The examination of the diverse characters in Gordimer’s novels has shown that the individual has not only a mind but also a self that arises in the course of social experience and activity. An individual is able to form his ‘self-concept’ only through the process of meaningful interaction with ‘significant others.’ Human thought, experience and conduct are essentially social. People develop their identities and their comprehension of how society works only in the course of their interaction with others. One’s right perception of the self helps the society at large, since society and the self are inter-related. When one assumes the role of the ‘generalized other’ the facets of one’s self converge. The norms and values of life merge in our identity, helping us to make meaningful contributions to ourselves and to the society.

Chapter – V

CONVERGING LIVES

\textit{parts relate to whole,}

\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots

\textit{All serv’d, all serving! Nothing stands alone.}

--Alexander Pope

The ‘self’ is a reflexive phenomenon that develops in social interaction. It emanates, as examined earlier, from the dialectic of the ‘I’ and ‘me.’ For Mead, the formation of the unified self of an individual depends on social experiences.
Taking the attitude of the other is the ultimate state in the evolution of the self. It involves taking into oneself the others’ attitudes and points of views, whereby an individual moves from “simple role-playing to generalized role-taking” (Coutu 186). This internalization of the general attitudes of a community is what Mead calls ‘taking the attitude of the generalized other.’ This is the key that unifies the disparate modes of behavior of an individual into a unified body of conduct.

The ‘generalized other’ emerges through the development of the self. It is that stage at which the individual relates to himself as object and subject and assimilates the attitudes and values of his social environment. Through ‘role-taking’ with only ‘significant others,’ the self would seem segmented, as it is divided among the different points of view. The ‘generalized other’ is able to link all those individual perspectives into one abstract whole, thus “giving the self a sense of integration” (Allan 272). Through relationships with others, different aspects of one’s experience get integrated.

Socialisation not only moulds the individual, it also teaches him how to fit his unique qualities into the fabric of the society. Gordimer’s fiction shows how the social environment affects one’s awareness of the ‘self.’ Most of Gordimer’s characters begin their journey of life as ordinary citizens without any great sense of purpose regarding the political and social situations that surround them. They seem rather simplistic at the outset but the situations they are exposed to and the people they meet with allow them to discover who they ‘really are.’ They do not stagnate, they move ahead after a transient state, either of disillusionment or passivity. They are aided in this process by generalising and assimilating the
attitudes of their ‘significant others.’

In her quest for an independent life, Helen Shaw, the protagonist of The Lying Days, had become deeply involved with Paul Clark. She had shorn off all her responsibilities by even giving up her university education, in seeking fulfillment in Paul’s love. She had been literally cocooned in her love life, shying away from all contacts with the outside world. Both Paul and Helen seemed to be self-sufficient in each other’s company. She had given up her work in the book shop to work in the Natives Welfare department. The tedium of the work makes her feel “like being in a cage suspended from the invisible ceiling of the sky” (LD 282).

A fissure in their relationship opens up when Helen is gradually consumed by the monotony of her life. In Paul’s flat, with mechanical deftness she goes about cooking and cleaning and she seemed to be “living a kind of interim period” (228). Helen is gradually irked by Paul’s farcical work in the Native Affairs department. He had been put in charge of the housing section but there was an acute shortage of housing for the Africans. There were just 1,100 houses for 20,000 families. But Paul seemed to be wholesomely involved in his job, as much as he was with his unofficial work for the radical Africans. Helen realises that the revolutionaries, whom Paul supports, spend much of their time in mere words and do nothing concrete through action. She is ignited to speak against the “perpetual state of crisis” (290) that everyone lives in, without procuring any solution to the problem.

When Helen points out to Paul the futility of his work he grows irritated and incensed. Soon, Helen perceives the lacuna in her love for Paul. While he attempts to reconcile a job with the government and friendship with black oppositional
politicians, Helen finds it very difficult to live with him. In her relationship with Paul she is not oblivious of the fact that “love is only the little boat that beaches you over the jagged rocks, for the interior something more will be needed” (232). Her rebellious self and the self that hankered after deep-rooted love converge into a ‘realistic self.’ When the very act of living with Paul is subsumed in contradictions, Helen perceives her life to be in a “state of suspension” (290). She accepts that something is wanting in the love that promised perennial warmth. Helen is led to understand that “love cannot be always the same” (292) and she fails to “hold together the torn and tearing garment” (296) of their relationship. They who had kept away from all socialisation again start to see a great deal of their friends. They were like the young couples who after “the self-sufficiency of the engagement and honeymoon period, by the habit of marriage and released again to seek diversion” (296). Slowly, Helen begins to gain recognition of her own ‘self,’ while living a sterile, unproductive life with Paul. She becomes increasingly moody and is reprimanded by Paul. He attributes her moodiness to that part of her that “hasn’t grown up” (301). She is made to accept the fact that she does hanker after her parents. She feels like “an invalid between the illness and the cure” (312).

When Helen meets Joel outside a theatre booking office, she is discomfited over herself for having ignored Joel’s graduation ceremony. She had been consummately immersed in her life with Paul that she had ignored Joel, her ‘significant other.’ It was only Joel who knew utmost about her. Through Joel, she confronts the truths of her life in South Africa: “the colour bar isn’t down
because you’ve invited an Indian to drink; you haven’t struck a blow for the working classes because like Jenny Marcus, you don’t wear a hat” (352). Unlike her, Joel had not placed upon any relationship with human beings: “the burden of the proof of an ideal” (366). This is what makes Joel accept even Mrs. Shaw’s foibles. To him, Mrs. Shaw’s open heart-to-heart chats with Anna, her native maid are “the real thing, the thing we’re all piously rolling our eyes to heaven for—contact between a white and a black simply as human beings nothing else” (124). Since, it is not easy to change others, Joel counsels Helen to “Accept them ... as they are” (125). Helen is enabled to see things anew through Joel her bosom companion. Her constant strife with her mother would have been averted had she been open-minded and large-hearted to accept her mother as she was. Helen reveals herself to be receptive to change through an internalising of the attitudes and values held steadfast by Joel.

Helen is a chance witness of the violence of the May Day strike that leaves eighteen people dead. She goes with Laurie to the townships looking for Paul and is led into the heart of riots. In the midst of mindless violence, she sees a man shot at by the police. The victim who drops dead before her is Paul’s peace-loving friend Sippho. The image of that man haunts her thenceforth. She had imagined at one stage that “political change does not affect the real happiness or unhappiness of people’s lives” (255). Even the Nationalist party’s victory in the 1948 elections did not seem to deflect her from her commitment to her ‘personal life.’ Earlier, she was so haunted by the account of mixed race couples arrested in bed, that she woke to car headlights in the room and recoiled from Paul. Now, the shooting of a black man
in front of her makes her recognize the void that masks her life with Paul. Helen’s description of the riot highlights her firsthand experience of horror though the event as such is belittled by Paul as “Helen’s adventure at the barricades” (334). As a social worker, Paul Clark is caught between working to improve the Africans’ condition and joining forces with African nationalists to overthrow the system. When apartheid gathers momentum he is forced to recognize “the irrelevance of his reformist activities to radicalized blacks” (Witalec 364). Helen’s inability to figure out an end to the brutal reality of apartheid brings down upon her “a calm, listless loneliness” (LD 332). Driven by a “longing to get out to the wide open spaces” (333), she decides to go to Europe. She resolves to lead thenceforth a “life of honesty and imagination and courage” (352).

