CHAPTER II

JOURNEY THROUGH SELF DISCOVERY

2.1 INTRODUCTION

After the collection of short stories *Dark Testament*, Abrahams thought himself to be enough capable to write novel and wrote. Actually, he wanted to focus on the influence of urbanization but the picture of urbanization portrayed in *Song of the City* seems superficial as there is no depth of philosophy rooted in this novel. But, at the same time the theme of the quest for identity automatically rooted in it. Such theme came from his subconscious mind which exactly he wanted to say. Second novel *Mine Boy* exposes the identity of African man as simply a boy. The white people called the workers in the coal mine as “boy”; it means white people denied the identity of African people that they are ‘thinking human beings’. To call the African people with a word ‘boy’ suggests that African people are not yet enough matured so far as Whites’ perspective is concerned. The third novel by Peter Abrahams, discussed in this chapter, is *The Path of Thunder*. In this novel, what the writer exactly wants to say is obscure though some critics think that he again wanted to complete his campaign of focusing on the faults of urban life which had been started in his first novel *Song of the City*. Unconsciously the author propagates the theme of the quest for identity.

2.2 SONG OF THE CITY (1945)

*Song of the City*, published in the year 1945, seems the sequel of Peter Abrahams’ previous collection of the short stories *Dark Testament*. 
In his introductory biographical note to the novel *Dark Testament* Abrahams said that he had completed a novel which is done half a second, and a third of a third. He wants to say that the time of the publication of *Dark Testament* is also the time of the completion of writing of *Song of the City* and beginning of the third novel *The Path of Thunder*. The critics and readers expected from the writer to contribute something mature and competent because they didn’t find these things in his first novel.

Abrahams has a sound perspective for the countryside, as even the same with the stories in *Dark Testament*. Further, most of his descriptions do not go beyond the commonplace. At the same time, he keeps his characters constantly in the company of nature because every character, first of all, fights for natural identity, what he thinks is this is quite different in the sense that it contains two almost wholly separate narratives: one deals with a black man trying to cope with urban Johannesburg after leaving a rural tribal situation, while the other is concerned with political crisis within ‘White’ society over whether South Africa should support Britain and enter the Second World War.

The novel opens in a Bantu village, where, although, the simplicity and complexity of tribal life is conveyed in the first a few lines. It is acknowledged to be dying way of life. A feeling of sadness is movingly conveyed in the awareness of this dying of an ancient way of life. The story tells how Dick Nduli, a simple village boy, leaves his home for the city and learns a new way of life and in the process develops political identity.
The novel *Song of the City* begins as a story about the conflict between the Traditional and the Western. *Song of the City* would not thereby have been a first-class novel, but it would have been always confined as more manageable for a young writer Peter Abrahams. Nduli, the central character, leaves home with sunrise and arrives in the city at nightfall. The unstated question is how much of this ‘home’ would provide him new identity is matter of discussion. He comes to the city to find out his personal identity. His traveling symbolizes not only his traveling from village to city but from primitive life to modern one. It further symbolizes the then movement of liberalization, where Nduli is depicted as ‘ready to opt new values and customs’ for one’s personal, social, cultural & political development. Nduli wants to prove that the factor of identity is inborn and one has to pursue for it through the life for betterment.

Yet Abrahams does not exploit the full possibilities which this simple plot opens to him. For example, after his interview with the policeman who gave he a pass and a second name as well as ‘Dick’ Nduli could have been portrayed as a man with a split personal identity. Abrahams attempts here to convey the message how apartheid was meant to blacks. Whites were not in a position to accept blacks as a ‘human being’. That is the reason why the name Nduli is rectified as English name ‘Dick’ by an Englishman at the very outset of the novel. Whites probably wanted to express the idea that blacks ‘don’t have any identity’, whatever they have is the mercy of white. “The Western name takes precedence over the traditional and gradually Nduli himself settles for the Western, as if demonstrating the increasing hold that Westernization is
exercising over his personal identity. Abrahams seems unwilling to pursue a sustained psychological analysis and further developments of his central character. He seems more interested in Nduli’s physical identity and the social identity” (Ogungbesan 27).

Nduli is a caricature and lacks any social identity. He gets a job, as a domestic servant in the house of Professor Solomon Ashe, who has his identity to be white, liberal, a pacifist and a Jew. The white man’s kindness always confuses the black man in the world of Abrahams’ writing. Ashe Family accepts Doctor Timbata, a black man as their equal, is a sole matter of fact of liberalism. Nduli himself is always anxious to tell how baffling everything is and he admits rest of the world around him in a letter written to his mother:

“Dear Mother, I have now been in the big town for nearly a month. I do not know if I like it or not. Last night a police-man stopped me. Mtini, he is thin as a reed, he lives in the same compound with me and Mbale, he says they always do it. Last week I went with Mbale to see a bioscope. You go into a big room with lots of chairs, you pay seven pennies to go in and you sit down and a big man with a whip whom they call Sheriff, goes up and down and makes people keep quiet. Then the lights go out and you see white people on the wall and you hear them speak. He thought for a while and then wrote slowly: “I am lonely. There is no one to talk to. No one like a real friend, I mean, but there is a girl who has come to work next door, maybe we shall be friends. I would like it to be so. Your son Dick Nduli” (SC 44).
This letter is an excellent example which shows confused state of mind of Nduli and how he is trying to find out social identity in the city. The letter succeeds as an attempt to capture the jumbled thoughts and feelings of a newcomer to the city; the fear of the police, which runs through it, is a more successful attempt to create an atmosphere, because it is more subtle. She is one Daisy, who has been steadily watching him for a long time and who makes Nduli’s to lift his head up from his letter to be written to his mother, which further expresses his quest for identity in longing for a woman: ‘It threw him into confusion. He did not know what to do. There was something imperious in her attitude. It commanded louder than words’ (SC 45). The girl looking at him forces him to know what exactly he is or which things of personal identity attracted her. There is always this kind of domination find in Abrahams’ women, but his men do not often have to worry about this. Daisy does, because she is the daughter of the city; she is not only in the city, she is of the city and her virtues or lack of them are city-bred.

Daisy, who has been in the city many years, asks him if he loves his mother. He answers, “She’s my mother” (SC 47). This response of Nduli serves to point out the differences between the ideologies and attitudes of tribal and western man. Nduli’s identity is deeply rooted in tribal values. Daisy is portrayed as vitally alive as more whore and less individual. Abrahams is no more successful in making us see her than in his attempt to render to us the meaning of the Song of the City although Daisy tries so often to explain, and perhaps tries too hard. The meaning of the song is as simple as its origin, which Abrahams has supplied elsewhere.
There was a crowd of people in the yard. The people were all talking and laughing together. Nearly all the men wore suits, and nearly all the women had long dresses. Some of them talked in English. He even heard two men and a woman talk in the Dutchman’s language. Daisy took his hand and pushed through the crowd. Her face was flushed. She laughed as they bumped against people. Her eyes sparkled with joy and excitement. Somebody called her name. They were in a low, dimly lighted hall that was filled with people. Music came from an old rickety piano that stood on a little platform at the far end of the hall (SC 70).

