
A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE TRANSFORMATION IN MASTER-SERVANT RELATIONSHIP PORTRAYED IN GORDIMER'S JULY'S PEOPLE

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Abstract:

The postmodernist era witnessed so many changes and transformations in social life. South Africa is a country that felt a social and cultural transformation in its lifestyle. It was possible only because of the writers who reflected the real feelings of the oppressed people through their influential writings. In South Africa, people were divided as White and Black, and the White treated the Black as their servants who were exploited a lot. Unable to digest this oppressive attitude, some writers like Nadine Gordimer protested against the White through her writings. So, through her novel, July's People, the novelist Nadine Gordimer narrates how the White people illtreat and exploit the Black by all means maximum.

Moreover, she also portrays how the situation transformed the White to understand the feelings of Black people. So, in this novel, the narrator talks about the Master-servant relationship; the action takes place in a village where the Blacks live. Because of some political changes, the servant, July, takes his Master's family to his village to hide and save them from Black rebels. The revolution takes place between White and Black in Johannesburg as the

apartheid system is followed there. From the novel, one can outline the development of July towards the Smales, the White. Hence, this paper portrays the complete change of attitude between the master-servant relationships and the transformation in social, racial, cultural, and relationships.

Keywords: Oppression, Black and White Race, Cultural Transformation, Master-Servant Relationship, Racial Transformation.

The social transformation in apartheid South Africa took place in the year 1970. The narrator describes the escape of the Smales from Johannesburg to a nearby village. Nadine Gordimer states the happenings in Soweto and Johannesburg, where revolution occurs, and the Black liberals are against the White in South Africa. In 1948, South Africa tolerated the national parties and their apartheid system where segregation in race took place. The Whites were given higher privileges than the Blacks, which was considered a curse in society. The Black leader Nelson Mandela

was sentenced to prison in 1976, and the student rebels of Black were put in the army and marched towards Soweto. The students who protested against apartheid were gunshot, and some non-White got killed in the violence. Though there were deaths everywhere, the Blacks entered Soweto to protest to transform society.

One day smiles servant, July, takes the Bakkie, the White's vehicle, without their permission. When Bam questions July about the vehicle, he answers with a gesture in his hands. He never uses the word 'sir.' And then, July says to Bam that he should drive the car. The gesture of July shows how the Black servant controls the Whites as they depend on their servant for existence. The answer given by July to his Master shows the reversal of the relationship. Then Bam again questions July about the license to which July answers that nobody can question him here. He says that the White policeman should run away once they see the Black police army, and none can question him about the vehicle. July also asserts that if someone asks about the purchase of the vehicle, he would say that he got the vehicle from the town. The above-said July's different attitude shows a transformation between the White and The Black.

In the novel *July's People*, one can see that July answers more than the Master revealing the present situation of the White in the apartheid society. The statement of July, "the White policemen would run away seeing the Black policeman," shows the power of the Black over the White at present

in society, and the apartheid system is slowly being deconstructed in society. The Black takes the power away as they have control over the Master. The master-servant relationship also undergoes several changes in the latter part of the novel. The Whites have lost everything and become entirely dependent on the Black, even for their basic needs.

The novel *July's People* scene takes place when July asks for the car keys back. He repeats the word 'Who' three times, stating the inability of the White to go out. Because only July can go out to buy the basic needs for them. Maureen can understand his broken English more than Bam. Bam could usually not understand the English of July, but Maureen could understand the gestures of July as she was used to it before. The word 'of course' is used three times in the story, explaining that except July, nobody can help the White buy their basic needs. So, the White has to be entirely dependent on the Black servant. This shows the transformation in the power of the servant over his Master.

Meanwhile, Victor, the youngest in the White family, feels unhappy. When July asks him for his sadness, the boy replies that he is angry towards the Black children as they drink all the water from the tank built by his father. July pleases the child in a playful, light, and beautiful way in the absence of the child's parents, Bam and Maureen. July consoles the child by saying there is plenty of rain in the village; the rain fills the tank, and the villagers are going to

drink from the tank, including the boy. How he calms down the child is a challenge to the power of the White or the transformation in July. Maureen is more aware of July's transformation than Bam does.

