Nadine Gordimer (1923 - ), a representative South African novelist and the Nobel laureate of 1991 has successfully depicted the contemporary reality in fiction in artistic terms. The novelist by holding a mirror to South Africa's political, cultural and emotional attitudes represents the language of the people, their culture and tradition by introducing new avenues of experience for the readers. The motifs of the novels cover the whole range of human life and activity, as well as every known manifestation of physical nature. It not only represents the events and sayings of the people of South Africa, but the rules deduced from the observation of the conditions of men’s lives are included in its records. As a white South African writer, the contribution of Gordimer to the liberation of the Blacks is remarkable. The skill of the writer in relating the lives of the people as lively in literature suits C.S. Lewis’ opinion, “Literature adds to reality, it does not simply describe. It enriches the necessary competencies that daily life requires and provides, and in this respect, it irrigates the deserts that our lives have already become” (n.pg). It is in Literature that the concrete outlook of humanity receives expression. The literatures written in Africa, Asia and the West Indies exhibit authentic responses to the human condition and predicament which is very closer to the individual's cultural consciousness. These New Literatures represent a hale
blend of authority and experience in complex human situation aggravated by social, historical and economic changes. The central assertion of these literatures is the logic of cultural transition, compelling new ways of identity, continuity and affiliation.

Modern African literature is a body of work that has emerged out of the colonial encounter between Africa and Europe. According to Eldred Jones, “Literature is a part of Africa’s gift to the world” (McEwan 5). Chinua Achebe, the most celebrated writer of Africa, defines African literature as a “group of associated writers… the sum total of national and ethnic literatures of Africa” (qtd. in Gill 90). Gill presents Gordimer’s observation of African Literature is a writing, “done in any language by Africans themselves and by others of whatever skin colour, who share the African experiences and who have what she terms as the ‘Africa-centered consciousness’” (9). Like the literatures of other nations, it enjoys an enviable antiquity, though its new medium is English. African Literature, as a serious, intellectual and cultural activity with beautiful expression of the tumultuous changes happening in the country. It has been used as an instrument of instilling social awareness, fostering national consciousness, thereby reminding the Africans of the injustice and inhumanities done to them by the forces of colonialism. Africans suffered greatly from the misguided attempts of other people to modernize them, and their literature has been inspired by a reappraisal of their present place. The traditional art of Africa is the mouth-piece of its community,
success and failure and visions of the future. The writers are much concerned with the past and the present history of their country and it is reflected in their works. The social change that, “Africa has been subjected to sincere colonization of the country, the cultural, political and missionary influences and its present state of independence with a growing awareness of both national identity and modern problems”, (Shinde 94) find expression in African fiction.

African Literature, written after 1945 was previously part of the oral tradition which has been omitted on the basis of two considerations. Mutiso opines: “First, it represents a codification of a past era. Second, it is not clear that the available ‘written’ oral tradition literature is representative of the total amount of such work, most of which has never been transcribed” (x). George Joseph in *Understanding Contemporary of Africa*, writes that the European perception of literature generally refers to written letters, while the African concepts include Oral Literature or Orature, in prose or in verse. The prose is mythological or historical, which includes tales of the trickster character; story tellers in Africa used call-and-response techniques to tell stories. In the trickster story, a popular form of traditional African folklore, a small animal uses its wits to survive encounters with large creatures such as, Anansi, a spider in the folklore of the Ashanti people of Ghana; Ijapa, a tortoise in Yoruba folklore of Nigeria and Sangura, a hare found in Central and East African folklore.
African Literature in the late colonial period increasingly exhibited themes of liberation and independence. Since majority of the African nations gained their independence in 1950s and 1960s, African Literature has grown dramatically in quantity in recognition, with its numerous works appearing in Western languages notably English, French and Portuguese and in the traditional African languages. The clash between Africa’s past and present, tradition and modernity, indigenous and foreign, individualism and community, socialism and capitalism, development and self-reliance and between Africanity and humanity form the major themes of African Literature. Apart from them, social problems such as corruption, the economic disparities in newly independent countries and the rights and roles of women were also included. According to British writers Joyce Cary and Joseph Conrad, the African was an ugly hedonist with a savageous life style. The novels written about Africa by the British writers were based on tales recounted by early adventures and missionaries. “Negritude”, a literary movement started by a group of writers such as Aime Cesaire, Leonard Senghor and Leon Damas in 1930 emerged as a protest against the French revolution. It paved the way to express the feelings in European literary forms. Thus, the literary endeavour of Africa was the result of the agony and crisis in the soul of the Africans who became scapegoats in the hands of the colonials.

African novels are “…refreshing in their claim to teach, to inform and to entertain, and – especially in recent years – to persuade, by reference to the real world” (McEwan 3). The first among the African writings to gain
attention from the West were the powerful slave narratives. The narrative text *The Interesting Narratives of the Life and Adventures of Olaudah Equiano* published in 1789 described vividly the horrors of slaves and the slave-trade. In the colonial period, Africans exposed to Western languages such as English, French and Portuguese began to write in those languages. In 1911, Joseph Epraim Casely-Hayford (1866-1930) of Ghana published the first African novel, *Ethiopia Unbound: Studies in Race Emancipation* in English. Although the work moves between fiction and political advocacy, “its publication and positive reviews in the Western press mark a watershed moment in African literature” (n.pg). The African literary output increased considerably published after the Second World War. In the beginning of the twentieth century, the African writers, with their western education, attempted to show to the literary world that there is a new world of literary activity. Keeping the immense richness of African oral culture as the backdrop of the writings, the African writers expressed their views through fiction whose predominant theme was the historical confrontation during Africa’s colonial era.

West African writers such as Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, Ousmane Sebane, Kofi Awooner and Camera Laye and East African writers, Ngugi Wa Thiong’o and Oket ‘P’.Betek and Thomas Mofolo who published a historical novel *Chaka* (1939) and Es’kia Mphalele and Dennis Brutus wrote about horrendous rule and the enslavement of their race by the Europeans. These writers attempt to “reproduce or re-enact in their writings what is happening in
the streets” (Nkosi 43). Their authentic and genuine portrayals of reality in real life situations paved way for the outpour of the protest writings which later nurtured South African literature, a reflection of South Africa in the pre-apartheid and post-apartheid regime.