While leaving for Europe, she re-examines her life and this affirms that she has reached the state of recognition that she has left her “lying days” behind her. Helen leaves Africa with a drastic change in her convictions. Her departure is not an escape from the inconducive political and social atmosphere. It is the first step of her ‘converged’ self. She gains an understanding of life in South Africa as a “picnic in a beautiful graveyard where the people are buried alive under your feet” (358). It is, she learns “a false paradise built on the sufferings and destruction of the others,” she uncovers the horrors “as she digs beneath the lying surface of her country” (Visel 37). At the port, she meets with Joel whom she had not seen for quite sometime. He intends to go to Israel and it is only in his company that she feels like a “creature come to life again” (LD 349).

As she stood in the ship that was set to sail for London, an extraordinary calm
engulfs her. She sees in the street below figures of some little native minstrels, who were singing as they padded along in the rain. She muses over the clarity of thinking that she has gained. She knows she is not practising self-deception any more. She had “the strong satisfaction of having accepted disillusion as a beginning rather than an end: the last and most enduring illusion; the phoenix illusion that makes life always possible” (367). As the African Nationalist government consolidated its apartheid stance and public restrictions became manifold, Helen’s fragmented self gets integrated. She senses her alienation from the black world and her inability to contribute to their struggle for freedom. The traumatic memory of the rioter’s death does affect her in her decision to leave South Africa. She had remained all the while “a spectator, trapped behind glass” (Visel 41). When her ship is ready to leave she declares: “I am not running away from now because I know I’m coming back here” (LD 340). Her ultimate change of mind to return to South Africa is not sudden. It is the natural product of her converged self. It indicates her acceptance of her identity as a South African. Apartheid thus becomes “a shaping force … in the psychology of Helen’s growth to young womanhood” (Dimitriu 29).

Helen’s boarding of the mail boat in Durban is not, as Robert Green remarked, “an act of abandonment, resignation and defeat, the quitting of a land that offers no foothold” (546). It is, as Clingman observed, “an acceptance of the complexities of her South African situation, and a determination to work within them” (172). Helen is brought into an acceptance of the need for a sense of responsibility and commitment to the society of which she is a part. In this process, Joel Aaron plays
an invincible role that helps in her ‘self-integration.’ It proves true Mead’s observation: “When a self does appear it always involves an experience of another; there could not be an experience of a self simply by itself … the response of the other becomes an essential part in the experience or conduct of the individual” (195).

Helen, who had been groping in the world of love and illusion, gains a passage into “wisdom and reconciliation” (Hayes 66) of her personal and social self. She also learns that “complete liberation from private, familial restraints requires challenging the dominant political order as well” (Matuz 164-65). Her relationship with Joel and her visits to the townships facilitate her knowledge of her self. Be it her attitude to her mother, or her life in the Mine, Helen was conditioned by strong whims. As Joel reinstates the need for accepting individuals as they are, Helen is induced to ingest his views. Her life in Atherton, her stints at the University, the book store, the Native Affairs department and her stay in Paul’s flat—in sum, the life she has lived through in a fragmented society, furnish her with a consciousness of her ‘self.’ Having accepted the aridity of her life with Paul, she embarks on a journey—a new journey that exemplifies her transition to a matured self. It is not a flight of escape, as in her earlier days. It is a ‘pilgrimage’ undertaken only to come back where she belongs—to where she is needed most as “an independent social being.”

In A World of Strangers, Toby Hood’s ‘self’ is, as Mead describes, an awareness of who he is that is built up from various social interactions. Only when he takes the attitudes of the organised social group to which he belongs does he develop a
complete self. He is drawn into the world of “forbidden fraternization” (WOS 169), where some whites overcoming all prejudices moved with the people who were on the periphery of their lives. They attempted to bring to light the talented African painters, theatre groups, dancers and craftsmen by collaborating with Africans in all sorts of artistic ventures. One of Sam’s friends was an amateur composer with whom he was collaborating in the writing of a one-act African opera.

Though Toby had mingled with the upper crust of white society he finds his ‘brother’ only in the defiant carefree life in the townships. He had found a reflection of himself in Steven. And now he finds it difficult to accept the fact of his death. He reflects: “How could it be true, that which both of us know, that he was me, and I was him? He was in the bond of his skin, and I was free; the world was open to me and closed to him; how could I recognize my situation in his” (252).

He witnesses the love that people had for Steven through the funeral ceremony that was arranged. He observes how Steven had “died like a criminal” but “was buried like a king” (254). There were admirers, friends and acquaintances who turned up to see him off. They had known him as “one of themselves” (254). Steven had lived and died a life which Toby could only observe. In his social apathy and egocentric state, Toby realises that he and Steven had shared a common nature. The carefree “Robinhood code” (121) adhered to by Steven did allure Toby. Despite the fact that Steven violated all regulations and norms, it is his latent integrity that has its sway over Toby. Steven never did wear a mask to
hide his ‘truant self.’ His was a transparent nature that easily endeared him to all. After Steven’s death, Toby could not bring himself to go to the Alexanders. He realises the “enormous strain of such a way of life where one set of loyalties and interests made claims in direct conflict with another set equally strong” (258). When Cecil Rowe asks in surprise how Toby managed to sit down with black men, he states: “They’re my friends” (263). He, who had earlier feared losing Cecil if he revealed to her his association with his black friends, now candidly states: “the man I’ve known best since I’ve been here was an African” (263).

Toby’s sensuous relationship with Cecil has a natural end with Cecil marrying the affluent Guy Patterson. Toby realises that the void created by Steven’s death cannot be filled with his love for Cecil. He has found a true companion in Steven and his loss can be requitted only by long lasting commitment. He is led to privilege the social group of the townships to that of the Johannesburg mansions. A sense of brotherhood that fills the air of the townships is something that Toby cannot give up. He has assimilated the warmth and naturalness of people like Steven and Sam. His bond with the “organised community or social group” (Mead 218) of his township friends is the ‘generalised other.’

In confronting Steven’s death, Toby is taken in by deep anguish as he had never felt the fact of his death in his own life. He realises the need to reach out to his black fellowmen who are easygoing without any reserve in striking opposition to the people of the High House. He understands that “the world of the High House is not just a world where money rules, but a world where money and privilege evoke insincere responses” (Parker 120). What Anna Louw foresees of Toby
materializes: “You think you’ll keep free, with one foot here and another there and a look in somewhere else, but even you, even a stranger like you, Toby—you won’t keep it up” (WOS 184).