Abrahams has here succeeded in explaining not only the beginning of the *Song of the City* but also its meaning. He does it so with simplicity that Daisy’s persistent claim that the song is indefinable, even as she is trying to define it. A night is used as the best tool to unravel its meaning. Very early in the novel we come across the artist himself, not any of the characters, giving expression to the *Song of the City* and the meaning it had for him in his youth. The following are the opening paragraphs of Chapter three River of Race:

That is the soul of night over Johannesburg. Over its suburbs. Over Vrededorp, slum home of the dark-skinned thousands; over Parktown, home of the wealthy Europeans; over Berea, predominantly Jewish; over Fordsburg, melting-pot of the poor whites. For it alone there is no colour, no wealth, no race, no creed. Almost it seemed to say: ‘without me there can be no rich. No poor. No black. No white. No gold ... No city’ (SC 23).
The struggle of the artist can be observed through this very heart-touching piece of quotation for the quest of social, political, cultural and racial identity. The emphasis is on the ‘chaos’ of Johannesburg. The originality of South Africa’s colour, wealth, race and creed are lost in the chaos. ‘From the bowels of the earth came the Song of the City, and on it, the lesser song of the Maraba’ (SC 73). It is an attempt of the writer to expose how both Black and White in their miserable conditions are trying to find out their existence and quest for identity. Abrahams’ major issue in Song of the City is to fuse his two major themes: South Africa’s response to the Second World War and Nduli’s quest for identity. And he seemed successful by handling these issues quite skillfully. He does it by alternating the chapters, and even making some characters operate in the two worlds. Critics have come to this conclusion that, “Song of the City may be considered as an imperfect task by Abrahams due to more weightage to theme of Second World War than to quest for identity of Nduli” (Wade 110).

As Nduli is portrayed as a new to urban life; all the symptoms of alienation: anxiety, loneliness, and confusion are found in him. His response is found awkward during his arrest. He is, further, again imprisoned and at the same time, fined for no clear reason. Finally, he is mugged by a white mob. While in prison a noteworthy change begins to occur in Nduli when a fellow inmate explains that blacks are oppressed because ‘the white man... is afraid for the time that you do not fear him’.

Abrahams has no sympathy for Ashe at all, and that is the reason why the old professor of philosophy is made to look so stupid. The war fever is carried right into Ashe’s drawing-room by his friend Richardson
who, as an English-speaking South African, wants his friend to throw his weight behind efforts to get South Africa into the war on the side of the Allies. But the professor is hardly ruffled. In the Chapter Two the two argue the merits of neutrality, is entitled The Undertones. Thus, Abrahams used his tool of irony quite successfully. Abrahams knows his two ‘civilized’ characters and the world of the drawing-room where the dialogues take place. The subject, deeply controversial, is none the less discussed in undertones. Ashe’s voice remains even more modulated throughout, as befits a man who looks at passionate problems dispassionately. The dangers of Ashe’s quest for identity in an embattled land are seen within his own house.

Rachel is shown frustrated elder daughter of Professor Ashe. She is terribly lonely and has taken up knitting as an outlet for her frustrations, ‘and all her thoughts and dreams and hopes were burnt out in flying needles and polite coldness’ (SC 88). Rather, Ashe’s younger daughter, Naomi, deserves more attention, because she is the only one still vitally alive within Ashe’s household. Also, she is aware to the fact that her home, under the guise of shelter and respectability, exposes her. Most important, she deserves to be the first in a long line of Abrahams’ portraits of the artist-as-hero. Naomi is a pianist, and in spite of her youthfulness, this identification with art gives her a perception which other characters lack. Indeed, it is perhaps not perception at all, but an innocence which makes her emphasize all the time the superiority throughout the novel. Yet Naomi is not a credible character. Neither her innocence nor her role as the music-maker could have given her importance. Her identity remains idol; rather many of the pages are without her presence.
Abrahams chose the most obvious way out to design a character of Naomi, young that is also an artist and therefore, used her as just a vehicle to convey his own opinions. It is rightly said that the novel’s one of the implausible aspects is Naomi’s ability to see through everyone. Her reaction and being rejoinder to her father remains Abrahams’ answer to the question of South Africa’s stand during the war: no person or country could afford to be neutral when the stakes are so high.

Naomi felt it was all a dream. She had never been so peaceful and happy with anybody before. They seemed to fit each other so well. Like two people who had grown up together and know and understood each other. And yet they had met for the first time less than an hour ago. And the strangeness of the life Lee had lived and ease with she spoke about it. It was a new world that had been opened to her… she felt strangely calm, she had always thought she would be nervous, but she was not. Her reaction was as thought everything was natural (SC 91).

Quite different types of identity traits are found to judge and condemn Hendrik Van der Merwe, the Minister for Native Affairs, the ‘man of sincerity’, who goes to consult his constituency about how he should vote in Parliament. Abrahams had dared to say through the character of Hendrik Van der Merwe that not mere sincerity in enough to run the nation, it needs courage also. When a time comes when the Minister has to choose between his political careers, he chooses political future and votes for South Africa’s neutrality. Ironically, his choice of neutrality does not save the country. Further it leads to bring the war into his own household. The woman, who for three years of marriage has
filled his life with ‘love and fun and laughter’ leaves him, condemning him for the rest of his life to isolation, showing the reason that this man doesn’t have any identity.

Personal identity is dominant in Myra Van der Merwe, who is the only character of any individuality. The dominant feature of her personality is a generosity of heart which enables her to see the other sides of an argument while remaining firm about her own convictions. She is also shown as a right human being who knows no boundary of race and geography. She empathizes with her Coloured housemaid and voices the only concern for the baby begotten by the mentally retarded Uys and a Coloured girl who turns out to be Dick’s sister. Her husband’s feeling for his country is expressed in his love for the land itself, symbolized by the hill of granite to which he tries to relate whenever he looks out of his window and which he has always tried to reach since his youth. But Myra’s love transcends the land itself and reaches to all people and their suffering. Placing human beings over and above what her husband calls ‘duty’, she leaves him to return ‘home’, as she persistently refers to England, but it is certain that, to her, home means more than a habitation.

She saw her home and the things that made it home. The people. Their voices. Their smiles and their tears. Eyes and hands. Lips moving. And the words. And the earth and the sky. And behind them all she saw Van. Face coming and going. And the things they had done together. The little world they had built for themselves. A sweet little world it was. So quiet and peaceful. So touched with love and laughter. And the silences that are so precious. Not

She is conscious about the fact that only home has ability to give the personal and social identity.

There are other minor characters in the novel who are just living people; stereotypes. They can be described in a sentence or two. Ernst Cellier, the newspaper reporter, is a cynic masquerading as a deep thinker, but in reality is as shallow as anyone else. He is found wearing pair of dark glasses all the time in public. Thus Abrahams gives a picture of a mask of irony and cynicism. “Dr Timothy Timbata is the educated ‘responsible’ black leader and intellectual who counsels a ‘reasonable’ approach to the race question, and plays into the hands of the authorities by advocating something remarkably similar to what has become known as a Bantustan homeland” (Wade 122).

The writer shows more sympathy to Timbata’s political opponent, the young Ndaba, whose identity is praised by the Communist Roger Jones. He has a political identity of being communist. Abrahams demonstrates the strength of his own convictions by making Roger Jones. As Roger Jones has a political identity, he is not without his own failings. And it is a tribute to Abrahams’ sincerity that when he puts him to the test in the discussion with Naomi he shows us the short-comings of communism which is perhaps why Song of the City received such a scathing review in The Daily Worker. Naomi rebukes the dogmatic Roger:
I think it’s because everything you say comes from your head and not from your heart. There’s always something to it. Something planned that leads in a very definite direction. I thought you were angry when you spoke to Ernst, when you quote that verse, but you were leading in a definite political direction again. Don’t you sometimes long for the language of the heart? Not to be going anywhere but just to be drifting?’ Again she watched the tired eyes and wished to know what feeling was behind them (SC 106).