South African Literature, a wing of African Literature, is a body of work, written in South Africa or by South Africans living in other countries. Being not a single entity, populated by diverse ethnic and language groups, South Africa has a distinctive literature in many African languages as well as Afrikaans, a vernacular derived from Dutch and in English with a rich history of literary output. The South African social, economic and political history contributed greatly to the emergence of its literature during the last five decades of the twentieth century, an endeavour of showcasing the rare gems of literature. South African Literature has thus become a deep rooted plant, spreading its aroma in every nook and corner. It has been acclaimed around the world for its innovation and radical approaches to the art of storytelling and reworking of language. In the view of Baxter, South African Literature is an outcome “of hardship and repression … South African writers have produced a long and august body of work that once again stamps the nation as something more than just a run of the mill developing country” (n.pg). The country, with its eleven official languages, the annual publishing output remains highly favourable to the publications in the English language. Afrikaans comes second, with the nine indigenous languages trailing behind in various shades of relevance. South African English Literature is internally
fractured due to the Black and the White writers’ contribution from divergent backgrounds, literary traditions and orientations. It consists of colonial, liberal and radical writings by the Whites, while writings by the Blacks include texts that range from colonial complicity to a variety of national liberation ideologies encompassing non-racialism, Pan Africanism and black consciousness. The literature of South Africa is nothing but a “conflict between the white conquerors and conquered black, between white masters and black servants, between the village and the city” (Nkosi 76).

Black writing has always been under fence and during the two hundred and fifty years of slavery, it was a legal crime for the Blacks to read and write. The experience of oppression provoked them to write. They stressed the need to report on and define the condition of race and felt that it is the intrinsic duty of the writers to communicate the wishes of the people to the society. Black literature constitutes one of the supreme enrichments of black culture and life. The Black writers struggled against the confines of race and sex for freedom and selfhood. The fighting spirit of the Black writers endured all adversities and uncovered their ordeal through writing. Black literature in South Africa began with the oral tradition, augmented by song, a powerful tool of community fellowship and communication in Africa. For the sake of broader reach, majority of the Black writers wrote in English.
Literature by black South Africans which emerged in the twentieth century reflects the inner turmoil of the people. The conflict between the people of the land and the rulers from the European continent left scars in the minds of the natives, which were recorded by the victimised writers of South Africa. The first novel in South Africa was *Mhudi* by Solomon Plaatje (1876-1932), the founding father of Black Literature in South Africa. The epic story follows the trail of the Tswana people during and after their military encounter with the Zulus under Shaka and encompasses their earliest encounters with the Whites moving into the interior. Thomas Mofolo’s *Chaka* was the first book to be translated in English. The dominant figure of South African literature, Sarah Gertrude Millin’s views on the ‘tragedy’ of racial miscegenation was represented in *God’s Stepchildren* (1924) and her later novels dealt with the predicament of the Coloured people in South Africa.

In the early 1960s, the state of emergency implemented by apartheid nation to crack down the dissidents and the banning of political organizations sent many black writers into exile. Alex la Guma, an exiled writer, a Marxist and African National Congress leader, through the novella *A Walk in the Night* reveals the lives of the slum inhabitants who are driven into crime and in *And a Threefold Cord* contrasts the existence of a black worker in a white home with the affluent life of her employer. *In the Fog of the Season’s End* exhibits the developing consciousness of a man’s dedication to the struggle for freedom.
In the late 1960s, the Afrikaans literary scene witnessed a rush of new blood, with the literary writers such as Jan Rabie, Etienne Leroux, Breyten Breytenbach and Andre Brink forming a group Die Sestigers. Published first in Afrikaans and later also in English, these writers were increasingly politicised by the situation in South Africa and their contrasting experiences overseas. The first fictional works to emerge from South Africa were produced by immigrants who felt alienated from the South African landscape and at the same time, mesmerized by its harsh beauty. These colonial writers were troubled and intrigued by what they perceived as exotic elements of indigenous cultures. Their attitude to native South Africans was ambivalent, not hostile, as is evident in the writers’ adventure stories, in which the colonial heroes are romanticized and the role of the black South African is reduced to that of an enemy or servant. Rider Haggard, the author of mythical and adventure stories, glorifies the Englishman as the hero and the aboriginals as either dangerous savages or faithful servants in the famous novels King Solomon’s Mines and Allan Quartermain.

One of the towering figures in South African literature was Olive Schreiner (1855-1920), a progressive minded writer, a feminist and intellectual who had grown up in remote parts of South Africa as the daughter of a Calvinist missionary. She produced her masterpiece The Story of an African Farm (1883), in South Africa and published it in England, which is considered as the founding text of South African Literature. It tells the story of several characters such as a group of white settlers, adults and children of
South African society. The African servants and farm-workers remain in the backdrop, less interesting to the author than the ostriches and chickens about the farm. The works *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland* and *Polemical Women and Labour* exposed the brutal activities of British South African Company. From that point, onwards, a dam burst of protest literature began to flood the fertile plain of South African race policy. Schreiner later supported the Boers in their war of freedom against British.

The confrontation between two dissimilar civilizations and cultures made the South African writers contribute a lot to the literature. Numerous writings extolling the great traditions of South African civilization appeared on the literary scene. The fact that all the writings were set in South Africa with its traditional values as the backdrop of the literary works was not an isolated incident. It was a conscious effort on the part of the South African writers who desire for emancipation from the literary stereotype of the western writers. Through their writings, they erased the prejudices and preoccupations of the westerners who distorted the South African literature. Among them, Gordimer, the most applauded writer of South Africa has carved out a special place for herself through her writings. The contemporaries, who occupy a prominent place along with Gordimer such as Bessie Head, Alan Paton, J.M. Coetzee, Andre Brink, Es’kia Mphalale and Chinua Achebe complement the ideas and views of Gordimer in their writings.
Bessie Emery Head (1937-1986) who emerged as a leading South African woman writer, wrote of the traumatic experiences and unsettling existence, alienation and displacement. Although her works deal with the injustice, oppression, and hopes of social change and peace, she presents much love and light and uses intense imagery to describe vividly the beauty to be found in both human and environmental nature. Her works, *When Rain Clouds Gather*, *Maru*, *A Question of Power*, *The Collectors of Treasure* – a collection of thirteen short stories about human treasures, *Serowe village of The Rainwind* – a non-fiction of the history and myths of Serowe and *A Bewitched Crossroads: An African Saga* suit well with the contemporary socio-political and cultural scene of South Africa.