Anna Louw who introduced Toby to his black community is arrested for political activities. Her life is an illustration of the “possibility of a friendly reconciliation between blacks and whites” (Vijayasree 94). She had severed her marital ties with her Indian husband, Hassim, but she continued to take care of his little sister Urmila. The mature Anna knows how lives can converge when the seeds of the future, viz. children, are nurtured—“they’re the new people in the world that’s coming, the decent one where colour doesn’t matter” (WOS 176). From Anna, Toby recognises that “the only way forward is to move into the barren no man’s land between the two worlds in friction—not to take up a middle ground but to represent a realistic alternative to both worlds from which real community might arise” (Parker 123).

After Steven’s death, Toby learns from Sam and the Congress people whom he meets at Sam’s place, the need for principled action. His kinship with the down-to-earth Steven and the affable Sam brings an integration of his divided self. He had drifted between the two worlds, but Steven’s death drives him to make a definite choice. He gives up the world of shallow emotions represented by the High House and holds on to the invigorating world of the townships. Despite the state of squalor in which the likes of Steven and Sam lived, the spontaneity and genuinity that characterised their lives envelop Toby. It is their attitudes and values that he willfully embraces. He realises the need for assuming responsibility for his black
friends. He had earlier reserved the right “not to take a stand” (WOS 34) and was resentful of his family’s dedication to social causes. He is now directed towards a commitment to his discriminated brethren.

Toby bids farewell to Sam Mofokenzazi and promises to return as he would soon be the ‘godfather’ to Sam’s second child. At the railway station, Toby assures Sam that he was not leaving the country and would be back in a month. They laugh holding each other by the arms watched by a policeman. While Sam has his own misgivings over Toby’s return to South Africa, Toby’s newly integrated self avows the need to commit himself to the cause of the black world. Toby does not “quit” as Stephen Gray opines, neither is he “guilty of moral dereliction” (15). Anna had distinguished between “public livers” and “private livers” (WOS 122), that is, those primarily concerned with their collective fate and those concerned just with their individual. After moving through the whole spectrum of South African society, Toby resolves as a ‘public liver’ to commit himself to the black world. Through Toby’s choice, Gordimer highlights “the necessity of political action” (Wettenhall 39).

Toby can no more afford to be “the arm-chair strategist” (WOS 84) simply observing the society without contributing to it. His “rehabilitation” as Clingman avers, “lies, therefore in his consequent social commitment measured in the friendship he forms with Sam, another black character” (174). He recognises that only in people like Sam and his wife Ella, in their innocent unsuspecting involvement he had committed himself. His listless self has found its moorings in the community of the blacks. By being socially indifferent, Toby had nurtured the
social divide indirectly. The friendship of Sam, Steven and Toby reaffirm the truth that only through the interpersonal relationships the social barrier can be thrown. Through Toby, Gordimer suggests, “that hope can be found in a black white friendship” (Peterson 171). Toby’s self is a ‘social self’ that is “a self that is realised in its relationship to others” (Mead 204).

No individual can have a consciousness of his/her self in isolation. Only through social interactions and relationships with ‘significant others’ that an individual derives his/her identity. The responses to different situations and to people around are varied. A ‘unique self’ is made possible only in the socially defined expectations of an individual in a given social position. This is exemplified in the life of Rosa Burger in Burger’s Daughter. Rosa’s merger with the community that nurtures her identity is initiated by two incidents. The first occurred in one of Johannesburg’s city parks. An African dies suddenly while sitting on the bench in front of Rosa. The second occurred when Rosa came across a black man whipping a donkey heartlessly. She is startled at the sight and she identifies the scene with all the suffering there has ever been including that of her own country: “the infinite variety and gradation of suffering by lash, by fear, by hunger, by solitary confinement—the camps, concentration, labour resettlement …” (BD 208). These two incidents trigger Rosa’s flight to Europe. She flees to avert the smothering atmosphere of the South African society. She is only too eager to reject the ideals of her father who made her deny her own individuality in favour of political needs. She also realises that her father’s ideology is losing its significance because of the
new political ideology of Black Consciousness.

When Rosa arrives in Paris, she catches someone trying to filch her pocketbook in the crowded Rue de la Harpe. In her encounter with the pickpocket we find black and white Africans coming together in the crowded anonymity of Paris: “He was what he was. I was what I was and we had found each other” (233). The black figure is here the oppressor and the white is the victim. It is the black who helps the white ‘discover’ himself. It is in contrast with the donkey episode that made it impossible for her “to live with herself for being a member of the ruling white race, which perpetuates black subjugation” (White 223).

At Paris, Rosa is glad to be away from the political scene of South Africa, but she soon understands that people in Paris care least about the fact that in some countries “people die for ordinary civil rights” (296). She joins the French branch of the anti-apartheid movement and is very much in demand as the daughter of Lionel Burger. To meet other revolutionaries who are in exile, she goes to London from Paris. In one of the parties, she meets Bassie, her ‘surrogate black brother.’ The latter however refuses to acknowledge Rosa and later calls her in the night. He riles against the whites and accuses his parents for mindlessly following them. To him, they were “one of Lionel Burger’s best tame blacks sent scuttling like a bloody cockroach everywhere” (320). He objects to the white/black divide in the world that has always privileged the former over the latter. He contends that though there were hundreds of black men including his father, who died in jail, the world is not concerned about them. No one seems to keep track of the black
men who died for the cause of freedom.

Rosa’s self that had just catered to her sensual needs now becomes more open. Bassie’s call brings her to accept the blacks as they are. His words bring a sea change within her receptive self. Bassie, whose real name is “Zwelinzima” (suffering land), reminds her of the futility and vanity of her life as a mistress in an alien land. She grows sick and throws up. This state of sickness is only an externalisation of the new understanding that she gains and that alters her course of life. Her conversation with Zwelinzima “shakes her out of her complacency” (Ghorpade 96). She who had fled her father’s ideology, returns to South Africa with a renewed sense of social commitment. This is made possible through the different stages in the development of her self.

Caught in the luring world of pleasure and forced into a listless relationship with Bernard Chabalier, Rosa’s political consciousness is awakened in her final confrontation with Bassie. She gains cognizance of the fact that she cannot afford to keep away from her political heritage and responsibility. She asks herself, “How could I have come out with the things I did? Where were they hiding” (BD 328). The very state of self-examination depicts her movement towards her integrated self. In an epiphanic moment she contemplates the six tapestries of “la Dame à la Licorne” in Paris; of which, five tapestries celebrate five senses, the sixth tapestry enjoins their renunciation in favour of the exercise of individual free will. Rosa, likewise renounces a life of sensual individualism. In France, she had been consumed by an image of herself as a sensual woman floating like the lady on “an azure island of a thousand flowers” (340). Bernard too was in love with an image
of Rosa to which he does not fully conform. Gordimer describes a woman gazing at the tapestries: “There she sits gazing, gazing … sits gazing, their creative that has never been” (34). In returning to South Africa, Rosa chooses not to be such an image—not to be “an object to be displayed and desired, a figure in an erotic or political iconography” (Newman 95).