As a result of his experiences in the city Dick’s political identity is reflected. When he first meets Timbata, his response is one of nervous timidity. But, half-consciously, he analyses the situation: Timbata, a black man, is drinking with whites; yet drinking is illegal for blacks and Dick’s friends are arrested for having beer in their possessions.

Though the writer fails to imbue his characters with humanity, he succeeds to give racial identity to Dick Nduli, the central character in the novel. Although he is the first character to be introduced, he remains nameless for some time. Nduli is briefly commented upon the people across the racial line. Thus, Abrahams is more interested in what Nduli represents than in his individuality. Through him we are meant to see what happens to the native rustic fresh to the city. Abrahams’ political preoccupation of social identity soon detracts our attention from Nduli, and he is lost in weightier matters. Nduli should interest us, as the first of Abrahams’ passive heroes. Otherwise, the transformation in his personality is not adequately motivated. The first crisis of his life is also the most traumatic: he is arrested wrongly, and convicted, fortunately with
an option of a fine which Daisy promptly pays. After his release from the prison, he sees the exited white man:

Dick thought about the young man who had no fear and who had said the white man wanted them to have fear. Why? Why? What did the old men say about it? He thought hard. The old men had been right in everything and if they had said anything about this it would be right too. But they had told him nothing about this fear the white man wanted him to have. Did they know about it? They must know about it. How could a young one, one who is as young as himself, know about it, and the old men not. They must know. Maybe they forgot to tell him. Maybe they did not want him to know (SC 143).

At one moment, he sees himself in mirror and finds a sophisticated, well-dressed person, like the educated Timbata, who visits and drinks with white people. Daisy too is dressed as beautifully as white people. But, though they adopt new ways they are not allowed into the new world of city. Thus, they are not permitted to sit in the bus reserved for whites but must instead await a crowded non-white bus. Such is the life style of a number of Africans. In the light of such problems, Timbata proposes his plan for the separate development of the various races. But in reality his plan is not so feasible. He does not really feel or understand the sufferings of the people. He is simply the tool of the white people.

Nduli’s life in the city, hardly, bears out any message. The death of his friend Mtini, who used to stay in a beautiful rural home, there he had left a wife and two children, makes Nduli to bring home. This incident
apparently cured of his illusion. The latter represented by the non-existent idealized girl of his dream, Mnandi.

Mnandi was dead. He had been home for three days now. The sickness was leaving his body. Walking among the sheep on the hillside and among the cattle grazing in the valley, and being among his own people, away from the white man, all that had helped to take the sickness from his body. Yes, there had been great sickness in his body when he had left the city. Enough sickness to kill one man. It was all gone now. And the dream of Mnandi was gone too. It was good to be with his old mother again. To eat the food she made and listen to her voice. And it was good to be among the old men; to hear their tales of battles and glories of the past. And to go into the fields and hear the young maidens singing while they worked. All this was good. It helped to take the sickness out of his body. But why was the sickness still there in his mind? Why could not that go also? (SC 177).

The protagonist of the novel, Nduli, of course, must return to the city, as he explains to his mother: ‘I can only understand in the big city. There is no rest for me here. I must go back to the city’ (SC 17). So while the people of the village put out their lights to go to bed, Nduli prepares for this journey into his own night. The implication of Nduli’s reaching the city at night is that the black man is today struggling with his own night in the white world, but the inevitable dawn carries within itself.

Abrahams has used the historical event of South Africa’s decision to declare war on Germany in September 1939 as a background to Nduli,
who makes the classic odyssey from traditional rural life to the big city. Further, this is illustrated with the disintegration of the marriage of the Minister of Native Affairs to his English wife. The entire novel whirls around these incidents and thus the quest for identity roams everywhere.

Writer’s decision to take up the theme of quest for identity was both courageous and obvious. The story of Nduli exposes the quest for identity. He leaves his tribal village, named as Bantu, applies for a ‘pass’ at the nearest town where he is re-named by the policeman as Dick, catches the train to Johannesburg, finds work as a house boy in the home of the family of Professor Solomon Ashe, a Jewish philosopher of liberal views and sleeps in a ‘compound’, an urban hostel for African workers.

The tension between urban and tribal life is epitomized by the figures of the women like Mnandi and Daisy. We are told that, in the first chapter of the novel ‘faintly he heard the voices of the young women of the village. They rang out clear, with a faint insistence that would not die’ (SC 7). The scene seems to foreshadow the persistence of the Mnandi’s vision. Dick’s first impression about Mnandi is of a simple village girl who would ‘come every day to the house of my mother and work with her, and always it was she who made my food ready and set it before me’ (SC 48). He meets Daisy in the city, a creature of joy, laughter and vitality and finds soon that he ‘listened to the clear voice of Daisy and thought of Mnandi’ (SC 49). At the dance with Daisy, he feels that the peace that meant Mnandi has crept into his heart: ‘it was Mnandi that leaned on his breast and listened to his pounding heart. And round him were the things that made Mnandi more beautiful’ (SC 74). The vision of Mnandi is superimposed upon the reality of Daisy and the moon and the
song of life is associated with both. The moon shined on him at the folks at home; the vision of Mnandi helps him to retain his contact with his village. Ogungbesan is rightly observed, “The vision is based on Daisy who marks his tie with the city. Mnandi serves the function of bridging the worlds. This dual dream vision is one of the compensations for detribalization” (Ogungbesan 12).

City, obviously, is meant to stand as a counterweight to the new life and new sensibility. Abrahams has failed to describe tribal background. And thus he loses the opportunity of achieving a dramatic tension between urban and rural, traditional and modern in the soul of his hero.

The days before the white man came. And dreaming about the wars they had fought and about the great deeds that had been done in those days. And the young people, there were very few of them left, but some would be listening to the old men. Others would be out hunting for rabbits. Yet others would be lying on their backs and chewing grass and looking up at the moon. They would be dreaming of the big cities and the big things they were going to do (SC 71).

Dick Nduli begins to think politically after listening to the man with no fear make a speech while he is in prison. He dwells continually on the idea of having fear or having the white man as a brother. Eventually he returns to his own village; but the sickness of his mind is not healed. What Nduli learnt in prison is to seek confirmation from his tribal elders of the new wisdom of not fearing the white man. He even writes them a
letter, asking their opinion. But they prefer, he finds when he goes back at the end of the book, to continue to dwell on the past.

Mnandi has an identity to be tribal woman. She is the hopelessly idealized tribal whereas Myra Van der Merwe is the English wife of the Minister of Native Affairs. Abrahams has given symbolic meaning to both to Myra where she expects her husband’s support for South Africa’s entry to the war and Nduli’s urbanization at the same time.

It is true that the ideas expressed by Timbata and Ashe are unacceptable. Timbata’s conservatism is shown by his rejection of the younger generation of radical politicians emerging within his own movement. One doesn’t find any presentation of the arguments involved on this issue. It is just a dramatized interpretation of what Abrahams believed was really going on in South African society. Abrahams has used Nduli’s experiences and Myra Van der Merwe’s choice as a tool to criticize the contemporary ‘song’ of the city. Together they render the values of bourgeois liberalism invalid in the area which they define. Myra’s decision to leave her husband and return to England when the latter, a victim of political pressure and deceit, declares his opposition to the war with Germany in parliament relates with Nduli’s decision to return to Johannesburg after he realizes that his visit home has not been the experience of spiritual re-generation he had hoped for. They have both been betrayed by the weakness of liberalism, by the impotence of the well-intentioned bourgeoisie: Ashe and Timbata, instead of campaigning for entry to the racist war, divert themselves with irrelevant and defeatist proposals to solve a problem while Van der Merwe betrays Nduli as well as his wife, because he is Minister of Native Affairs. Thus, ultimately
responsible, politically at least, for what happens to Nduli both in town and at home in the countryside. Myra’s departure is the symbolic divorce between the values of English liberalism and white South Africa.

