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Treatment of Women in Nadine Gordimer's My Son's Story

It is believed that the concept of feminism oscillated from time to time, and place to place. Feminism in literature is essentially concerned with representation of women in the society. It has explored that plight of women in the male oriented society in which women have to be dumb and bear the pangs of misery like humility, mental exploitation, sexual harassment, marital rape, honour killing etc. In this way, feminist consciousness has provided a new awareness of women's role in modern complex world. Feminist scholars aim at forging a new identity for women. The African novelists use myths, legend and proverbs for making the people aware of their heritage and history. This has created a sense of history in which in the minds of people and generated a critical perspective to know the past, evaluate the present and visualize the future. The novelists have played the ancient role of the narrators who have not only transmitted legends, myths, and the collective wisdom through their oral narratives, but also used narratives as the focal points of social harmony. The African novelists believe in Social integration and resent the neo-colonial approach to subdue native culture. Nadine Gordimer has exposed the traumas and tensions of apartheid in South Africa. So, her novels mark a swift in her focus from a concern with the role of whites in polarized society. In this paper, I shall be looking at the ways in which women are represented in Nadine Gordimer's texts. Gordimer has questioned women's inherited identity and created women protagonists

who have tried to display rounded characters. Thus, her works create an awareness of the way in which women's identity has been constructed.

Women writers like Nadine Gordimer and Toni Morrison present an insider's view of the female psyche, their aspirations and their dilemmas. In the novel, *My Son's Story*, Gordimer places major emphasis on examining women's lives and their psyche in the context of South African family, representing women in their traditional roles as mothers, wives and daughters. While Toni Morrison in *Beloved* explores an analysis of society's attitude towards victims of a cultural materialistic approach. Hence, the focus of cultural materialists is on issues that have been disregarded in America. *The black women in America are triple burdened and disadvantaged. They are black, female and economically underprivileged. This triple burden has restricted them from a fuller and meaningful participation in American society mainly because they are confined to their race.* Among all issues she has addressed racial discrimination and psychological problems in a white society.

Nadine Gordimer's *My Son's Story* offers the theme of relationships that are related to the theme of commitment, personal and political. In the realm of relationships, the novelist has shown the influence of politics clearly.

It is about a coloured family ravaged by the father's affair with a white woman. It also deals with a picture of a marriage and an extramarital affair. Sonny is a husband and father in the novel. *He likes Aila in his primary stage and he uses to think: She is blond, my father's woman of course. What else would she be? How else would he be caught, this man who has traveled so far from all the humble traps of our kind, drink, glue-sniffing, wife-beating, loud-mouthed caper... and all the sophisticated traps of lackeyism, corruption, nepotism.... If he is to be caught, of course, it's going to be...¹*

Will is his son who feels cynical over his father's betrayal and tells a story. The novel has three major female characters named Aila, Hannah and Baby. The projection of women is seen on a wider scale in the novel.

Aila is one of the greatest major characters of *My Son's Story*. She is married to Sonny. She does not flirt and thinks that a husband is meant a lifelong friend. Hence, she keeps to herself some fibre of her personality as a separate identity. She makes self-respect. She takes a secretarial course and studies psychology in preparation for a useful working life. She knows sonny's growing involvement in politics but she supports him in his decision. In one hand, Aila understands everything but on the other Sonny keeps nothing from her. Owing to political matters, Sonny was furnished. He was in the prison and Hannah, beloved of Sonny visited him again and again. When he comes out of prison, Aila doesn't go through with him. *Here, we have to remember about the relation between Rasheed and Laila of the novel Khaled Hossein's A Thousand Splendid Suns. When Rasheed gets married to Laila Merian, an outcast mother breathes a sigh of relief and the novelist asserts:*

But it was inevitable that they would run into each other. Marian passed the girl on the stairs, in the narrow hallway, in the kitchen, or by the door as she was coming in from the yard. When they meet like this, an awkward tension rushed into the space between them. The girl gathered her skirt and breathed out a word or two of apology, and as she hurried past, Mariam would chance a sidelong glance and catch a blush... sex, mercifully, was a closed chapter in her own life. It had been for sometime and now even the thought of those laborious sessions of lying beneath Rasheed made Mariam Query in the gut...²

In this way, Sonny gets anxiety and thinks that strange. To the passage of time, Sonny tries to betray her trust and he compares her with Hannah. Aila becomes an irritant for Sonny.

Hannah is Sonny's comrade. She becomes his mistress. He wishes her to talk him and releases from his fears. She is a divorced woman but she falls in love with him. She desires for

individual's identity in highly commercialized. She is encouraged to concentrate on the emotions in the favour of Sonny. Her relationship to Sonny gives birth the political and the personal fields. Other characters of the novel interact with them. They (Sonny and Hannah) meet as activists. This gives to the tension life in the novel. Hannah writes him: *I know you will come out happy for the battle...*³ In this way, Hannah presents her consciousness. She also feels scared of guilty that she takes the path of betrayal. She has learnt a new of life and she breaks social and moral code to establish her identity. In this way she discovers the joy and is far from the shackles of race and gender discrimination. She also dreams for escape and decides to go on a long trip.

Baby is a Sonny's favorite child and she lives carefree. Owing to negative impulses she attempts suicide but her attempt became in vain. She is married to a freedom-fighter and goes in to exile at Lusaka. She is swayed by the student's movement and she joins the political struggle as a coping mechanism. Thus, Hannah is an anti-apartheid worker who tries to meet Sonny visiting him in the prison. On the other hand of Hannah, Baby thinks that she controls her ways. When her mother comes to meet her, she feels happy in her motherly love. She does whatever it pleases. Thus, she is conscious of only her action not of the consequences which results from her action.

Nadine Gordimer has thus beautifully presented the realistic picture of the treatment of women in My Son's Story. As a novel, My Son's story seems schematic and prosy regarding for the treatment of women characters. Here women are caught in the process of redefining and rediscovering their own roles, position and relationships within their given social life. The novelist has presented the impact of race and gender in the novel. The point of view is used to present the treatment of women and their social reality. *Rejection, abandonment, unhappiness, hatred, frustration, depression fill women life. Men always emphasize the importance of their reputation and to protect their 'namoos' or reputation can do whatever they want without*

considering women's feelings and desires. Her women characters try to transcend the restrictive role in the novel. They rebel, reject and seek freedom from the traditional norms and the way of life.

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