Rosa had been groomed in a political environment and had also been exposed to youthful passions. Caught between sensuality and social commitment, her ‘generalized other’ is a fusion of her individuality and sense of social responsibility. Ultimately, what she pursues is a commitment that is not bogged down by an ideology. She had enjoyed just satisfying her senses but she is “pulled back by the ties of the community she has left behind” (Peterson 173). Ridden with fear over the futility of a life without a definite social purpose, Rosa resolves to abandon her comfortable European exile and contribute to the ‘community’ that nurtured her. She had fled to Europe to avert the political destiny and to attempt a private life but she “returns to be useful in Lionel’s country” (Smith 181). She identifies in an irrevocable manner with the ideal which her father had lived for when he declared from the courtroom: “I would be guilty if I were innocent of working to destroy racism in my country” (BD 133).

Neither Rosa’s return to Africa nor her job in a hospital is forced. She engages herself in teaching crippled children how to walk—how “to put one foot before the other” (332). She prefers living in Africa to that of Europe and attempts to be of some help to efface the people’s predicament in the ‘suffering land.’ Her displaced self ultimately finds an “authentic constituency” (Radhakrishnan 124).
Gordimer’s interview to Stephen Gray clearly explains Rosa’s state:

Rosa belongs to a segment of society whose prime motivation is their relationship to society, it’s the touchstone of their lives ….You are either running away from your invincible place, or you are taking it on … your place depends on the role you take in society. But the fact is that you have a role. (267)

Rosa does not sideline her individuality in favour of the public cause. To her, the fact of suffering is more relevant than any ideology, so she reconciles herself to her father’s heritage in a unique way. As she says, “I don’t know the ideology: / It’s about suffering. / How to end suffering” (BD 332). In the acceptance of her self: “I am what I always was” (349), Rosa transcends the conflicts that made her an exile. Her return to South Africa reveals her gaining a “sense of community” (Rowe 50).

Rosa becomes involved in the underground revolutionary work and is detained under Terrorism Act. Her political activities are related to the SOWETO uprising in 1976 which was the first distinct revolution after the formation of the Black Consciousness movement. She is charged with “aiding and abetting of the students’ and school children’s revolt” (BD 356). She returns to where she started from—‘the prison.’ She moves “from outside to inside the prison and solves the problem of how to offer one’s self” (Rowe 47). Lionel’s life, his ideology and political activities were centred on the abstract future. But Rosa begins her political life by teaching the black children in whose hands the future lies. Her ideological and sensual self fuse to give her a new role. She is no longer yoked by
her father’s heroism. She may not be a ‘hero’ like Lionel Burger but she does her utmost for her suffering fellowmen in her own way. It is an important phase in Rosa’s life when the ‘I’ and ‘me’ are fused. It is during this moment that she senses “the ‘true’ meaning of life” (Allan 274). In Rosa’s converged self one perceives the “connections between private experience and political context” (Ettin 8).

Brandt Vermeulen’s words are proved right in Rosa’s life: “travel … tells you where home is” (BD 186). Rosa realises that one cannot shirk one’s calling. All her doubts regarding her own ‘role’ in her society are alleviated. She enjoys her detainment in the company of her friends, Clare Terblanche and Marisa, the black activist. In the prison there are many Coloured Indian and African women who are not permitted to occupy adjoining cells and cannot share the prison yard together. Despite this segregation the inmates “transgress physical barriers through the power of their words, voices and singing” (Halil 38). A heterogeneous fraternity comes into being within the walls of the prison. Rosa succeeds in moving from “the luxurious armed camp of the colonizer to the political prison of the colonized, from the sterile enclave of the whites to the materially impoverished but spiritually rich territory of the blacks, which is pregnant with the future” (Visel 42).

Diverse experiences lead Rosa to the final stage of maturation. From her youthful, rebellious, passionate self she evolves to be a mature, responsible individualistic woman. Her dreary, illusory life of a mistress had cloaked the real world from her. Her chance encounter with Bassie is the last stage that hastens the growth of her ‘self.’ She emerges resolute after her experiences in exile. Through her “self-
discovery she identifies her mission and embraces her destiny with enthusiasm” (Oyegoke 63). Cruising along in an imagined state of living, Rosa is at last anchored in her integrated self. What C. Wright Mills observed in his essay “The Promise” explicates the impact of the society on Rosa’s self:

> Every individual lives out his or her life in a particular society, with the historical circumstances of that society greatly influencing what that individual becomes. People who have been shaped by their society contribute, in turn to the formation of that society and the course of its history. (19)

Mead has observed that we can realise ourselves only when we recognise the other in his relationship to us (194). This is true of Maureen Smales in July’s People. She is forced to reevaluate her relationship with her former servant July. She is given the opportunity to assimilate with the native world. But, she had been observing, what Robin Visel calls the “liberal decencies” (38) in her association with her black inferiors that she simply could not tune herself to the strange environment. In the new situation there is an “absolute breakdown of communication” (Engler 29). When Maureen and July try to talk to out, the very notion of understanding each other is undermined beyond repair. July had adopted himself to the cultural changes in the city to maintain harmonious kinship with his mistress. But with the disappearance of the Bakkie and the gun, which are symbols of power, the deadly struggle between Maureen and July surfaces.

Both, Maureen and July have been interacting with each other for fifteen years without attempting to understand the other’s facets of self, because of the barriers
imposed by apartheid. When the old system collapses, they use their intimate knowledge about each other to expose the other’s true nature. July explains that he had taken the vehicle as he needed it to drive to the shops for supplies. But Maureen suspects his real intentions. She taunts him by offering the keys sarcastically, “Here are your keys” (JP 68). Soon, they are led to confront each other squarely. Gordimer writes,

He stood there, his stolidity an acceptance that he could not escape her, since she was alone, they were one-to-one....People in the relation they had been in are used to having to interpret what is never said between them. (69)

July states the implied, that she is not for his having the keys. Though Maureen protests, July points out the shallowness of that trust: “—You frightened I’m not working enough for you” (70).

For fifteen years, they had hidden behind a social and linguistic veneer of civility. It is only in the rural village that they confront each other without any pretence. She talks in her unpatronising English and he in his vernacular. Only when July speaks to Maureen in “a barrage of his own language does she realise the falsity of her mistress position” (Knox 70). She ingests the fact that July’s being correct was only her idea of him as a servant, not as another entity having equal human and civil rights. Though she did not know his language, she knew that his rejection of her was complete. As each reviles the other, Maureen realises “her own view of herself in the past as tolerant, humane, non-racist has been false” (Smith 95).

Maureen’s post-modernist culture makes it difficult for her to embrace “the
simpler rural and local cultures of the black South Africans” (Rich 380). But Bam Smales unlike his wife enters into the social world of July’s village by making useful contributions to it. He acts as the “provider” (Brink 171) among July’s extended family by mending broken implements, shooting warthog or catching fish. He rigs a well and builds a tank and the villagers are excited about it. Everyone takes water from it. When Victor is angry that his “father’s tank” is used by all, July tells him “You see, your father, he make everyone—everyone to be pleased” (JP 63). Bam’s status as a hunter facilitates his social interaction with the men of his village. His engagement with the daily tasks of the village impresses the other villagers and he is therefore invited to their beer drinking and gathering. Moreover in contrast to his suburban life, Bam develops a more fatherly attitude towards his children, mainly because they constantly follow him during the days: “the children were generally around as the blacks’ children are always with their adults” (35). Life in the village provides Bam the opportunity to have greater social interactions with his children in comparison with his former life, when in all probability, he was devoted to his career as an architect.