These are the twin inevitabilities of the situation in South Africa, as Abrahams saw it, the quest for identity of Nduli and the divorce from English liberalism. And who can deny that he achieved a measure of personal identity? The condemnation of the ‘good bourgeois’ is equally perceptive in the light of subsequent history. When Van der Merwe goes home, on the visit already mentioned, he discovers that Uys, his gigantic idiot cousin, has given one of the African farm-girls a child. Van der Merwe buys her off with a large sum of conscience money and sends her home to her tribe. When Dick goes back to his kraal at the end of the book, the reader discovers that the woman is his sister. So he and Van der Merwe have a blood relation in common: but no other contact whatsoever. The irony is too neat, the probability too remote, the coincidence too perfect. The respective returns to their rural roots by Dick and Van der Merwe are intentional parallels: the results contrast, only too neatly, at all major points. Van der Merwe goes back to find out something about others, allows others to dictate his choice, makes the wrong one and returns to confirm his error and lose his love.

In Song of the City, Abrahams attempted to deal many of the problems that face South African society. Although the work appears strained at times because it strives to cover too wide a range of material, it presents several of the themes and problems that Abrahams goes on to explore in greater depth and with greater efficiency in his later novels. Even the issue of cohabitation between a black and a white person is
handled with compromising way. When Hendrik returns to his constituency, he learns that his cousin, Uys is the father of a child whose mother is an African. Hendrik’s reaction is to cast silence by paying the woman to leave the area as quickly as possible. There is not firm stand found against the Afrikaner horror at miscegenation. Torn between a sympathy for the participants and sympathy for the ‘good’ Afrikaner Hendrik, whose family must face the problem, the text stumbles over the attempt to resolve such situations. Thus, as it were in improvement, Uys is presented as insane to suggest the abnormality of his behaviour. Thus, finally one doesn’t find black view of the war issue presented in the novel.

The novel proceeds to develop the possibilities opened up by the city and in the final chapter, the city song is strongly affirmative, even though it regrets the loss of rural traditions:

Oh sing then the
Sing it when your heart is in pain
For you are a son of the city
And the song will lighten your pain;
Today there is pain – but tomorrow
The song will be gay – rich with hope (SC 174).

The city’s busy ‘hum’ which is regularly mentioned, carries a symbolic meaning suggesting vibrancy and multiplicity. It also ‘created peace and harmony’ (SC 79) and accords with the book’s epigraph from Whitman’s Leaves of Grass. Thus, it celebrates the rich community and industry of city life and the poet’s intimate identity with it. Peter Abrahams affirmed the developing identity, consciousness and future of
the black African and his role within a multi-racial society of great and potentially enriching diversity, whilst at the same time recognizing the injustice, prejudice and divisiveness that is forced upon contemporary South African blacks and non-whites.

In short, Abrahams, in this novel, tried to expose pursue of every character through major or minor, the quest for identity. Almost all the characters get social identity without any hard labour because all of them are born in the society. Except social identity man cannot live happily because he always wants to prove himself that he is different from others. Generally it doesn’t happen with flat characters because they are not enough conscious about their existence and personal identity.

2.3 MINE BOY (1946)

Mine Boy is Peter Abrahams’ most philosophical work which keenly seeks the theme of the quest for identity. It was published in 1946. It describes urban African life and changing dynamics of African society. When Africans began to depend on non-African things, they began gradually to lose their identity. This exposes that how African men lost their identity and turned into working hands. The central figure in Mine Boy is Xuma, a country man from the north of South Africa, who has come to work in the gold mines in Johannesburg. Through him we meet Leah, Daddy, Ma Plank, Eliza and Maisy. Xuma involved himself into the affairs of Leah’s family. Thus, he get involved himself first through his affair with Eliza and secondly, through his mother-son relationship with Leah. The central theme of the novel is Xuma’s struggle to achieve his freedom as a human being in society and to create his own identity as a
human being. Abrahams has skillfully crafted Xuma for his quest for identity. This novel deals with the issues like blacks’ economic need, the conflict between rural and urban values which further leads to sub-themes such as blacks’ working conditions, their relationships with superiors both black and white living conditions in urban slums.

The white rulers purposefully kept the identity of blacks as ‘boy’. The use of the word ‘boy’ labeled these men as inferior to their white managers as if they were the matured ‘men’. Abrahams uses such terminology to demonstrate the level to which the repressive society reduces the African male psyche. After taking Xuma, a protagonist of the novel, to the mines, Johannes has an argument with a white man who is supposed to admit Xuma to the mine itself:

“This is the new one,” Johannes said.
“Your gang?” (said the white man)
“No. For the Red One. Boss Boy.”
“The Red Man has not come.”
“My white man says so.”
“You mean your boss.”
“My white man.” (MB 116)

The use of ‘boy’ for Africans and ‘man’ for whites reveals that the notion of African inferiority even manifested itself in the speech of individual Africans. It is important to note that even though Johannes and Xuma are, in fact, ‘bosses’, they still have the word ‘boy’ attached to their titles as to clarify that they are black human beings...just mine boys. Similar is the plight of men in the work place, Abrahams also notes the
changing roles of African men in private life. Upon his arrival at Malay Camp in Johannesburg, Xuma is taken in by a group of fellow Africans. With Leah, a woman at the helm of this pseudo-family, Xuma becomes a part of a household that is somehow strikingly against of the tradition of male-dominated African family. This traditional structure, however, seems reversed in the story of Mine Boy, as Leah has several men who are dependent on her for their livelihoods.

On the very first day Xuma experiences the sadism when he is set the impossible task of pushing a truck load of sand, the work which is normally done by two persons. The task is purposefully designed to humiliate Xuma whose only pride is his strength. Mine boys express their familial identities which leads them to risk their lives in the dangerous depths and unhealthy conditions of the mines for the happiness and the security of their families. The peak of this problem is depicted through an old man who continues to expose his life to danger, when he knows that he is already in the advanced stages of tuberculosis. He restricts himself to report about his illness for fear that he might be dismissed and lose his job. His moving plea is expressed to Xuma in the following terms:

Listen Xuma, I have a wife and two children and I have worked it all out. We have a small farm and I owe a white man eight pounds. If I do not give it to him he will take the farm and if he takes it where will my wife and children go? I have worked it all out, Xuma, Really I have for four months I have been saving and if I save another three months I will have the eight pounds and there will be a home for my wife and children. Please let me stay. Don’t tell the white people. The others will not. They know. I know I am
going to die, but if there is a home for my wife and children I will be happy (MB 153).

Leah keeps her identity in a different way. She always strives to remain unchanged. Though her man is in prison, serving a three years sentence she resists being affected by this. This hardness is part of her mask for survival. She always assumes a hardness that defies any softness in her. She controls herself after the death of Daddy by not crying though she has loved Daddy very much. She discourages Xuma from going to work in the mines. Leah is aware that working in the mines is a source of destruction for a man because no matter how strong he is. Leah beats the law at its own game by using one of the polices as her informer who warns her each time there is going to be a police raid looking for the liquor that she sells for a living. When she is eventually caught she remains unchanged and defiant. Leah teaches Xuma for law of survival in the city; one must fend oneself, or one has no hope; one cannot afford the luxury of worrying about others because one’s own immediate responsibilities are so great. Xuma finds it difficult to accept or understand this new philosophy. The tragedy of the situation is that there is no other solution other then Leah’s way.