Alan Paton (1903-1988), the South African novelist, social reformer and the founder President of the Liberal party of South Africa, in his first novel *Cry, the Beloved Country* received great critical and popular acclaim distinguished for its compassionate treatment of the people caught up in the racial conflicts of South Africa. Paton’s *Too Late the Phalarope* and *Ah, But Your Land Beautiful* deal with racial tensions in the South African Society and his outspoken opposition of apartheid led to confiscation of the passport of Paton between 1960 and 1970. The novels such as, *The Land and the People of South Africa*, *The Long View*, *Lost in the Stars*, *South Africa in Transition*, *Debbie go Home*, *Instrument of Thy Peace*, *Knocking on the Door* and *Towards the Mountain* strongly advocate Paton’s concern for the South Africans and the polarized South African society.
J.M. Coetzee (1940-), one of South Africa’s most lauded novelists dealt in subtle ways with issues of power, authority and history. The novel *Waiting for Barbarians* was awarded the James Tait Memorial Prize and the Geoffrey Faber Memorial Prize, and the novelist is thrice the winner of the CAN Prize. Twice the recipient of the Booker Prize for *Life and Times of Michael K* in 1983 and for *Disgrace* in 1999, he was the fourth South African writer to be honoured with the prestigious Nobel Prize. The works *Dusklands, In the Heart of the Country, Waiting for Barbarians Life, Times of Michael K, Foe, Age of Iron, The Master of Petersburg, The Lives of Animals, Disgrace, Elizabeth Costello, Slow Man* and *Diary of a Bad Year* present the real South Africa to the world stage.

Es’kia Mphalele (1919-2008) is a significant contemporary black South African writer, by virtue of his all-round achievement and lifelong commitment to literature. The corpus of Mphalele’s works such as *Man Must Live, Down Second Avenue,* and *The African Image* remind the qualities of insight, compassion and intelligence. Chinua Achebe (1930-), the Nigerian author of unlimited glory is one of the most widely read novelists from Anglophone Africa. The vast contribution of Achebe to literature in the novels, essays and poems display African culture. The novelist acts as a mouth-piece through the protagonists of his novels. The works such as *A Man of the People, Anthills of Savannah, Arrow of God, Things Fall Apart, No Longer at Ease* and *volumes of short stories* exhibit the inert awareness in portraying the racial policies of the stratified society.
Andre’ Philippus Brink (1935-), wrote both in Afrikaans and in English. In the 1960s, he and Breyten Breytenbach were the key figures in the Afrikaans literary movement known as *Die Sestigers* (The Sixty-ers). These writers sought to use Afrikaans as a language to speak against the apartheid government, and thus to bring into Afrikaans literature the influence of contemporary English and French trends. Brink’s novel *Kennis van die aand* [Knowledge of the Night] was the first Afrikaans book to be banned by the South African government. Brink’s early novels were concerned with the apartheid policy. The novels *The Ambassador, Looking on Darkness, An Instant in the Wind, Rumours of Rain, A Dry White Season* and *A Chain of Voice* engage new issues raised by life in post apartheid South Africa.

Gordimer (1923-) occupies a pride of place among white South African writers. Like her fellow Nobel laureates Gunter Grass and Alexander Solzhenitsyn, she is a towering figure of the World literature and the moral conscience of her nation. She belongs to the group of white academics and radical South African historians who felt it necessary to expose the realities of South Africa. She is recognized all over the world as a representative voice from South Africa which courageously reveals the political turmoil, social segregation of the people and exploration of the effects of the apartheid system, on the entire population of the Whites, the Blacks and the Coloureds of South Africa. “Her primary focus is on the complex human tensions that are generated by apartheid. … Gordimer is also praised for using precise
details to evoke both the physical landscape of South Africa and the human predicament of a racially polarized society” (Matuz 160).

Though Gordimer has much to share with experimental fiction writers such as Bessie Head, Alan Paton, Coetzee and Brink, the unique qualities that distinguish her from them are an empirical wealth of details, clinical detachment and a powerful yet innovative style. Gordimer’s art through the five decades of writing, has been keeping space with current trends that exhibits, a mind accustomed to changing times and situations. Gordimer often echoes in her fiction, the tensions of life and the increasingly unreal experience of the people of her country, Africa. Her stories present a paradox, the fabulous quality of a very real world of alienated individuals, caught up in revolutions, bloody massacres and acts of shocking atrocities beyond the imagination of ordinary people. The theme of most contemporary and experimental fiction has been determined by solitary individual as the plaything of impersonal social institutions and vague forces beyond his understanding.

Novelist, essayist, screenwriter, political activist and champion of the disenfranchised, Gordimer was born of immigrant Jewish parents on November 20, 1923 in Springs, Transvaal, a small gold-mining town in South Africa. In Seamus Heaney’s words, she is one of “the guerrillas of the imagination,” (Wastberg) who became the first South African and the seventh woman to be awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1991. Her father
Isidore Gordimer, a jeweller came from Lithuania and mother, Nan Myers Gordimer is of British descent. After receiving education at the 'Convent of Our Lady of Mercy', Gordimer studied for one year at the University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. Early education was imparted at home by tutors since she kept delicate health as a child. Her mother, Nan Myers confined her at home, when a heart ailment was diagnosed and the child was taught till the age of sixteen by tutors. Consequently, she developed an engrossing interest for solitary reading and writing and began writing stories at the age of nine, expressing on paper, all her private and personal feelings. At the age of fifteen, Gordimer’s first published story, *Come Again Tomorrow* appeared in *Forum*, a Johannesburg weekly. Initially, she came to be known as a short story writer, thereby contributing regularly to popular literary magazines such as *New Yorker, Harper’s* and *Virginia Quarterly Review*. The first collection of short stories, *Face to Face* was published seven years later in 1949. When she was twenty-one, she attended the University of Witwatersrand for a year but was barred from taking a degree due to her lack of formal education. Her academic career and literary achievements are magnificent. Apart from being a visiting lecturer at various universities namely The institute of Contemporary Arts, Washington D.C., Harvard university, Princeton University and North Western university, Evanston, she also served as a lecturer in the University of Michigan in 1970.