Maureen had earlier tried to combat the imposed primitivism and insisted on using toilet paper, malaria pills etc. But later on, her attitude undergoes a slow change and she did not mind even if her family washed in the river which in all likelihood may be carrying bilharzia infection. Lives do converge when the Smales family and July’s relatives share daily tasks with all the other tribes in the veld: “the same endless dragging of wood, chopping of wood for the same fires; the same backsides bent at washing, squatting pecking over maize” (106-7). Among the Smales, only
Maureen found it difficult to cope with the new background. The children quickly acclimatize themselves. They not only learn the vernacular, they also play with July’s children. Maureen had never attempted to learn Fanagalo, the black South African lingua franca, although she grew up among Africans. Gina, unlike her mother, almost transforms into an African girl, immersing herself in African language, manners and food. Instead of the Afrikaner lullabies she learned from her father, she now sings lullabies “she had learnt from her companions, in their language” (79). Gina naturalises herself with the local tradition of the Africans:

“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” (41). Dominic Head rightly observes that “the possibility of a post-revolutionary rebirth is carried principally by the Smales children, the daughter Gina in particular” (134).

The Smales’ children quickly and spontaneously adopt themselves to their new environment. They eat the mealie-pap in the African fashion with their fingers. They are ‘at home’ in July’s village. As Gordimer writes, “Yes, home, Gina was at home among the children, hearth, ashes and communal mealie-meal pots of July’s place” (JP 121). All three children—Victor, Gina and Royce share a moment early in the novel when they see a black child as “one of their own kind” (42). Victor and Royce “pull their father from the hut and make him go fishing with their following troupe of children and babies” (157). Gina finds a close friend in Nyiko. Gordimer describes their friendship thus: “The little girls smile and don’t speak before the others, their friendship is too deep and secret for that”
Gina “hybridizes herself by mixing her own cultural background with that of the Africans” (Hemante Singh 63).

Maureen’s existence in the village makes her more independent of her husband. And since her children manage on their own in the company of the other black children, her sense of motherhood also diminishes. She also comes to a better understanding about her relationship not just with July but also with Lydia, her black maid, when she was a child. She realises that the relationship she used to define as friendship was nothing more than that of maser-slave, frozen in “the photograph of the white school girl and the black woman with the girls’ school case on her head” (JP 33). In her attempts to reach out to the women of the village, she learns how “the relations between city people and country people form a major separation, a principal frontier of human relation” (Redfield 66).

Maureen had been grappling with a countermanding of roles as a result of her deluded self. Her confrontation with July in his village ushers the realisation of her integrated self. Her earlier acts of liberality were mere attempts at keeping July in his place. Shorn off her façade of benevolence, she sees herself as a ‘mean mistress.’ As she reckons with the failures of the past and the differences of the interregnum, Maureen admits her distancing from July’s “real facts of life” (JP 73). As Ali Erritouni observes, “the rigors of their new life force them, especially Maureen, to reckon with the origins of their social and economic privilege and with some of their unquestioned assumptions about racial equality in South Africa” (70).

When Maureen hears the sound of an approaching helicopter, she runs towards
it. Her running is not “one of betrayal” (Roberts 82). It is the ultimate act of realisation of her ‘self.’ Maureen had failed to understand July for fifteen long years. Having gleaned from her encounter with her ‘significant other’ July that, she is totally dependent on him, she takes her first step towards ‘liberation’ from her own dependent self. Abdul K. Janmohamed compares Maureen’s escape to Rosa’s in Burger’s Daughter:

in both cases withdrawal [from history] leads to a further development of the protagonist’s consciousness and the realisation that one cannot escape history. Rosa … returns to accept her destiny by going to prison and Maureen’s escape from the village is in fact simultaneously a return to the war, and recognition of her own historical fate. (144)

For Stephen Clingman, Maureen is “running from old structures and relationships … but she is also running towards her revolutionary destiny” (203). To Nancy Bailey, Maureen’s flight is an abandonment of the duties of motherhood, and “an attempted return to the illusion of identity created by the world of privilege and possessions” (222). Her flight seems to reduce her to the condition of a solitary animal. But seen from the perspective of Maureen’s evolving self, her flight is a necessary “precondition for a reconstitution and transformation of identity” (Neill 96).

Conception of self is essential to the individual’s understanding of other people in his environment and of his relation to them. The self, as Mead analyzed, reaches its full development by organizing the individual attitudes of others and by
becoming an individual reflection of the pattern of social behavior in which it is involved. Sonny, in My Sons’ Story, is entangled in his affair with Hannah that alienates him from his family and the resistance movement. He had taken his wife Aila’s silences for granted without knowing that her gentleness gloved her “strength of will” (MSS 7). Aila had an element within her “some fibre of personality as a separate identity” (8) that even Sonny was unaware of. She knew about Sonny’s affair with Hannah, but his “marginal encounter” with Hannah does not make her question his “dedication and dependability” (189). Aila had always kept the “carryall” packed with toiletries, ready for her husband for fear he may be arrested at any point of the night. She silently went about doing her work at home. Gordimer represents her silence as “mobile the kind that undergoes exhilarating transformation” (Sonza 112).

Sonny’s fruitful contributions to the society as a revolutionary pulls Aila out from her role as a “stay-at-home wife-and mother” (MSS 147). She enters “a new life coming out of the old one” (170). When Baby marries a comrade in the underground resistance movement, Aila resolves that the family ought to keep quiet about it. Everyone is startled by her decision: “Since when did Aila decide what was politically expedient” (169). They even observe the politicization of her vocabulary. She who had been confined to the domestic sphere makes secret arrangements to go and see her daughter in the camp. When Will gets a hint of Aila’s other life through her passport photos hidden in a draw, he utters a telling remark: “Where is she going? Is she going to leave him?” (146).

Aila’s self is reflexive in that she has taken up Sonny’s underground activism.
Observing her husband for years, it is only natural for her to assimilate Sonny’s political attitudes and societal values. When Aila returns from Lusaka, Sonny and Will notice that it is not just her outward appearance that has changed. She had assumed an ‘underground self’ in executing her revolutionary tasks which minimizes her use of common conventional communication. She grows politically mature as she tells Sonny: “It’s not what you have to feel about it, it’s how you feel” (123). In Aila, we find a progression, from subservience to dominance—dependence to empowerment, that marks the formation of her complete self. This is testified in her battle cry, “My turn now” (233). She has created a life outside her role as a wife. She had been influenced by Sonny who had abandoned a career he loved and “given up the forming of minds of a future generation for the … popular platform demagogue, left the cozy circle of family, for the existence under surveillance, the prison cell” (198-99).