The novel throws a light on the identities of minor characters who struggle to subsist. Leah’s household is composed by people; none of whom are related by blood. They are brought together on the line of ‘poverty and homelessness’. In the opening pages of book the readers find Daddy’s wealth and power has already disappeared and thus he is in Leah’s custody. Eliza is Leah’s foundling whom she has educated Xuma is, a force, an out sided to whom Leah has given accommodation and food.
Towards the end of the novel Leah is arrested for illicit trade of selling Liquor. Before she leaves for imprison Leah instructs Ma Plank to take control of the business and to maintain the family in her absence.

The story sets in South Africa. In this story, Peter Abrahams portrays African people’ tragic identity – ‘apartheid’ through following the life of Xuma, a villager, in search of a better life. Xuma first lived in Malay camp where he was offered accommodation by Leah on his first night in the city. After getting a job, he moves to his own house in Vrededorp. In *Mine Boy* we see underdevelopment both at individual and group levels.

Groups of children walking down the street carefully studying the gutters and vying with each other to pounce upon dirty edibles and fighting each other for them (MB 77)

One can point out from the behaviour that food for the people over there is not adequate, so the children are helpless to eat the food lying on the streets. In spite of working hard in mines, these miners have very little for eating.

All the men had the same kind of little tins. In each tin was a chunk of mealie-meal porridge cooked into a hardened chunk, a piece of meat and a piece of coarse compound bread. (MB 43)
Naturally, this kind of food is not at all good for health of human beings so far its quality and quantity as well is concerned. These people do not get enough food to satisfy their hunger and the little they get is not nourishing enough to reinforce their strength after the hard work. Hence their capacity to do work is lessened.

The houses are shown in Mine Boy, very tiny and built close to each other. At Leah’s place there is little space where the number of people is more. When Xuma comes to join Leah’s accommodation, he finds this tiny & awkward place for stay. So Xuma had to use Eliza’s room because she was not there. Even the room was lacking in proper furniture. In fact, the only piece of furniture mentioned is only one long bench. Some of these people prefer flooring.

And in the other room the old one they call Daddy was sleeping against a wall with an open mouth and with nothing to cover him. Finally, Xuma got a room of his own. Though it was small, it served as an all purpose room. On one hand there was his bed, on the other, there was his belongings, his food and can full of charcoal that was to be used for stove. The same was the plight of Naisy’s room. Some people walking along the streets were bare-footed and had no coats. Daddy at Leah’s place lay on the floor uncovered (MB 6).

The society, depicted in the Mine Boy is unjust as it rejects the basic necessities of the blacks. Racism is prevalent but Abraham’s is not aware that this is so in order to justify the exploitation of black people and using them as a source of cheap labour. There are restrictions for blacks on
roaming especially at night. One has to carry a pass as long as he is outside his territory. Blacks found wandering about in certain areas and at certain hours of the night are arrested without questioning. There is a sudden police raid in the streets when Xuma and Joseph walk leisurely on one Saturday afternoon. Xuma and his friend make them run to escape from police.

“Come” Joseph urged again. “But we have done nothing”. “They will not ask you”. Joseph said in discussed and dashed down the streets (MB 16).

Xuma as a character is defined by his experiences in the city. He and other black natives are intimately connected with the inhabitants of a house in Malay Camp, an old slum area of Johannesburg, once populated by Africans, Coloureds and Indians which doubles as a shebeen, a sort of saloon bar where liquor is sold under illegal conditions. One of such places belongs to Leah’s residence. The inhabitants of the house include Leah, the shebeen-keeper; Daddy, an elderly and incontinent drunkard; Ma Plank, Leah’s older assistant; Eliza, Leah’s adopted foundling who has become a schoolteacher; and Maisy, a winsome urban lass. The household revolves around Leah, predictably enough, since she is perhaps the archetypal Abrahams’ dominant female, motherly, powerful, decisive, fearless, protective, sexual and wise. She is frequently imitated, if never surpassed, in the later novels. She takes in the helpless Xuma, who is lost, hungry and cold on the night of his arrival in the city from the north.

Eliza, by virtue of her academic qualification, believes that all the people in Leah’s household are below her social status. She just respects
Leah only because she has brought her up. Though the fact is that Shebeen has helped Eliza for her education she doesn’t play any significant role in this business. “Abrahams porously and invariably depicts her either coming from school or in her room where she spends most of the time. Eliza’s identity differs from other characters and thus she is unpredictable. This is partly illustrated by the love relationship that she evolves with Xuma. While Xuma loves her passionately, whole heatedly and sincerely, she is half-hearted about the affair. Abrahams implies that the root cause of Eliza’s identity crises is deep-seated alienation” (Oungbesan 42).

Eliza herself tells Xuma:
I am not good and I cannot help myself it will be right if you hate me. You should beat me. But inside me there is something wrong. And it is because I want the things of the white people. I want to be like the white people and go where they go and do the things they do and I am black. I cannot help it. Inside I am not black and I do not want to be a black person, I want to be like they are, you understand Xuma. It is not good but I cannot help it. It is just so, and it is that that make me hurt you ... (MB 60).

If Xuma represents the rural life at the beginning of the book, Leah embodies all the learning that the city has to teach, and the polarity that quickly emerges between town and country is first manifested through their relationship. She is soon telling him. The following passage is intended to give the reader a wider view of the social identity rather than to influence the raw young Xuma. He is soon at moral odds with Leah over her refusal to share the information she buys about the liquor squad’s
interest in the doings of the shebeen queens with any of her colleagues in the trade:

‘You will not tell the others,’ (the policeman) said.
‘I look after myself,’ she replied and turned away.
The policeman rode away.
‘Come,’ Leah said and led the way back to the house.
Xuma caught up with her and took her arm.
‘Will you tell the others?’
‘What is it to you?’ she said pulling away.
‘You are a strange woman.’
‘You are a fool! . . . Come! I have much to do.’ . . . Leah went out and shut the door behind her. Then she pushed her head back into the room again. ‘Xuma, I’m not angry with you but don’t be such a fool. If I tell the others the police will know we have been warned and that will be no good . . .’(MB 41).

Xuma can see the discrepancy in the idea of ‘man without colour’ because he is availing that if the concept works, his people will not suffer. As a black man, Xuma feels the pinch and has a personal experience of suffering, whereas Paddy, the Raid one and his wife belong to it different world of experience, and have only an intellectual view of the suffering of the blacks, as Xuma argued:

“You say you understand” Xuma said, “but how can you? You are a white man. You do not carry a pass. You do not know how it feels to be stopped by a police man in the street. You go where you like. You do not know how it feels when they say “get out, white
people”. Did your women leave you because she is mad with wanting the same things the white man has? Did you know Leah? Did you love her? Do you know how it feels to see her go to jail for nine months?... You understand with your head. I understand with pain”. (MB 172)

It is clear that Xuma’s country code like loyalty is meant to represent in city is, however, immature whose application may seem universal but which are rejected by even the kindly and good in the city. The relevance of his values has to be proved afresh, but this can only happen after they have developed and been modified through participation in urban life. This plan of action is rigorously executed by the author, within the limits of his ability. It follows from these requirements that every episode Xuma encounters, every relationship he makes, must in some way exemplify an aspect of city life, so that he will be able to accumulate experience by contact with it. On the first of these occasions, during his first afternoon in the town, he goes for a walk in the streets of Malay Camp under the direction of Joseph, the brother of Leah’s man. This is an opportunity for Abrahams to attempt to present a vision of the city through Xuma’s unaccustomed eyes, but the result is rather confused. It is heavily authorial, saturated with information that Xuma could not have had time to acquire and decidedly weak through its very lack of specificity in the evocation of atmosphere. But the standard description of the African working class disporting itself on a Saturday afternoon comes to an abrupt and significant climax.