Gordimer’s compelling and powerful fiction made her the proud recipient of numerous awards and prizes. Her works achieved literary

Various universities such as The University of Leuven, Belgium in 1980, South College, Northampton Massachusetts in 1985, City College, New York in 1985, Harvard University and Yale University in 1986 and at Columbia University New School for Social Research and the University of New York in 1987 conferred D.Litt to the great acclaimed novelist. She was the Honorary Member of the American Academy of Arts and Science in 1980,
Honorary Fellow, Modern Languages Association (U.S.A) in 1985, Honorary Member of American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, Fellow of Royal Society of Literature (Britain) and the Goodwill Ambassador of UNDP. Order of the Souther Cross, South Africa, Order of Friendship, Republic of Cuba and Presidential Medal of Honour of the Republic of Chile honoured Gordimer for her selfless involvement in writing.

Gordimer’s activism has not been confined to the struggle against apartheid. As a dynamic member of the African National Congress, the novelist actively took part in the struggles against apartheid and the political scene of South Africa. She has resisted censorship and the state of control of information, and fostered literary arts. She refused to let her work be aired by the South African Broadcasting Corporation as it was controlled by apartheid movement. Gordimer also served on the steering committee of South Africa’s Anti-censorship Action Group. A founding member of the Congress of South African Writers, she is actively involved in South African letters and international literary organizations such as the vice-president of international PEN.

In 1954, she married Reinhold Cassirer, a highly respected art dealer who established the South African Sotheby’s and later ran his own gallery. Cassirer, a refugee from Germany served in the British Army in the Second World War. Gordimer collaborated on two documentaries with her son Hugo, a filmmaker in New York. She had a daughter, Oraine by her first marriage
with G.Gavron in 1949. Gordimer endured the bleak apartheid decades, refusing to move abroad as many other writers did. Though her daughter settled in France, and the son in New York, Gordimer remained in South Africa “out of commitment to black liberation – to be the voice for the silenced, black South African writers...” (n.pg).

Gordimer is one of the most powerful of the protest fiction writers of South Africa. By travelling in every nook and corner of South Africa, her firsthand realistic experience of the oppression of the natives widened the scope of writing in all fields evenly as in political, social and cultural scenario. Her fiction features the postcolonial era date and the frontier, whether open or closed in the works, arises in various situations and relationships, private as well as public. To Roland Smith, her novels and short stories capture the stresses and ironies of life in that authoritarian and segregated society. He also comments:

Her writing is closely involved with politics, yet seldom political. Not only she is a hauntingly accurate recorder of the sclerotic effects of white domination but also the pre-eminent portraitist of white English speaking middle class life …. In her novels and short stories the relentless accuracy of detail is almost invariably tied to an emotional reaction, a sense of loss of importance and rarely of vitality and courage. (qtd. in Vinron 263)
Leon de Kock feels that on the one hand Gordimer “ruthlessly exposed the limitations of western, liberal humanism as a way of life in apartheid society, yet many of her characters have remained located within these very limitations even while struggling against them” (Henderson 378).

Gordimer has amassed a body of work that includes fourteen novels, more than two hundred short stories and several volumes of essays that were translated into more than thirty languages. Gordimer’s work has grown profoundly as psychological and social chronicle of half a century in South Africa. She is both its activist and lighthouse keeper: above all collected experience, the light sweeps, illuminating parts that would otherwise have lain in darkness, helping to navigate towards a South Africa that, far from being geographically cut off and politically ostracized, depicts a universal landscape. Gordimer reveals situations when reality suddenly takes another course and people are caught in their roles and expectations, in the traps of skin colour, class, family and the body itself. The early works of Gordimer focus on the imposition of external reality into the comfortable existence of South Africa’s middle class White society. Her debut *The Lying Days* (1953), a semi-autobiographical novel describes the awakening of a young girl Helen Shaw to the hypocrisy of small-town life, its extraordinary blindness to events going on around it, with its backdrop, Gordimer’s home town Spring in Transvaal, an East Rand mining town near Johannesburg. Helen, the protagonist tells of her cloying childhood in the white community of Atherton, where a strict patriarchal social hierarchy matched one’s position in the mine,
the street and at the house. Helen’s potential growth is measured by the extent to which the curiosity and intelligence lead her to break away from the changing conventionality of home. The novel follows chronologically the protagonist’s white middle-class upbringing in the mining community, whose racial fear and prejudice binds her to social injustices. It follows her self-absorbed, politically obvious first love and sexual awakening, the struggle for independence and adulthood as she wrestles with an emerging social awareness and its consequent alienation and guilt.

A World of Strangers (1958), which won the novelist recognition and approbation, was banned by the South African government as it exposed the cruelty and idiocy of apartheid and the dangers of daily life for the blacks. The novel exhibits the first fruitful but frightening encounters between the Whites and the Blacks in the heady days of Sophatown. As an early demonstration of an individual living in South Africa who is predetermined by the constraints of apartheid, the novel also examines man’s profound need to give meaning to life, the best ways to realize the self within the limitations imposed by South Africa, the world of strangers par excellence. Set in Johannesburg, it relates to Toby’s attempt to unite his white intellectual companions with several black Africans whom he has recently befriended. Critics have noted a relation between the tone of Gordimer’s fiction and the deteriorations of race relations and the acceleration of violence in South Africa during the late 1990s. Though Gordimer’s two earlier novels display a promise of hope for the future of South Africa, the later works The
*Conservationist*, *Burger’s Daughter* and *July’s People* exhibit a growing sense of pessimism and express the author’s belief that the Whites as well as the Blacks are victims of apartheid.

