is no prejudice based on culture or social standing.

## Conclusion:

We might say that cultural studies have become an important milestone in the study of literature. This tells us about the dissimilarity and similarities between the social and cultural ethic that is common in society today.

As a result, this theory also examines the gender, race and ethnicity of human beings by way of literary figures' depiction in the works of literary characters. Diaspora studies of the text and structuralism and postmodernism are equally relevant to this genre. Globalization has created mixed identities because of these factors.

There are all the facts and causes of the riots in South Africa in the 1970's depicted in Gordimer's *July People* novel. The study of culture encompasses a wide range of human endeavours because it is impossible to sum up in a single field of study. In Chris Barker's definition of 'culture,'

In order to fully understand human behaviour, one can use the concept of culture. In fact, no story about the meaning of culture is merely a description; it is also a development and an implicit justification of concerns that are relevant at the time of that story's publication. (Barker 67).

Culture is always a reflection of what is most attractive to people. The aspirations, realities, fiction, and myths of a particular ethnic group at any given time and in any location serve as catalysts for the development of that group's culture. Moreover, it is clear from the literary trajectory of the *July's People* that the author has given much attention to the cultural negotiation.

## References:

1. Bailey, Nancy. "Living without the Future: Nadine Gordimer's *July's People*." *World Literature in English*,
2. Barker, Chris. *Making Sense of Cultural Studies*. Sage, 2002.
3. Bodenheimer, Rosemarie. "The Interregnum of Ownership in *July's People*." *The Later Fiction of Nadine Gordimer*. Edited by Bruce King. New York, 1993.
4. Christopher, K. W. *Rethinking Cultural Studies*. Rawat Publications, 2005.
5. Cuddon, J. A. *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*. Revised by M.A.R. Habib, Penguin Books, 2014.
6. Gordimer, Nadine. *July's People*. Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2005.
7. ---. *Burger's Daughter*. Penguin Books, 1977.
8. Hall, Stuart. "The Emergence of Cultural Studies and the Crisis of Humanities." *The Humanities of Social Technology*, vol. 53, The MITS Press, 1990, p.12.
9. Thiong'o, Ngugi Wa. *Barrel of a Pen: Resistance to Repression in Neo-Colonial Kenya*. African World Press, 1983.
10. Thompson, Leonard. *A History of South Africa*. Yale University Press, 2000. vol. 24, no. 2, 1984, pp. 215-16.
11. Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the World*. New York: Grove Press, 1963.
12. Gordimer, Nadine. *July's People*. London: Penguin, 1982.
13. Saul, John Ralston. "The dictatorship of reason in the West", *Voltaire's Bastards*, <https://catalogue.nla.gov.au/Record/384725>. Web. 23 Feb. 2019.
14. Smith, Rowland. "Masters and Servants: Nadine Gordimer's *July's People* and The Themes of Her Fiction", Skidmore College, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40547639>. Web. 23 Feb. 2019.