In Mine Boy the theme of detribalization is worked largely in Xuma’s quest for identity. Xuma is a simple man, just out of the tribal
Eliza is attracted to western ways, but also to Xuma. The scene is set for a conflict of interests. Xuma gets shocked when he first met Eliza and found her smoking a cigarette like a white woman, immediately there is barrier between them. Leah tells Xuma:

That one likes you but she’s a fool. It is going to school. She likes you but wants one who read books and dresses like the white folks and speaks the language of the whites and wears the little bit of cloth like tie. Take her by force or you will be fool (MB 51).

Abrahams himself is a more sensitive, sympathetic and understanding towards Eliza’s identity. She is in the unfortunate position of being caught between two worlds. Her educated, well-dressed young men are unable to satisfy her needs. But even when she is at peace with Xuma she then finds “Something hard tries me... One minute I know what I want, the next minute I do not know” (MB 87). She tries to explain herself to Xuma:

Inside me there is something wrong. And it is because I want the things of white people. I want to be like white people and go where they go and do the things they do and I am black. I cannot help it. Inside I am not black and I do not want to be a black person. I want to be like they are, you understand, Xuma. It is not good but I cannot help it (MB 89).

Eliza feels deeply the injustice of a system where, having learned to appreciate things like carpets and books, music and wine. She is denied her right to any of them because of colour. She rebels against the system.
Xuma is unable to respond to her plea for understanding. He feels, “A white man and a black man cannot be friends. They worked together. That’s all... He did not want the things of the white man” (MB 93). Xuma’s resentment of the white man is partly due to the fact that the white man’s ways have come between him and Eliza.

Xuma’s closeness to the rural tradition is suggested by the simplicity of his thoughts and words, and the noble courtesy with which he thanks his authorities. The most important underlying rhetorical point is also conveyed strongly: the necessity and effectiveness of concerted action and solidarity between all oppressed people in the face of the oppressor. The level at which this is effective is allegorical rather than symbolic: at this stage Xuma is the innocent hero, natural man in his unfallen state. But he is so little related to his new reality that after his escape from the policeman he cannot find his way home again:

Xuma had found the street without trouble. But it was difficult to find the house. The houses all looked the same in the gathering twilight. The same verandas. The same yard gates. The same corrugated iron walls leaning drunkenly backwards. And all the same dirty colour (MB 34).

As well as the passage suggests that depersonalization and lack of individuality are a condition of non-white urban life. This suggestion is taken up and elaborated into a full-scale dramatization of quest for identity in the description of Xuma’s work on the mines. The passage stands in its own right and is convincing and horrifying.
Maisy is the child of the city. She maintains her identity as an urban lady. She knows how to be happy and makes others happy too. It is Maisy who helps Xuma to cross the bridge into city life. She takes him to Hoopvlei where Xuma feels closer to home. And this is the painful process of detribalization. In the end of the novel it is Maisy who waits for Xuma to come out of prison to rejoin her in the city.

The author is skillfully used the character of Xuma to express the analysis of the psychological consequences of the degrading form of work through Xuma’s own reaction and his implied frame of reference is his rural back-ground. Depersonalization and fall of the personal identity is present in the novel, but the virtue of Abrahams’ description lies in convincing us of the effects of the experience on Xuma in terms of neurotic behaviour. At one moment Xuma compares the eyes of other miners with the eyes of ‘sheep’, where a human being is taken to the level of a ‘sheep’. This is a process; it begins with the realization of how pointless one’s work is. For Xuma and obviously the other mine workers this lies in their own rural experience. Other obvious aspects of the mine-workers’ lives, such as racial prejudice, exploitation, an irresponsible attitude towards safety on the part of the managerial group, are all touched upon. Abrahams’ initial emphasis on alienation is not only his most original and profound contribution to an outsider understands of the experience, it is also most effective. During Xuma’s first meeting with Chris Johannes’s white man Chris punches him in the chest to assess his reaction. But Xuma shows his violent reaction against the rules of racial interaction. Xuma instinctively… stepped back and raised his arms, both hands bunched into great fists as if he was ready to strike back. This
reactionary personality lays the groundwork for the ultimate climax of the novel, when Xuma leads his boys on strike following a mining accident that claims the lives of both Johannes and Chris. In confronting the mine’s manager, Xuma declares,

It does not matter if our skins are black! We are not cattle to throw away our lives! We are men! (MB 212).

In asserting his masculinity to the white mine owners, Xuma not only creates a situation that allows for Africans to look at themselves differently but it also helps to validate the opinions of sympathetic whites. After seeing Xuma stand up to the authorities, Paddy a white man and Xuma’s boss joins him in the strike by saying that he is a man first and White second. This sentiment, which ultimately draws on Abraham’s belief in a shared class struggle, is what the author himself hopes would take hold in his native South Africa. It is important to note, Abrahams is kin in regards with the identities of black & white people. That was the time when everywhere the air of liberalization was blowing. Abrahams used this situation to present the quest for identity.

Abrahams himself is well versed with these kinds of experiences. He is the son of Coloured mother and an Ethiopian father (who worked on the mines and died when Abrahams was very young). Abrahams spent his Vrededorp childhood in extreme poverty. At the age of nineteen years old Abrahams, for the first time experienced the test of green vegetables with each meal. Abrahams spent maximum times on streets and at work and minimum at home. He lived with Aunt Mattie for sometimes. He earned some money for his schooling after working with Aunt Mattie who used to
sell a beer to the minors on weekends. Like Leah in the novel she was arrested by the police.

In contrast to Xuma, Eliza is straightforward mimic character and she further differs from Xuma in the sense that she exhibits the identity of the educated class. Eliza aspires to what she thinks her education has entitled her. She identifies with the cultural forms of the mother country and hence her fetish for white clothes and whiteness. Her desires are focused on class mobility, but the class she seeks does not exist yet. Xuma repeatedly notices Eliza’s similarity to white women and the links between Eliza and Paddy’s white girlfriend are explicit and repeated. Both, she and Eliza, smoked and both the hands of white women and Eliza are soft, both the white women and Eliza have dimples. The soft hands, here, represent they do no manual work. Eliza desires her own material advancement and the acquisition of commodities. Thus Eliza’s identity is as ‘the mimetic, economically elite and often collaborationist stratum of black South African society’.

In general, Abrahams looks clumsy when he thought about the treatment to Daddy’s identity. Daddy is a rigid stereotype, a scarcely credible character, a jerky puppet laden with the idea of folk wisdom corrupted by urban degradation. This makes his life story even more miserable to accept. Such a man! He was strong and he was feared and he was respected. The narrator is Ma Plank, who goes on to tell how when there was trouble about the passes he stood at the head of the people and he spoke to hundreds of them and the police feared him.
He understood and he fought for his people but he understood too much and it made him unhappy and he became like Eliza. Only he fought. And listen, Xuma, that one lying there in his own piss is wiser than Eliza. He can read and write (MB 116).

Ogungbesan argued rightly in this regard as, “The political aim of the book is realized through standardized events of this kind, in which the relationships between characters who represent larger and conflicting interests are confined within a pre-determining ideological framework. But the description of the effect of the work on Xuma’s sensibilities succeeds on a different and more meaningful level because Xuma exists with duel personalities: simultaneously and convincingly as an individual as well as a representative of a class. He is not merely the stock hero of stock gold-mining situations but a man in a universal situation whose reactions to specific aspects of it acquire universal significance” (Ogungbesan 51).