In the novels of Gordimer, the central character is South Africa with its prejudices and discrimination, agony and sufferings, hopes and dreams and the colonial past and the turbulent present. It is thus a frontier country where culture, time and people are eternally intermingling and at the same time in conflict. The characters who live in this no-man’s land also become frontier people, torn by conflicts and kept back from emotional and economic growth by barriers of racial segregation and cultural transition. In *Occasion for Loving* (1963), the novelist explores the moral dilemmas confronting the white South African liberal. In novel after novel, with a growing sense of concern, the devastating effects of apartheid on the Blacks as well as the Whites are probed. The novel is yet another example of the problems of the South African situation witnessed by the novelist. *The Times* praised it as a work of “searing intensity”, and stated that, “…it explored the different kinds of love, in experiencing which, human beings discover themselves…The book however is about something more: the responsibilities inseparable from loving” (Cover Flap, *Occasion for Loving*). The novel deals with the destruction of the Black, Gideon Shibalo, by a white English girl who enjoys the adventure of an affair with Africa, personified in Gideon and then returns to her marriage and Europe, leaving his life of frustration and humiliation, unchanged.
*The Late Bourgeois World* (1966), portrays the arid isolation of the white middle class in South Africa. As a remarkable novel, published in 1966, it crystallizes without political dogma, moralizing or false heroics, the crisis of the role of the Whites in the struggle against apartheid in the Sixties and presages the polarization of the Black and the White power in South Africa. Banned in South Africa for twelve years, the novel exposes the hypocrisy of the South African bourgeois mentality and reconstructs events leading to the suicide of a white political activist who had betrayed his compatriots in exchange for clemency. It deals with the “crisis which beset white people in the struggle against apartheid in the South Africa of sixties. Prescient, tender, pitiless and incisive, it reveals a great novelist at the height of her powers” (Reddy 91). The novel presents the tragic story of Max who wanted to live well with his wife Liz Van Den Sandt, in the most honourable sense is presented in the novel. Highly strong, sensitive and intelligent, he found it increasingly impossible to bear the burden of betrayal and the slow erosion of his self-respect forms the core of the novel.

According to *The Guardian*, Gordimer’s *A Guest of Honour* (1971) is a massive book about an ex-colonial Englishman’s affair with a new African state. The novel portrays the protagonist, James Bray’s ill-fated return to the newly independent African nation from which he was exiled for supporting the black revolutionaries and his discovery of corruption, greed and self-interest among the leaders of the country which resulted in disowning his idealistic political beliefs and condemning the new government, thus leading
to his assassination. Regarded as Gordimer’s finest work, the novel bagged the James Tait Memorial Prize for its total immersions – physical, moral, social, and political, teeming with human life, landscapes of the map and of the mind, with events and insights.

_The Conservationist_ (1974) which won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1991 acclaimed Gordimer as the most renowned novelist of South African literary scenario. Her masterpiece, _The Conservationist_ also won the Booker McConnell Prize for fiction. The novel is a subtle and detailed study of the forces and relationships that seethe in South Africa today. Seen as Gordimer’s version of _The Waste Land_, it fictionalizes the collapse of all familiar structures of power in South Africa. The beauty of the land is drawn with a breadth and scope that is breathtaking. A novel of enormous power, it presents a fascinating portrait of Mehring, a wealthy white rich man, who has all the privileges and possessions that South Africa could offer, but makes life tragic. His wife, son and mistress leave him; the foreman and workers become increasingly indifferent to his stewardship and his farm is destroyed by drought and floods. Isolated, at once cold and passionate, he challenges history in his determination that nothing would change his way of life. As Paul Bailey points out, _The conservationist_ is, “…one of those rare works of literature that command special respect reserved for artistic daring and fulfilled ambition” (qtd. in Reddy 91).
In *Burger’s Daughter* (1979), Gordimer portrays the impingement of political developments on the personal lives of people in the transitional society of South Africa. A novel of social and political import, it is a captivating history of South Africa, unfolding the story of a young woman’s evolving identity in the chaotic, political environment of South Africa. *Burger’s Daughter* is a self-study of Rosa; the story of a young, white, South African woman and her search for identity. It presents a penetrating portrait of a courageous woman, Rosa Burger, whose father’s death in prison leaves her alone to explore the minutiae of what it actually means to be Burger’s daughter. Though Lionel Burger dominates in the plot of the novel, it is through Rosa, the daughter of Lionel, Gordimer examines the predicament faced by the inheritor of a revolutionary tradition in the context of South Africa in the 1970s. Moving through an overwhelming flood of sensuously described memories, Rosa, at last arrives at a fresh understanding of her life. Gordimer’s fine and meticulously crafted prose sweeps the engrossing narrative to a triumphant conclusion. Reddy records Joyce Carol Oates’ view of the novel as an intensely subjective prose-poem, mesmerizing in the subtle cadences of its language. It is beautifully manipulated work of art with its controlled density, subtlety and vitality. Gordimer described the novel as a coded homage to Bram Fischer, the lawyer who defended Nelson Mandela and other anti-apartheid activists.

*A Sport of Nature* (1980) represents Gordimer’s belief that South Africa’s existing social order would be destroyed in course of time. The title
implies a botanical phenomenon of a plant which suddenly deviates from its parent stock and the mutated offspring is personified by the heroine, Hillela. The White South African heroine, espouses the cause of her assassinated black husband, and becomes the first president of the newly created black African nation. It is a new departure in scope, length, number of characters and in the broad geographical diversity of the settings, thus treating various African political movements through the personal experiences of Hillela, who “becomes an emblem of hope for united Africa: with her it was already one world; what could be” (Blain 441).

The fictional world of Gordimer reveals both the black and the white characters entrapped by circumstances and dilemmas generated by a tense political climate and the social determination of racial laws. A notable trait of the fiction is the undercurrent of pathos, which patches of pathos. Published in 1981, thirteen years before the official demise of apartheid, *July’s People* (1984), visualizes the inevitable collapse of white South Africa and the emergence of new political and social realities that would require the white South Africans to fashion the contours of new identity. Gordimer conveys the motifs in a unique way, the medium becomes her message. The novel traces the end of the white regime and the impact of the sudden reversal of power relationships on both the Whites and the Blacks. Set in the future, the narrative takes place in the aftermath of a revolution and centres on the trauma experienced by a white family who are forced to depend on the charity of a former black servant. Through the reversal of roles, the novelist exposes the
deep rooted feelings of prejudice and racial supremacy lying dormant in the so-called liberal minds. A daring and imaginative work of art, *July’s People* highlights events such as the harmonious living of the Blacks and the Whites and the power shift from the Whites to the Blacks. A brilliant and the most artistic portrayal of the story of two enlightened, liberal whites, Bam and Maureen Smales who are rescued from the terror of the war by their servant, July, leading them to take refuge in his village. The shifts in character and relationships contribute unforgettable glances into the terrifying, tacit understandings between the Black and the Whites, thus giving glimpses into a gorge of hatred and misunderstanding. Like Jane Austen, Gordimer aims at perfection in the novel and succeeds in the attempt. As Reddy praises, “…every sentence she writes has the special impress of a true novelist’s imagination” (92).