Hannah who was deeply committed to her work in civil liberties and prisoner’s right leaves to take up a high level post in the United Nations High Commission for Refugees. After losing Hannah and his position in the movement, Sonny realises that both his wife and daughter are risking as much as he for the movement. When Sonny’s political activism is on the low, Aila naturally takes over. Will is startled when the security police turn up at their house to arrest Aila. It is learnt that she has become a ‘courier’ for the Zambian based guerillas. Aila’s “reserves of silences” (Parrinder 17) thus disguise her involvement in the underground struggle. She, a supposedly passive wife, is arrested for storing hand grenades and limpet mines in their guest room. When Sonny discovers Aila’s
activism, he is made to admit: “there was a blank in his chronology of her life; he knew little of the changes in her for which, he believed, he was responsible…” (MSS 257).

Aila in conjunction with Baby has been involved in military resistance to the government. Baby’s commitment to revolution had been a matter of pride to Sonny. Likewise, Aila decides “to act rather than react” (138). That is the very nature of the liberation movement itself. Both Aila and Baby, “move from passive domestic roles to active political ones” (Lalan K. Singh 18). Baby, who had joined Um Khoto we Sizwe, the militant wing of African National Congress, accomplishes an independent identity with “decisive dignity” (Chanda 60). Her action was befitting as the child of a popular resistance worker. But Sonny had least imagined that Aila could be capable of being a companion in the struggle. He is unaware that Aila’s political consciousness is aroused through her exposure to his own involvement in the resistance activism. She had witnessed him being propelled out of “political quiescence and localised concerns towards involvement in nationwide struggle” (Ram 28).

Sonny’s affair with Hannah was intertwined with his political work. He found delight in Hannah’s understanding of resistance politics. It made him believe that it was an ideal relationship that he did not have with his own wife Aila. Now, Aila is charged with helping a banned organisation and is accused of being a member of a movement responsible for acts of terror in that region. The leadership decides that Aila should go under cover as the case against her was very serious. In the eyes of the movement, “Aila had performed her missions commendably….Her
name would be honoured, from now on, in the movement inside and outside the country where she could still be active” (MSS 262). Sonny could not imagine seeing his wife in the role of a “prisoner of conscience” (226). But his displaced self is drawn to rid itself of “an outworn perception of Aila” (257).

Sonny now waits for his turn to have a glimpse of Aila behind the bars caught up in an “incomprehensible disaster” (226). He observes how Aila conducted herself before the wardens and the policemen. She had grown “prison-wise” (234) for which he takes the claim to himself. He realises that Aila “had freed herself just as he had, through the political struggle” (258). He also learns that in politics is only “the measure of the attention” (263) that made one ‘Sonny.’ He could no more afford to take his role as a revolutionary for granted. He had deflected from his purpose for sometime, having been obsessed with Hannah. He is led to accept: “the only freedom worthwhile was the freedom to go to prison again and again, if need be, for the struggle” (264). His disoriented self finds its right focus. His old rhetoric comes back as a public speaker. When the whites burn down their home in an act of vandalism, he declares:

> We can’t be burned out … we’re that kind … its called the phoenix, that always rises again from the ashes. Prison won’t keep us out. Petrol bombs won’t get rid of us. This street—this whole country is ours to live in. (274)

Everyone in Sonny’s family realises his/her ‘matured self.’ Will learns that he had been “the cover for both Aila and Sonny” (234). His girlfriend’s parents trust him with her because they are impressed by “the high moral standards of a family who
live for others” (185). He records: “My father the famous Sonny, Baby the revolutionary exile, Aila the accomplice of Umkhonto we Sizwe—they are our family’s sacrifice for the people” (251). Will had felt left out in being useful to the society. But, he now reveals that he is the author of the book we have yet to finish reading. He “reasserts,” as Karen Ramsay Johnson points out, “one of the most fundamental of the claims writing makes: the recording of a witness” (135). He would surge ahead from the story of his own family to his mature work as a writer, a work that he identifies with politics. He says:

My time that’s coming with politics....I’m going to be the one to record, someday, what he and my mother Aila and Baby and the others did, what it really was like to live a life determined by the struggle to be free, as desert dwellers’ days are determined by the struggle against thirst and those of dwellers amid snow and ice by the struggle against the numbing of cold. That’s what struggle really is, not a platform slogan repeated like a TV jingle. (MSS 276)

Unwilling to be judged by the laws of the white man, Aila refuses bail, to live in exile. From the role of a housewife she has moved on to be “the comrade” (243), “the revolutionary,” (242) and “the hero” (237). She finds her “voice through the course of political action” (Singh 18). While Aila and Baby are together in exile, Sonny and Will were “still together” (MSS 266) at home. The strained familial relations are eased with Aila and Sonny finding their ‘generalised other’ in political activism and familial responsibility. While gratifying his personal yearnings Sonny ‘the prodigal father’ had strayed away from the ties of the family
and political commitments. The repercussion of his erroneous bond with Hannah is seen in an attitudinal change among his comrades. His ‘attachment’ makes them question his loyalty. But, unlike his comrades, his wife Aila had put up with his deception in absolute silence with not a word of rebuke. Her unflinching faith in his love and dedicated work in the movement draws his estranged, disoriented self back to their fold. Sonny’s converged self incorporates into his being, the faith reposed on him by his family. The happenings in the life of Aila and Sonny corroborate the fact that “when a self does appear it always involves an experience of another; there could not be an experience of a self simply by itself” (Mead 195). Julie Summers in The Pick Up, achieves a ‘relational self’ by assimilating with her ‘community.’ It is a self that is based on personalised bonds of attachment. It defines her role and position within her significant relationship. Julie’s awareness of her wholesome self is gradually triggered by her encounters with the desert. She goes out alone into the desert early mornings. She “could not explain the dialogue all beings have within themselves” (PU 198). The desert that adjoins the village becomes a place of spiritual regeneration for Julie. During her regular forays to the end of the road she gains a mystical insight into her materialist self. Julie who was used to comforts and all privileges makes her ‘home’ in a lean-to of Ibrahim’s parents’ house. She explores the desert and visits a rice field in an oasis. It is commonplace understanding that lack of water in the desert retards growth and life. But, Julie sees the rice being threshed “in the middle of the desert” which had “the infinite articulacy, pure sound” (211). She desires to buy a piece of an oasis to cultivate rice. She is inspired to drill wells for this agricultural project
with money from the trust fund her father had set up for her. She discovers she could do something useful “other than write advertising copy or arrange pop singers’ itineraries” (200). But Ibrahim does not cherish her idea. He longs to leave his desert nation for a better living elsewhere.

Rejecting the role that his family and tradition ascribe to him, Ibrahim makes himself a ‘nobody’ in his own culture and he stays so in the Western countries. Desperate to give up his ‘oriental self’ he declines “the offer of a lifetime to take charge of his uncle’s workshop” (186). He sees it as an attempt to trap him again in an impoverished state between rejection of his Eastern past and appropriation of a Western future. In the process he loses his ‘own place’ to fix his identity. His friends in the village are representative young Arab nationalists. But Ibrahim keeps away from all involvement in national politics, as he fears it might decree him to a permanent residence in poverty and backwardness. In Ibrahim, one observes “an abandonment of familial, religious community and national heritage” (240). He applies to different countries for permit to stay. Countries like Australia, Canada and Sweden refuse to take him. But after persistent efforts, the United States grants him two visas—for him and his wife. He grows ecstatic at the prospects that await him. He hopes to get into information technology, or with the help of Julie’s stepfather enter into the casino business.