Gradually, Maureen comes to know of the transformation in the master-servant relationship. The authority has been taken over by July when he asks Maureen to go and work with other Black women in the village. These words upset Maureen as he was a symbol of slavery in the past that would always run in July's mind. Maureen had more authority than Bam in the past, so she could analyze the personality change in July, who, nowadays, has transformed the master-servant relationship. The above incident from the novel predicts how the revolution in South Africa against the White has changed the life of White as they need to depend on their servant July who takes the authority over every move of them. It is predicted in the novel that the entire situation has changed, and the apartheid system has vanished from South Africa, where the Black has gained command over them. They gain all the rights in the village. The Black protects the White from the Black rebels.

Here, July begins to speak his language to Maureen, which she understands though it is difficult for her initially. Earlier, Maureen criticizes that July has always stolen something or the other from the house. Maureen never asked him anything in Johannesburg because she needs to counter July and becomes a superior speaker to July. So, she criticizes July for stealing things

from her house. This shows the command of slavery predominant in Maureen previously. July's reply has no breakdown conversation, and the idea of July becoming Master has come down during the conversation. Before this conversation, July has attempted to become Master, but his aides have been reversed through this conversation. Therefore, this novel displays a kind of balance in the relationship between the White and the Black. Situational changes happen if everything gets reversed. In her novel, Gordimer thus, points out that equality and no superior clash. July's novel predicts the transformation of the servant to his Master and the apartheid lasting in South Africa.

A critical analysis reveals that the novel's central theme is racial discrimination, apartheid, and socialism. Though the apartheid system is not given that much importance in the novel, one can experience it now and then. And then, most of the scenes concentrate on race and the suffering of the discriminated people in the apartheid system. It also discusses the boundaries between White and Black, which are clearly explained in the novel. The White people have the same profession and role in the apartheid system. Besides, they give more importance to materials and properties in the apartheid system of South Africa. They experienced dominating nature in the apartheid system. The Whites find adapting to July's village challenging, as they give more importance to materialism and possession.

Racial discrimination is another crucial factor in this novel because the adaptation between two different races and the change of power is discussed. The novelist specifies the skin color in this novel. Most of the term used is 'Black servant'; the White master specifies the color of the people. "The tea tray in Black hands" (JP 1); this sentence from the novel *July's People* is the opening part of the story that talks about the color of July when he carries the tea tray as a Black servant. The story's opening portrays July, who bends at the doorway and asks if the Whites like to have tea (Gordimer 1).

Meanwhile, Bamford and Maureen consider themselves White liberals and are not involved much in the apartheid system, per the author's point. However, when July comes in to act, he likes to do whatever was commanded to him when they live in the town. This clearly shows the racial discrimination in the Smales' house also. The Whites appointed the Blacks as enslaved people in their houses as the apartheid system to exploit one's race as laborers. Black people also treat Whites differently. When Royce falls ill, July's wife Martha gives him herbal medicine, to which July says the medicine is not for the White because he thinks that White people are superior to them. Because they have got different medicine for White. He thinks that the medicine that Black drinks is not suitable for White.

Over time, July's mother thinks that the stay of the White in the village might

create some trouble and disturb the peace in the village.

July's mother thinks like this because the White is not superior, but they may create societal problems. The Whites always make the Black as servants. She fears that if the Black revolutionaries find them hiding in their village, they will surely punish them because they know the distance between the White and the Black race. The Whites remain superior forever.

This novel discusses a gender issue because of the authority's change. The relationship changes happen in the novel among July, Maureen, and Bamford. Martha and July have no relationship change when he brings the White to live in his village. As July works in the city for White, Martha, his wife, raises their children in the village. There is no gap in the relationship when the White family arrives to stay in the village. As for Martha, it is a well-known fact that Martha and July's mother helps him to build the hut for the Whites.

On the other hand, they do not argue when the Whites come, but Martha remembers July saying they have different rooms and are spoilt. In the novel *July's People*, the men and women follow the old Western lifestyle where the men and women do their work without gender bias in the other gender's work. The same is followed by the Black people, where the Black men work in town for the White, and the women raise their children. In the novel, July says that women have different works, and they

do their work. They look after the children. They go to the field in search of food. They pluck the plants, fruits, and greens to prepare food, which are the regular works of women in Black society. July has his hut for himself, where he thinks he remains calm. When compared to Black women, Black men are more powerful. In Black society, women have less power than White.