*My Son’s Story* (1990) charts the political transformation of the coloured man Sonny and the repercussions on himself and on the family. The novel wrestles with the issues of gender in building a new nation. Set in a time, when the legal system of apartheid is crumbling and integration taking place, it explores the permutations of loyalty and betrayal, of dependence and autonomy, of kinship and community. Sonny, a loving husband, father and an intrepid militant for black freedom and political rights believes in principles and sticks to his ideals. A good teacher, who is drawn into political activity away from his family, he lost the job and becomes a popular figure in the struggle against apartheid. Within the narrative, the individual, the family and
the community come together to be forced into revolutionary process to dismantle apartheid, thus causing timeless struggle for liberty.

*None to Accompany Me* (1994), Gordimer’s passionate novel takes place in the tumultuous South Africa in the final fling of apartheid, in the year when the old life comes to an end. The upheaval is reflected in the life of Vera Stark, a white woman civil rights lawyer who gradually sheds the trappings of her married life in pursuit of a small space in existence to be traversed by herself. Tracing Vera’s transition along with her country, the novel becomes a lyrical exploration of radical social change as a possibility of changing oneself. It is set in an extraordinary period immediately before the first non-racial election and the beginning of majority rule in South Africa.

*The House Gun* (1998), second post-apartheid novel of Gordimer is a personal tragedy of parents, whose son, in a crime of passion murders human values along with the man he kills. The quest for freedom is also an underlying theme apart from violence and inhuman values. The title of the novel suggests the extent to which violence remains insidiously habitual in South Africa. Duncan’s murder of Jesperson and the aftermath of the murder, the trial in the court, the predicament endured by the parents, Harald and Claudia form the core of the novel. The novel treats the rising crime rate in South Africa and the guns that virtually all household have, as well as the legacy of South African apartheid and the couple’s concern about the black
lawyer of the son. The novel is optioned for film rights to Granada productions.

Gordimer’s novels reveal a world that is peopled with men and women of all shades who are victims of the inhuman racial laws of a troubled country. *The Pickup* (2001) considers the issue of displacement, alienation and immigration; class and economic power, religious faith and the ability of the people to see and love across the divides. As a novel of cultural transition, it reflects power shifts in the private and public domain and a chance encounter between Julie, the privileged daughter of an investment banker and Abdu, a mechanic from an unnamed Arab-African state who allows the author to examine immigration and cultural conflict. *The Pickup* was long listed for the Booker Prize and won the best book category for the 2002 Commonwealth Writers' Prize in Africa.

Gordimer’s recent novel, *Get a Life* (2005) is the story of Paul Bannerman, an ecologist in Africa undergoing treatment for a life-threatening disease. The book is an adroit portrait of the dilemmas facing South Africa at present, as apartheid has been vanquished and more mundane problems intrude. The protagonist, Paul Bannermann, an ecologist, battles against installation of a planned nuclear plant and at the same time undergoing radiation therapy for cancer, causing him personal grief and ironically rendering him a nuclear health hazard at home. Gordimer pursues the twin questions of integrating everyday life with political activism.

In addition to her reputation as a novelist and playwright, Gordimer is considered as an accomplished short fiction writer. Edward Weeks praises Gordimer as “one of the most gifted practitioners of the short story anywhere in English” (qtd. in Marowitz 179). As a short story writer, Gordimer has exhibited growth and development through the years. The collection of the seventies displays a contemporary technique and tone and is comparatively more articulate and expressive. Each collection of the stories has an accent of
its own and represents a turning point in the development of the writer’s art and thought. As one of the finest practitioners of the short-story form in South Africa, Gordimer portrays individuals who have struggled to avoid, confront or change their living conditions under which they live, in particular the repressive South African political system of apartheid.

The early short stories of Gordimer published in American periodicals such as *The Atlantic*, *The New Yorker* and *The Yale Review* were subsequently collected in the first major volume *The Soft Voice of the Serpent and the Other Stories* (1952). *Face to Face* (1949), *Selected Stories* (1975) *Correspondence Course and Other Stories* (1984), *The Moment Before the Gun Went off* (1988) and *Once Upon a Time* (1989) declare her skill in the realistic presentation of the pathetic condition of the natives and their sufferings. Several of her works included in *Six Feet of the Country* (1956) and *Friday’s Footprints and Other Stories* (1960) display the influence of nineteenth century French authors such as Guy de Maupassant, Honore de Balazac and Gustave Flaubert in their objectivity, realism and satiric edge. *No Place Like, Not for Publication and Other Stories* (1965) *Selected Stories* (1972) and *Livingstone’s Companions* (1972) depict ordinary people defying apartheid in their daily lives. These dazzlingly rich and astoundingly solid stories in their chronological order absorb, what has happened in South Africa over the years. These stories are poised over the dilemmas of Africa and its denizens of both shades. The collection of short stories, *Some Monday for Sure* (1976), envisions a brighter future for South Africa, when liberation would be reality.
To Edith Milton, the stories in *A Soldier’s Embrace* (1980) looks beyond “a political and social outrage to the sad negation of the human spirit which delivers to those in power an even worse sentence of pain than they themselves can pass upon their victims” (Matuz 161). In *Town and Country Lovers* (1980), *Something Out There* (1984) and *Jump and Other Stories* (1991), Gordimer examines the temperament of individuals who unwittingly support the mechanisms of racial separation. Her latest collection *Loot and Other stories*, reflects South Africa’s transition to a post-apartheid society. Her main concern is the devastating effects of apartheid on the lives of South Africans – the constant tension between personal isolation and the commitment to social justice, the numbness caused by the unwillingness to accept apartheid, the inability to change it, and the refusal of exile.

Gordimer, as a writer and an intellectual, for over five decades responded widely to the South African social context, while critics and readers alike accredited her as an obdurate anti-apartheid spokesperson. The novelist has sensitively portrayed “the strains of racial divisiveness and oppression by monitoring their effect on individual black and white characters in her fiction” (Rao 96). She deals with the inter-racial love, discriminatory labour and ‘strike laws’, teenage pregnancy, mother-daughter bitterness, and postcolonial hangovers. As a white writer, Gordimer experiences the difficulty of being accepted in the society as a spokesperson for the civil laws, which she confirms in *Living in Hope and History*, “I am not saying, nor do I believe, that whites cannot write about black, or blacks about whites” (46). Cultural
conflicts and political dogmas too find a genuine depiction in the novels. Gordimer is a representative South African novelist who has successfully portrayed in artistic terms the contemporary reality in fiction.