In contrast to Ibrahim, Julie realises that she has finally found a centre to her hitherto aimless life. She becomes more cognizant of reality unlike her husband who frantically seeks to flee his land. A year has passed since they arrived at Ibrahim’s home. Julie was wholly occupied in the varied household work. She
toiled “without reservation of self” (195). Apart from the routine chores, she kept herself engaged with the ladies’ conversation circle, she took lessons for the adults, she taught in the primary school and devised many play-learning methods for small children and coached English to older boys who aspired to pursue higher studies. She helped in the preparation of family meals, though it was the mother-in-law who “was obeyed as the guardian of all culinary knowledge and dietary edicts” (195). She tried picking up their Arabic just as they tried to learn her English. She joined the rest of the family in discussing plans for Maryam’s wedding. She was overjoyed at the sight of children everywhere. To her, “the exuberance of children is a universal response to being alive” (27). She spent much time with Khadija’s child, Leila. The little girl “had fallen in love with her, as small girls with some adult who offer activities different from those of a parent” (194).

Julie and Ibrahim had differences of opinion regarding the latter’s future plans, but, they found absolute happiness in their physical consummation: “In her body he was himself, he belonged to nobody, she was the country to which he had emigrated” (193). Though lost in Ibrahim’s love, Julie did not give up her habit of rising before dawn and sitting at the edge of the desert, allowing the desert to enter her. This makes Ibrahim dismiss the pull of the desert upon his wife as silly Western romanticism. Though the desert is depicted as being adjacent to the everyday life of Ibrahim’s village, it seems to possess a quality that transcends time and place.

The desert. No seasons of bloom and decay. Just the endless turn of
night and day. Out of time, and she is gazing—not over it, taken into it, for it has no measure of space, features that mark distance from here to there. In a film of haze, there is no horizon, the pallor of sand, pink-traced, lilac-luminous with its own colour of faint light, has no demarcation from land to air. Sky-haze is indistinguishable from sand-haze. All drifts together and there is no onlooker; the desert is eternity. (172)

While Julie is taken in by the “immensity” (167) of the desert, which is “just on the doorstep” (172), Ibrahim wants to go “anywhere but here” (173). In communing with the desert we find in her a spiritual development. It is something that is “determined not by doctrine but by what one can only call the spirit of the place” (Coetzee 6).

Julie’s bonding with the desert and with Ibrahim’s family grows deeper. Khadija’s long-lost husband Zayd sends a bank draft to the family, after a prolonged silence in an alien land. It was an announcement to all that he was safe. When Julie expresses her happiness to the reticent Khadija, “she who never touched anyone but her own children, embraced Julie” (PU 193). To Maryam, she is a “unique friend from another world and closer in understanding than any sister” (260). When Ibrahim announces to his family their planned departure to the U.S., Maryam arranges for an elaborate farewell party. Julie receives gifts from all the people with whom she was acquainted in the village. She did not have a ‘family’ at home in her own country, but now, she “has found love, happiness, and a purpose in the Arab village” (Noor 115). This goads her to refuse to
accompany Ibrahim to the U.S. What endears Julie is this strength in her conviction: “I’m not going back there....I don’t belong there....I’m staying here” (252-53).

The place that Julie claims as her own has not “taken the spirit out of her” (249), as Ibrahim imagines. It has, on the other hand, bestowed on her a new awakening. She reaches a state of ‘optimal experience’: “the state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter” (Sikszentmihalyi 4). Her materialistic self and the self that yearns for love converges into a ‘mystic self’ that decides to stay with Ibrahim’s family in the desert village. Tired of comfort, Ibrahim’s country seems to gratify Julie’s “yearning for meaningful difficulty” (Harrison 28). Her affinity with the local community and the desert pull Julie back from emigrating to the U.S. with her husband. She embraces the East and gives up her allegiance to the materialist West, by adapting to the “new rhythms of life” (Coetzee 6).

Deprived of material privileges to which Julie has been accustomed to, she finds in the desert village a fulfilling spiritual element. She gains a comprehension of the real meaning of life. Fascinated by the sight of a rice plantation in the middle of the desert, she translates her dream accordingly and decides to cultivate the land: “Here you could have it both. The mute desert and the life-chorus of green” (PU 214). In the opposing images of water and sand, the realisation of her complete self is attained. She is resolute in her stand of not going with her husband. The polarities of her self are resolved and a state of wholeness is achieved in this awareness of her converged self: “the sands of desert dissolve conflict; there is
space, space for at least one clear thought to come, arrived at” (281). Julie, like all Gordimer’s characters, faces forward, looks ahead and exists in a condition akin to a state of grace (Driver 30). She incorporates into herself her ‘new community’ and her ‘new home.’ The desert and its people thus create in Julie “a complete self—a social product in the fullest sense” (Davis 211).

A conception of self is essential to an individual’s understanding of other people in his environment, and of his relation to them. The very emergence of a sense of self depends on one’s psychological capacity for reflexive thinking—that is stepping outside the self and evaluating it from another’s viewpoint. Paul Bannerman in Get a Life gains this self-awareness through reflexivity. In his childhood retreat, Paul is led to unravel his parents’ marital life as he re-examines his own life. His father Adrian had relinquished his interest in archaeology to advance his wife Lyndsay’s career as a lawyer. Lyndsay had a four year affair with a European who was in the legal profession like her. She informed Adrian about it at the end of the affair after four years and since then they had been living in absolute closeness and warmth. To them, it was a matter of “truth and reconciliation” (GAL 80) and they planned to enter into a new phase of life together.

Paul moves from his state of isolation, as the doctor’s confirm that the cancer is clear and he is no more radioactive. He leaves his home a second time to “go home as an adult” (88). He reaffirms his social role as a “conservationist” (94)—“The inevitable grace, zest in being a microcosm of the macrocosm’s marvel” (95). Since his return from ‘exile,’ Paul is delegated by his team to research and prepare a study of the Okavango region. His parents go to Mexico on a new venture of
retirement. They traverse through excavation sites in the company of Hilde, a Norwegian guide. While Lyndsay is called back to argue an important case of corruption, Adrian stays back to follow “his avocation” (108) renewing his interest in archaeology. Paul had lived “a state of existence outside the continuity of his life” (67). His return to his team of black and white mates and his close relationship with his son Nikkie restores him to normal life.

Paul’s ‘revived self’ surges forward to reconnect his roles as a husband, father and conservationist. The conflicting claims of his varied states of being are reconciled in an exercise of self-discovery in the ‘garden of knowledge.’ As he plunges back to health and life, he meditates on the idea of co-existence of diverse forms of life and matter.

Adrian finds himself in love with the Norwegian guide: “the state, even though it is alienation while it is fulfillment” (128). When Adrian writes to Lyndsay about it, she accepts it stoically: “We don’t own one another” (133). She manages it “just as she had managed the isolation of quarantine” (139). Paul and Lyndsay have “the shared knowledge of the unspeakable” (128). They have each, “the dedication beyond the personally intimate, of belonging to the condition of the world” (141). She strove for “justice” and he for “the survival of nature” (140).