It was criminal offence in South Africa to sell alcoholic beverages of almost any kind to non–whites, except for traditionally prepared beers and those only under rigorously specified circumstances. As a matter of fact, the practice of illegal liquor drinking flourished specially in the towns. The immediate victim is Daddy. Daddy is a man who has been hauled from heights of social importance to the lowest ebb of frustrated drunkenness:

You scorn him, yeah? Yet when he first came to the city he was a man. Such a ma! He was strong and he was feared and he was
respected. And now you scorn him... Even the white-ones respected him.

He had money then, and many friends. Men though it an honour to be his friend and women longed for him. And when there was trouble about the passes he stood at the head of the people and he spoke to hundreds of them and the police feared him the understood and he taught for his people, but he understood too much and it made him unhappy and he became like Eliza. Only he taught. And listen; Xuma, that one lying there in his own piss is wiser than Eliza. He can read and write even better than she can (MB 80, 81).

The fatalistic acceptance of defeat is also prominent in Xuma’s first encounter with the black doctor. They meet one evening in a crowd of people watching police in a rooftop chase after a man who has been playing dice in the street. The man falls, and the doctor intervenes. Then the man moved. The crowd became individuals again. The doctor ran forward and knelt beside the man. The crowd pressed close around. Xuma helps the injured man to the doctor’s car and goes with them to his home, where he finds the same sort of middle class domestic comfort he has just seen in the flat of his white overseer, whom he had met by coincidence in the central part of town earlier during the evening. Dr Mini and his wife receive him kindly and understand his bewilderment. He feels ill at ease, as he had felt in his foreman’s apartment: ‘As though he did not belong there and it was wrong for him to be there’. But the doctor explains:

. . . You are not copying the white man when you live in a place like this. This is the sort of place a man should live in because it is good for him. Whether he is white or black does not matter. A place like
this is good for him. It is the other places that are the white people’s. The places they make you live in’ (MB 109).

Just then the doctor’s nurse comes in excitedly to tell him that the patient has escaped through the window.

In Mine Boy Daddy is portrayed as a drunker. He is shown as a busy person always carrying drinks with him. His drinking was a way of escaping from the painful realities of the situation. When summarizing the situation he says:

One day the city came to visit the custom, Xuma. And the custom was kind. It gave the city food and it gave the city beer and it gave the city beautiful women... The city didn’t say “No thank you” and people said “Ah everything will be alright now, the custom and the city are friends”. Hmmm... They did say that and they went out into the fields to look after their crops. And when the sun was going down they came back and looked for their beer but their beer was gone. And they look for the custom was gone too. And the city was there laughing at them. And now they go to jail if they drink beer (MB 11).

“Sometimes Daddy fights against some of the discriminatory laws, for instance the pass law” (Wade 235).

The theme of quest for identity is broadened by embracing victims whose symptoms are not directly related to work, but to the general racial set-up. Three of these stand out: Daddy, a nameless African doctor, Eliza, Xuma’s teacher girlfriend and Daddy, as has been mentioned, is a hopeless
alcoholic man who lives at Leah’s house. Even at critical moments, such as the solemn council Leah holds to try to find out who is betraying her liquor-selling activities to the police, Daddy is able to do no more than lean ‘against Ma Plank, his mouth half-open, a drunken film over his eyes’ (MB 186).

Abrahams examines two forms of alienation. First, he identifies alienation within the context of diverse from one’s society and culture due to overall effect of oppression and social discrimination. Second, he identifies with the context with the productive process in an industrial setting with the trust of his examination on the relationship between the worker and the product of his labour. The first type of alienation involves a number of characters in Mine Boy.

Working conditions in the mines are dangerous and exhausting. Workers are, all the time, under the extreme heat and spend most of their time crouching. In the novel, Xuma, the protagonist, is overwhelmed by the apparent lack of progress that he and his fellow miners have made on his first day at the job. And for all their sweating... seem to grow either (MB 42). Accidents and illness also take their toll on black miners. The tragedies which are depicted in Mine Boy are contemporary: one of the miners on Xuma’s crave contracts a lung malady and is sent home to die and towards the end of the novel, Xuma’s friend Johannes is skilled when a mine tunnel collapses.

The work place is like a military compound with marching men kept in order by armed police officers. These are the not free workers of liberal capitalist societies but the suppress workers of colonialism.
The black worker has to carry a pass all the time if he wishes to stay in the city. If he does not behave himself, he will be fired and thus lose his identity to stay in the city. It defines the rules of economic relations between worker and employer, strengthening the former at the expense of the latter.

The most complex and least successful study in alienation is Eliza, the teacher with whom Xuma falls in love. Her portrayal is mainly unsuccessful because of the very peculiar and consistent manner in which Abrahams falls victim to a version of feminine mystique in all his attempts at female characters. Thus Eliza carries veering moods, fits of guilt and remorse, alternating bouts of acceptance and rejection of Xuma, culminating in her sudden and secret departure from the scene may all be the effects of the corruption of her identity. This corruption is caused by the resentment thrust upon her by her racial position as an educated African woman in South African society. As she puts it after rejecting Xuma in bed:

‘I am no good and I cannot help myself. It will be right if you hate me. You should beat me. But inside me there is something wrong. And it is because I want the things of the white people. I want to be like the white people and go where they go and do the things they do and I am black. I cannot help it. Inside I am not black and I do not want to be a black person. I want to be like they are, you understand, Xuma. It is no good but I cannot help it. It is just so. And it is that that makes me hurt you . . . Please understand’ (MB 104).
Her alienation takes the form of crisis of identity. She cannot allow her attraction for Xuma to reach whatever degree of fulfillment is attainable precisely because of the unnatural limitations on this fulfillment that exist. She feels uncomfortable with Xuma’s obvious traditional virtues of strength, honesty and purity of mind. The reason is that she has been seduced into seeing them as relative to the equally obvious virtues of the achievements of the white society which surround her but are denied to her.

It is rightly observed that the Abrahams’ female characters behave in the same ‘typically feminine’ way as Eliza, being capricious, indecisive, moody, and dangling their men on a string. Just all they lack is the intellectual awareness as Eliza has of her as her identity. Still, she is responsible for the phase in the process of Xuma’s personal development. An inner conflict takes place between his passion for Eliza and his liking for Maisy: he only grows out of the one and brings the other to realization at the very end of the book. Both are, of course, representative figures within the propaganda framework. Maisy, whose hand, unlike Eliza’s, Di’s or Mrs. Mini’s, is work-hardened, stands for the real quality of black city life, without fundamental convictions and without pretensions; whereas Eliza is a torn product of the unborn future, a destructive half-born child, yearning for the inevitable reality to come. The portrait of the black middle-class as represented by Eliza and Dr. Mini is worth examining. Eliza is a teacher who is torn between her love for Xuma and other more pressing aspirations:

“...But inside me there is something wrong. And it is because I want the things of the white people. I want to be like the white
people and go where they go and do the things they do and I am black. I cannot help it. Inside I am not black and I do not want to be a black person” (MB 60).

Wade seems of the opinion that, “Her education has proved her to identify herself with white culture. At the same time it has alienated her from black society. Thus Eliza displays the inevitable contradictions of an educated black person in the society where the large number of people denied an education. Xuma does not understand Eliza’s crises because he is not educated” (Wade 231).