The large body of the works of Gordimer has impelled the reviewers and critics to affirm that she is not only best in the short stories but also in fiction. She has been studied and critically analyzed by many scholars in the light of historical, social and cultural perspectives. Bijay Kumar Das in the article “The Fiction of Nadine Gordimer”, presents Gordimer as a representative African novelist who has depicted the contemporary reality in her fiction in artistic terms. Venkata Reddy’s “To Read her is to Discover Africa’s Realities: Nadine Gordimer”, glorifies Gordimer as an idealistic and realistic writer whose portrayals have sensitively analyzed the psychological and emotional consequences of apartheid, and her skill in weaving an intricate tapestry whose threads are love, friendship, idealism, freedom and betrayal. In “Nadine Gordimer: Nobel Laureate in Literature, 1991”, Barbara J. Eckstein charts the fiction of Gordimer, its strength and ways of movement through different private, public, physical and political landscapes. Julian Becker traces out the political touch in the novels of Gordimer and how history and politics are entwined with the events in the history of South Africa in “Nadine Gordimer’s Politics”. Vijaysree in “Living in the Interregnum: The Case of Nadine Gordimer” traces Gordimer dealing with uneasiness of contemporary South Africa, where the Whites and the Blacks live together in mutual fear and suspicion, need and dependence. Smyer Richard’s “Risk, Frontier, and
Interregnum in the Fiction of Nadine Gordimer” narrates the uneasiness of contemporary South Africa, a minority society, which attempt to sustain the official myth of its permanent dominance while being pushed by events into unpredictable future and the risk of working in a nation on the edge of violence. David Llyod’s “Nadine Gordimer’s The Late Bourgeois World” states clearly the struggle of the Whites against apartheid in sixties and signifies the divergence of black and white power in South Africa. In “Reality in Nadine Gordimer’s A World of Strangers” Kolawole Ogungbesan pictures the structure of the novel, the narrative sequence and the white man’s struggle in a rainbow land. Mary Donaghy discusses about the possibility of meaningful personal and political engagement in South Africa in “Double Exposure: Narrative Perspective in Gordimer’s A Guest of Honour”. Cami Hewett’s “Hybrid Marital Union and Healing Apartheid: Nadine Gordimer’s A Sport of Nature” brings out Gordimer’s quest for South Africa’s future, a possible utopia where the Blacks and the Whites live in harmony and implements Gordimer’s claim to resolve apartheid differences through marriage mandates, the one who would dismantle apartheid.

Keki N. Daruwalla’s “Accompanying Nadine Gordimer” and Dominic Head’s “Gordimer’s None to Accompany Me: Revisionism and Interregnum” are thorough critical analysis of this novel in the light of racialism and politics, the problem of black empowerment and reclamation of the land, and the white involvement in the new struggles. “Speaking for Another – Nadine Gordimer’s My Son’s Story” by Ipshita Chanda charts out that in a racially
segregated society of South Africa, the voices of the coloured people are under the control of the Whites and there exists a rift between the generations and between the male and female members of a single family. Gordimer sustains creativity in self-discovery, a process that enabled her to grapple with the conundrum of the social and political reality.

Tamlyn Monson’s “Conserving the Cogito: Rereading Nadine Gordimer’s *The Conservationist*” and Surekha Dangwal’s “The Dilemma of a South-African White in Nadine Gordimer’s *The Conservationist*”, bring to light Gordimer’s creative sensibility in providing fresh meaning to actions, places and personalities and the dilemma of the Whites and the Blacks in the most realistic way. “Gordimer’s *The Conservationist*: the book of Unknown Signs” of Judie Newman produces a reading of the signs of Africa, the relevance of the Zulu myth employed and the predicaments of the Whites as well as the Blacks in South Africa. David Medalle’s “The Context of the Awful Event: Nadine Gordimer’s *The House Gun*”, is predominantly concerned with the relationship between the personal and the political and Gordimer, transforming the fragmented society and the fragmented self in the naming of history- an act which has a redemptive quality. Stephen Clingman in “Surviving Murder: Oscillation and triangulation in Nadine Gordimer’s *The House Gun*” converses on the characters of Gordimer, who within their triangular relationships, are oscillating between the real self and the stratified society.
Jeffrey Folks’ “Artist in the Interregnum: Nadine Gordimer’s July’s People” and Michael Neill’s “Translating the Present, Language, Knowledge and Identity with July’s People” highlight the problem of language and translation through ironic details which expose the white South Africa’s alienation from its geographical context and the dislocation of past and present. Lorraine Liscio’s “Burger’s Daughter: Lighting A Torch in the Heart of Darkness”, Richard G. Martin’s “Narrative, History, Ideology: A Study of Waiting for the Barbarians and Burger’s Daughter”, and Lekan Oyegoke’s “Crystallisation of Identity in Nadine Gordimer’s Burger’s Daughter” expose the real risk of being a political activist, quest for identity, racism, oppression, suppression, exploitation, humiliation, male chauvinism, feminism, sexism and heroism in the white dominated country. Siddhartha Deb’s “A Life beyond comfortable: Nadine Gordimer and the Possibility of Desire” and Jane Stevenson’s “Another Tainted Eden - Get a Life” proclaims Gordimer’s handling of different themes and the innate passion to save earth and human life. J.M Coetzee in “Awakening” and Frantz Meier in “Picking Up the other: Nadine Gordimer’s The Pickup” examine the pertinent problem of South Africa in cultural and social scenes.

Though a plethora of critical works are done on the fiction of Gordimer and her fiction, a systematic work on the political, social and cultural atmosphere of South Africa exhibited in the works has not been attempted by so far. So the researcher has chosen Gordimer’s select fictional narratives to explicate the different stand points such as political, social and cultural milieu
of South Africa. Though Gordimer’s twelve novels deal with the contemporary South Africa and the reality of the country, for the purpose of study, the researcher has chosen only six novels *The Conservationist, Burger’s Daughter, July’s People, The House Gun, The Pickup and Get a Life*. The novels are a real depiction of the past and present South Africa’s political, social and cultural milieu. They serve as authentic sources for exploring different perspectives on a wide range of social problems, culture, its transition and historicizing the history of South Africa.