The garden has initiated Paul’s discovery of his self. It was “both the place banished to … and the place to be yourself” (49). His confinement in his childhood home acquires new meanings. Earlier, he had inhabited in a temporary ‘state apart’—now he is ready to enter “a new state of existence” (172). He learns that his return to his varied social roles would be possible only when he assumes total
responsibility for others. He had pondered over the incompatibility between him and his wife Benni and had even contemplated divorce. But, he has now learnt to accept others as they are. His father’s sudden snapping of marital ties does not confound his ‘integrated self.’ Like his mother, he accepts his father’s decision without any contempt for him. He is led to accommodate contradictions in his familial, social and natural environment.

Paul takes up the project for saving the ecological system of the Okavango Delta from both government and corporate developments. His ‘integrated self’ muses over the integrated functioning of the eco-systems: “The Okavango Delta in co-existence with a desert is a system of elements—contained, maintained—by the phenomenon itself, unbelievably, inconceivably” (91). He suggests that one finds inspiration from “this intelligence of matter” that “receives, contains, processes” (92). To Paul, the contradictions in his personal and professional life no more seem unmanageable: “Return home; that’s his loop in the thread from the spider’s web to the Okavango system. Benni/Bernice, small boy, ... all the waterways and shifting sand islands of contradiction: a condition of living” (94).

A change in Paul’s perception is viewed in his return to his wife and son. He yields to Benni’s desire to expand his social circle beyond his environmentalist friends. He accepts to “move towards contact with others” and “come to life in the variety of friends and stimulating jostle of lively acquaintances” (103). Earlier he had his own reservation against the people from the advertising world. But, now at the parties organised by Benni, environmentalists and advertisers, black and white find a common place. His social circle gets broadened, he is “the new man, may
need to bring a new kind of relation into the old one (left in the garden) that served—the attraction of opposites” (111).

Paul, by engaging himself in the project of saving the wetlands and tribal homelands, gains a new consciousness of the natural world he works to conserve. He learns that “Nature doesn’t acknowledge frontiers” (90). On the conservation front he understands that “Okavango ... will renew eternally,” but “people don’t live eternity, they live a finite now” (182). The essence of Paul’s self is ‘cognitive’; it is generated through the reflexive emotional experiences that he had in his childhood garden. During the weeks in quarantine he was able “to understand loneliness” (117). This makes him respect Benni’s desire to have a second child for the sake of their only child Nikkie. As Paul incorporates into himself the attitudes of his colleagues and his close-knit family he becomes a ‘preserver’ not just of the eco-system but also of the family.

Paul’s mature self emerges as the elements that converge in the Okavango. He had been lost in the wilderness of his professional life. Now he finds ample time for his family—that includes his wife, son, his mother and her adopted black child Klara. His mother’s decision to adopt a child that might die was not an easy one. But, it gives Lindsay a sense of contentment. Klara does not address Lyndsay either as ‘mother’ or ‘grandmother.’ She is just “Lyndsay to the child” (171)—a term that is not an undermining of authority but an expression of love. Paul’s adolescent nieces create an air of oneness by pampering Klara.

Paul takes his family to a “half-botanical ... half-wildlife protection habitat” (160) that signifies an integration of diversity. He places a caterpillar on his son Nikkie’s
hand to teach him “to recognize what’s harmful and what’s not” (160). While reading to his wife aloud from a tourist pamphlet, Paul reminds himself that eagles, for surviving as a species allow their chicks to fight for their lives while still in the nest. “… the creatures who according to evolutionary hierarchy go back too far to have developed a morality. Except that of survival” (168). The dilemmas Paul faced over the social projects ventured by the government, find a clear conclusion. In his evolved state, one finds an explication of the statement: “human action is not determined, but rather self-directed” (Rousseau 250). He is drawn to change his former rigid beliefs in his mission to save the earth: “isn’t industrialisation, exploitation … of our rich resources for the development of the economy, the uplift of the poor. What is survival if not the end of poverty…” (GAL 168). Paul begins to accept flexible solutions to major social problems. His focus is not just on saving the earth, but also on helping the poor of the world. This wider understanding is built on his firm belief in nature’s intelligence that “carries its own knowledge … of its own means of renewal in time” (182).

All the members in Paul’s family do ‘get a life’—a new life—with newer meanings, newer possibilities and greater fulfillment. Paul’s father Adrian dies of cardiac arrest after getting a long overdue contentment by being part of archaeology and artifacts. Lyndsay takes up her role as a judge, Benni/Bernice is promoted in her work, Nikkie is to have a sibling and a family is constituted for the orphaned Klara. Paul gets the good news that the conservation organisation he works for has been successful in temporarily halting a mining project in the sand dunes and the
development of a pebble bed nuclear reactor.

Paul is no more “an untouchable” (42). Through the ‘generalised other’ of his family, friends and the government he is enabled to untangle his confused self. As Mead says, “when the community reaction has been imported into the individual there is a new value in experience and a new order of response” (194). Paul understands the need for striking a balance—“a balance between positive and negative” (GAL 93), be it in the family or at the work front or at the larger societal level. He comprehends that lopsided, self-opinionated views can only hasten disaster in any aspect of living, and what is needed is a wholistic view of problems that can yield feasible solutions. Living in an era of environmental destruction, Paul’s self perceives the necessity for a humanistic understanding of our natural world. As Warwick Fox puts it: “all will become well with the world if we just put this or that inter-human concern first” (18).

The above examination has shown that the ‘self’ arises in social experiences. Human behaviour as such, is regulated in terms of the attitudes and expectations of others. In the integration of fragmented selves, a complete self evolves. The basic shape of our personalities, as Mead argued, is derived from the social groups or community in which we live. Human lives converge only when the individual commences to make meaningful contributions to the society in his or her distinct way.

Gordimer’s protagonists gain a better perception of themselves only through social interaction. Moving from states of resistance to recognition and realisation, their self ‘matures.’ They emerge out of the maze that trapped them by either taking
part in the political struggle or by finding their moorings in relationships. Lives converge through the meaning derived out of responsibility shouldered or through clarity of thought gained in relationships. The perennial conflicts in society and the evolving self are rendered artistically through the myriad forms of Gordimer’s narrative techniques. The content and craft of her fiction synthesise so naturally, that it necessitates a brief examination.

Chapter – VI

SYNERGY

*Matter and expression are parts of one; style is thinking out into language.*

--Cardinal Newman

A writer’s sensitivity is shaped largely by his/her environment. Formulating observation by means of words is a challenging artistic exercise, and every writer has his own unique way of presenting the world he creatively renders. Novel is one distinct art form that possesses the ability to depict the varied social world that gives rise to it. Nadine Gordimer’s greatness as a novelist lies as much in the perspective she provides as in the literal truth of the situations she presents. Gordimer’s recreation of South African history and identity can be discerned in the narrative frame through which she presents the various stories. Mieke Bal has stressed that “whenever events are presented, they are always presented from within a certain ‘vision.’ A point of view is chosen, a certain way of seeing things,