July gains a different strength when he has no authority over the White over him. July experiences this when he takes the Bakkie for his work. In the novel, July's power transfers to the White, as the Whites have lost their authority over Black and depend on the Black. The authority transfer changes Maureen's relationship with her husband, Bamford. Bamford feels that he has lost his power because of the revolution in the town between the White and Black. Maureen argues that life seems to be boring without any work. Bamford's action of bringing meat that evening shows Bamford's strength towards hunting, and the entire village is fed by the White that day.

When Bam loses his vehicle and gun, he is considered powerless. Maureen treats him differently because the gun and vehicle are considered the most potent weapons for men in White society. After losing his power over the two possessions, Maureen feels sorry for her man. Both of them argue and go apart. Therefore, the transition of power causes many issues in the novel. More than race and gender, the power over material possession is the primary concern in the novel. Though there is a revolution between

White and Black in the city, racial discrimination is also in the novel. Bam and Maureen are shocked by the changes and influence of July when he takes the key from them without permission. The Black servant, July, can question the White, which is against the rule because Blacks are not allowed to raise questions.

Bamford and Maureen gave importance to possession in the city, and now they do not have anything in the village. They lose everything they own and feel powerless. They are stripped of their possession, power, and authority. They have apartheid and collapsed by the rebels in the city. Since they remain grateful to July for saving their lives, they cannot talk against July and remain calm about whatever is done by July.

The transformation of the authority from White to Black is depicted in the novel.

Meanwhile, the power changes from the Whites to July. The Whites are entirely satisfied that the chief has power over July. When July steals, Maureen has power over July; when Maureen steals the pills, the power is with July. In the end, both races have similar power over each other.

The Smale's three kids, Victor, Gina, and Royce, tolerate the difficulty of a post-apartheid African nation. The essence of the utopian desire is that it represents the lies in enacting for Whites in terms of the future, with much egalitarian coexistence with Blacks. The connection that Gina establishes

with African challenges the fears of racist Whites of "going native" and runs through Gordimer's fervent attractiveness for plural African nation wherever Whites are, "merely ordinary members of a multi-colored, any-colored society, freed both of the privileges and the guilt of the White sins of our fathers" (Gordimer and Clingman 32). Gina metamorphoses into a Black African woman and submerges herself in an African language, manners, food, and perceptions so that her new world had become the quality through that she perceives the remainder of the planet, "For Gina, who had not seen before or during this village was new the world" (JP 140). Rather than the Afrikaner lullabies she learned from her father, she currently sings lullabies "she had learned from her [African] companions, in their language" (JP 79).

Here, Gina's act of breaking the recent order does not have much evidence of her relationship with African children. The dearth of racial awareness in her perspective towards them contrasts favorably with the inequality that characterizes the friendly relationship of a young Maureen and her Black servant, Lydia. Although Maureen regards Lydia as her succor and intimate, their relationship cannot completely evade the hierarchy of White and Black. Thus, naturalized and deeply unmoving, feel her sense of the entitlements of her race that Maureen questioned the conduct, the reason, and the complexion of Lydia carrying her faculty case on her head from school to her home. Margaret Lenta observes that "her milieu, [Maureen] has assumed, ought as far

as possible to be exclusively White, and Blacks have had only a silent, servile role in it" (JP 135). In distinction, Gina adopts the communal traditions of Africans during which the older kids facilitate raising, the younger children, "She walked in with the old woman's sciatic gait of Black children who carry brothers and sisters almost as big as they are. She had a baby on her small back and wore an expression of importance" (JP 41). Lenta states, "The strength of Gina's friendship with Nyiko, a Black girl, also bodes well for the future of the races in South Africa" (JP 156-157).