The present study entitled **Confronting the Challenges of Political, Social and Cultural Milieu: An Insight into the Select Novels of Nadine Gordimer** attempts to analyse the political, social and cultural milieu in the select novels of the South African novelist, Nadine Gordimer. Since a writer’s mind and art are conditioned by the world around, as well as limited by the language of the black community, the researcher has chosen to investigate the select novels in such a way so as to appreciate the mind and art of Gordimer. Gordimer, a witness to the changing state of the political and social atmosphere of South Africa has expressed the pain and sufferings of its people in the ethnically and culturally separated and segregated society in a multi-dimensional view prompted to have a serious study of the fictional narratives. Focusing on the seminal role of Gordimer’s ideology, each main chapter of the thesis endeavours to present the social, cultural and historical awareness of the novelist, who takes the issue with the daunting politico-historical forces both during and after apartheid. Based on the hypothesis that in the novels of
Gordimer, there is strategic positioning of the cultural identities of South Africa, thus recreating history to project her tradition. It also attempts to find out the relation between the historical events of the country and the novels of Gordimer. The thesis traces, the history of confrontation between the traditionalists and Europeans based on the powerful presentation of the novelist. Further, the thesis focuses on the most dehumanizing effect of the apartheid ridden society, on both the Whites and the Blacks. In a deeper level, the novels present a cauldron of ideological divisions that have sown the seeds of hatred and violence in the society. It also studies the contemporary political, social and cultural milieu of South Africa and its radical changes and revolutions from the past to the present.

The thesis consists of five chapters. The introductory chapter is followed by three main chapters and summation. The Introductory chapter traces the growth, development and on the diverse issues of the African Literature and its wing, South African Literature, the emergence of Black Literature and the protest writings. It enumerates the contemporary writers and their works which deal with marginalization of the underprivileged. The chapter includes a discussion of the life and works of Gordimer, with the outline of the plot of the works chosen, the literary achievements and awards that adorned Gordimer’s crown and the review of literature on Gordimer and her fictional narratives. The investigator briefly introduces the topic taken for analysis with a brief discussion of the key terms related to the investigation is attempted, followed by methodology and plan of study.
The second chapter, “Encounter between the Private and the Public” traces South Africa’s historical events and how human relationships and personal issues get inextricably mixed up with the politics of South Africa. The novels are scrutinized in the light of New Historicism by relating the real life situations in them with the historical issues and incidents. Gordimer’s love for the homeland, its people, landscape, the nation’s past and present as reflected in the novels, attribute to a historical perspective. The novelist has recorded the thirty-seven years, when South Africa was undergoing earth-shattering changes and the real events of South African history dealing with the marginalized and the outraged people in South Africa. The author skillfully demarcates the relationship between the private and the public by charting each stage of the history of South Africa. The history of South Africa and the historical incidents that shaped the geography of the country such as the Sharpeville Massacre, Soweto Uprising, the revolution of 1960 and 1970 amalgamate the personal issues with the politics of South Africa. The novelist excavates the political milieu of South Africa, the reversal of roles from the Whites to the Blacks, identity of displacement, the White supremacy and its effect on the individuals and in the society. The study of the select narratives in the light of the nation’s past and the novelist’s effort to fictionalize all the historical events with the characters are dealt with keen execution.

The third chapter “Bridging the Unbridgeable” discusses the proximity between literature and society, where writers transport real life situations and interpret the nuances of society. It also deals with the origin of racism, the
effects of South Africa’s apartheid system: the oppression of the Blacks and the Whites, the economic insecurity, fear, resentment, the suppressed life and struggle against racism. The pain, pressure, perplexity and the injustice that exist in South Africa registered in the novels are examined. Gordimer realistically unmasks the painful uncertainties of the Blacks in their own land scuffling for space and life. The chapter further unfurls the conflict between the white conquerors and the conquered black, the white masters and the black servants, the village and the city. The human discrepancy torn between the longing to live personal and private life, the racial displacement and alienation are presented by the novelist. The dilemma of the Blacks in all their dreadful living conditions is pertinently highlighted. The author’s humanistic vision of the harmonized society with the Blacks and the Whites living together finds expression in the chapter.

The fourth chapter “Cultural Diversity” portrays the relation between literature and culture, South African rainbow culture and how the novelist represents the multicultural reality of South Africa. The origin of culture, the views of culture by eminent personalities and the detailed presentation of myth, rituals and various practices of the South Africans find an apt representation in this chapter. The Zulu tradition and the culture shared by the South Africans, their religious beliefs and customs are presented in this chapter with an objective to present everyman’s culture. Her strict use of culture, different range of experiences shooting from racial, ethnic, gender, sexual and class differences are also examined. The cultural practices of
South Africa and their keen influence on its literature are analyzed. It attempts to unearth the beautiful cultural drapery of South Africa as painted in the novels of Gordimer.

The final chapter “Summation” records the findings of the study and reiterates the success of Nadine Gordimer, who essentialises her political, social and cultural concern in the narratives. It surveys the findings of the study and draws the link between cultural and socio-politico modes in the fiction as evidenced in the novels of Gordimer. The socio-political percepts of South Africa, its merits and demerits and the way to empower and uplift the subjugated are recorded in the concluding chapter. The central role and the triangular view of the novelist in political, social and cultural milieu as substantiated in the fiction and her significance as an explorer are avowed. The scope for further research on the novelist is also documented in the chapter.

The discussion of the thesis topic has used appropriate critical tools for interpreting the select primary sources of Gordimer taken for study. References are made to her short stories and essays whenever they are relevant. Secondary materials on the writer and the works are also used in support of the argument. An effort has been made in the thesis to relate the select novels of Nadine Gordimer to the post-modern trends such as cultural, social and political milieu in the light of the troubled historical past. The thesis intends to have no separate chapter to examine the literary technique and style
of the novelist, as it has been analyzed throughout the study of the topic. Apart from the list of books cited, those consulted have also been provided, so as to form the theoretical framework of the argument of the dissertation. The documentation of the thesis is in accordance with the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers - Seventh Edition.*