So, Gina's romantic relationship with Africans is recollected in Pratt's definition of the contact zone as "an attempt to invoke the spatial and temporal co-presence of subjects previously separated by geographical and historical disjuncture, and whose trajectories now intersect" (JP 7). Therefore, here "Social Space" transculturation takes place. Transculturation describes "How subordinated or marginal groups select and invent from materials transmitted to them by a dominant or metropolitan culture" (Pratt 6). Pratt conceived transculturation as, for the most part, consequent on asymmetrical power relations involving "colonizers and colonized." The attempt of the subordinated teams constructs liberal identities by editing the history of Western conquest and domination to contest it and inflect it with their communist versions. The position that Gina assumes within the African bush is that of the descendent of the White oppressors, of the colonizers, who have finally broken along with her inheritance and adopted

African values. To the author, White South Africans should redefine themselves by accepting the values of the bulk cluster in the African nation. Since they must choose to form Africa their home, they must equally assimilate their culture, language, and values. Gina, therefore, hybridizes her identity by the admixture of her cultural background thereupon of the Africans. However, the optimistic characterization of Gina is balanced by that of Victor. Through Victor, the author shows the transition to a post-social policy. The African nation will be tentative and fraught with challenges, during which one major part of the transition should embody a new perception of possession. However, although the distribution of wealth is also a challenging goal to accomplish, it must be envisioned. By undercutting the liberal claims of the Smales for his or her failures with the vision of a young generation of South Africans who would produce, though by fits and starts, the associated just economic system.

Here, Victor displays an honest deal of the unduly aggressive sense of possession that the author finds objectionable in the White African nation. Once he arrives in the village, he desires to impress other kids together with his racing car or truck; however, he urges his mother to "tell them they must not touch it. I do not want my things messed up and broken. You must tell them" (JP 14). He conjointly reacts with vehemence to the villager's exploitation of water from the tank that his father has put in, "Everybody is taking water! They have found it comes out the tap! Everybody is

taking it! I told them they are going to get hell. But they do not understand. Come quick, dad". Undaunted by his parents' dismissal of his criticism, he insists, "It is ours, it is ours" (JP 62-63). Therefore, his sense of the inalienable rights of personal property looks simply like a persistent remnant of a dying system. Compensating his greed may be a growing understanding that property will be bartered - as once he exchanges the broken model cars from his sports track for "skeletal carts, homemade of twisted wire by the Black children" (JP 39). Which acquisition will be the result of a communal effort - as once he joins the harvest for a share of peanuts. Despite his shortcomings, Victor, like Gina, represents a model for White South Africans to emulate.

There are two contrary utopian impulses placed within the novel. One is unsure, undefined, and enigmatic; the opposite is unequivocal and unabashedly prescriptive. The inequality between them results from a tension that owes a good deal to the racial divide that has characterized the African nation. On the one hand, the author feels that as a minority and a member of the oppressive race, she has no right to dictate to Blacks about the course of their struggle and, therefore, a post-social policy African nation should take place. Further, she feels entitled to inform, typically to dictate to, different Whites about the correct terms that they will slot in Africa. The utopian impulse involving the Smales' kids owes its authoritative tone to the present perspectives.

Usually, Gordimer maintains that the dissident South African writer cannot afford to dissociate herself from her historical juncture and the strain. Her society makes on her, "The creative act is not pure, and the historical evidence it. Ideology demands it. Society exacts it. The writer loses Eden, writes to be read, and comes to realize that he is answerable" (Gordimer and Clingman 285-286). Moreover, by shaping herself as "a White; a dissident; a White writer" (Gordimer and Clingman 272), Gordimer has formed her role in exposing the guiltiness of White South Africans with social policy and imagining ways that redeem themselves.

Later, despite her great exposition of social policy results on Blacks, the author has principally explored the guiltiness and unconscious of Whites with social policy. Gordimer states that the White author has no alternative, however, to handle her work to different Whites, "To be a White writer is first to be presented with a political responsibility if not an actual orthodoxy: the White writer's task as 'cultural worker' is to raise the consciousness of White people, who, unlike himself have not woken up" (Gordimer and Clingman 293). In her writings, she has taken it upon herself to coach Whites, informing them of social policy's human and ethical value and shaping their place in a very post-social policy society.

To sum up, Nadine Gordimer has carefully described the social transformation in the South during the postcolonial period

through her novel *July's People*. In the novel, she creates White and Black and narrates how the White's domination over Black has come gradually through the Master- servant relationship. Therefore, *July's People* has become a powerful novel for social, racial, and cultural transformation.

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