The identity of Paddy in Mine Boy is a symbolic one. The novel suggests how black and white workers stand and act together to defeat the shared enemy. Paddy is shown as the representative of white who differs other white. He joins hand with Xuma and his fellow – workers in the strike against the mine bosses. When he walks over to Xuma and shakes his hand, he says, “I am a man first, Xuma” (MB 181). He then turns to the other miners and shouts:

Xuma is right! They pay you a little! They don’t care if you risk your lives: why is it so? Is not the blood of a black man red like that of a white man? Does not a black man feel too? Does not a black man love life too? I am with you: let them fix up the place first! (MB 181, 182).

Paddy forcefully insists that blacks are equally human. He doesn’t point a finger at capitalism but strongly burst out on the issues of racism. Paddy’s action signifies the personal identity of a white democrat to
promote the liberation struggle of an oppressed group which does not in any way share his privileged social status. Unlike Xuma, Paddy is not typical of his class. He is an uncommon individual who remains in the minds of readers for a longer time for his traits of personal Identity.

Regarded as, *Mine Boy* is the first modern novel of South Africa. The novel is told on the point of view of personal and social identity of Xuma. His travel becomes ours and his heart breaks too. By using the simple and everyday life of Black South Africans, Abrahams shows us the Quest for Identity become endemic in all the characters in the *Mine Boy*. It is believed that this is one of the first books to expose universally the condition of Black South Africans and the white regime. And yet the author never exhibited hatred in his narration for there were likable whites as well as detestable blacks. He propounded the ‘man first’ ideology, has explained by Paddy to Xuma. One of the most powerful features of Abraham’s writing is his ability to recreate quest for identity of black life and the characters in particular. His strong affirmation of its vitality informs all his South Africans novels and one is left with a lasting and profound impression and life in that country.

2.4  *THE PATH OF THUNDER (1948)*

*The Path of Thunder* was published first in the year 1948. The central theme of the novel is the love between Lanny and Sarie. The context explores the roots of miscegenation, how Coloureds and Afrikaners were related in the past and the present. Lanny is actually the son of the old Villier master, conceived when his mother used to work in a big house of Villiers. Sarie is not a real Villier yet she is the part of the
family, since her father was a foundling raised by the old Villier. Mad Sam is another Coloured who was violently beaten up by Gert Villier, the new master because of his love affair with his wife, the other Sarie in the past. As a matter of fact, Sam develops mental problem. He carries a different and unique identity, and protects the young Sarie even though he does not know why, since he can’t remember the past. Fieta is the Coloured woman with a liberal sexual life. She loves Sam and takes care of him to reshape his identity. At the end of the novel, Lanny and Sarie decide to run away to change their identities in Mozambique where a Coloured man can freely marry a white woman. When the love affair was disclosed, a group of Afrikaner men come to teach a lesson to Lanny as they did with Sam in the past. Later, Lanny, Gert, Sam and Sarie all die in the conflict. Below is the account of Lanny and Sarie having sex for the first time:

They got off and walked some distance, holding hands. And the moon was high and the night enchanted. A time for love. They sank to the warm, welcoming earth, and under the stars and the moon on the soft grass in the open they said with their bodies what was too deep and strong for human language. And as she lay spent and uplifted in his arms she whispered:

‘I feel holy, Lanny.’
And he whispered:
‘Love is holy, my dear.’
‘Beautiful and holy,’ she murmured and closed her eyes.
... O earth! Tell thy stupid children to love. Tell them for they are in need of telling. In need of the simple things. In need of sympathy
and understanding and brotherliness. In need of a love stronger and bigger than country and race, a love that embraces all countries and all races, the ultimate love of man for man. And teach them too, O earth, an anger, just and righteous, that offers peace only to men of good will. Tell them all hearts are sacred, all hearts can ache... Tell them... Tell them while one man and one woman cannot love in safety there is security for none... Tell them... (PT 246, 247).

Abrahams, boldly, exposes the intensity of the society and government that decide to rule over love affairs. The Afrikaner rejection of miscegenation is also in this novel, treated as an emotional rather than rational question. It is also exposed as a hypocritical position, since Coloured people have existed in South Africa for centuries, as a result of sexual relations between Europeans and Africans. Abrahams’ attempts to showcase the modern identity of love affairs through Lanny and Sarie which also represents liberalization: non-racial unity achieved at the private level of individuals accepting each other across the racial divide. Their love is an uncompromising flaunting of the liberal imaginary. Finally, Lanny will learn that he is, in reality, the son of the father of Gert Villier, who had an affair with Lanny’s (Coloured) mother. Interestingly Sarie and Lanny must, therefore, be related a problem resolved when he learns that Sarie is actually an adopted daughter.

On this landscape Abrahams sketched the quest for identity of all the major and minor characters. Lanny & Sarie leads the story. Lanny Swartz and Sarie Villier, the first of Abrahams’ heroes possess those identities which the novelist considers most important in a plural society freedom of the heart from fear and hatred. We have the author’s assurance
that Lanny’s generosity of mind extends to his oppressors. He didn’t hate anything. He didn’t hate the whites. Only in short spells, when they did him any harm, he feels bitter. But he doesn’t want to fight with anybody. Apparently, Lanny has such personally that man whom everyone in combat against apartheid should wish to be. Using his love for a white girl as his only weapon, he defies the plight of his society. The love that is between him and that girl has made him human. “In *The Path of Thunder*, the moment is from city to country, from present to past, from complexity to a direct. We follow the move of Lanny Swartz from Cape Town back to his village in the Karroo” (Wade 222).

In *The Path of Thunder* Abrahams moves a step further. The point is that Lanny, in spite of his Western education (he is a BA and has won scholarships), is still less than a human being. The love of Sarie opens to him life on the highest plane, because this is the plane on which the mind takes hold of and conquers fear. ‘There is something like inevitability about the way they seem drawn to each other. They don’t seem to be able to control their feelings’ (PT 219). Even the fatality that surrounds their love is a defiance of the South African laws which attempt to regulate human emotions. Interracial love humanizes the couple because it enables them to burst the shackles of oppression put on them by the colour bar. For example, it is only after confessing her love for Lanny that Sarie feels free to visit Tante, a visit which had been forbidden by Gert Villier.

Lanny is presented to be a hero. But his heroism is related clearly and inescapably to that which differentiates him from the others: his possession of education. Lanny is the only educated Coloured man in the book, apart from Mad Sam. Abrahams seems to be stressing a point of
somewhat validity that identity of hero should be related with education which is the key for initial liberation and self-realization. So Abrahams affirms duel personality here: he should be a human being and should be educated.

More accurately, Lanny is symbolic figure. He is a representative of the Coloured people’s dilemma. Two Coloured characters in *The Path of Thunder* defy it. They are Mad Sam and Lanny, and they are, both, doomed men. Mad Sam’s fate is a fairly precise prefiguration of Lanny’s, up to a point, as Gert reveals just before the moment of climax:

Gert brought his face close to Lanny’s. He could see the pain in those eyes.
‘I’m not going to kill you,’ Gert said. ‘No. I’m not going to kill you. I’m going to squeeze more. Squeeze till you are weak and then I’m going to kick you. Do you hear, Mister Swartz?’
Lanny was helpless. He could feel great drums beating in his ears.
‘Yes,’ Gert gloated. ‘I’m going to kick you and kick you until you are like Sam. They call him Mad Sam. But he was like you. Though he was good enough for a white woman. Just like you, educated and well dressed and with a clever tongue, and I made him what he is today. My slave! He was stronger than you! I kicked him and now he moves like an animal. That’s what’s going to happen to you, Mister Swartz!’ (PT 258).

But Mad Sam himself intervenes and he and Gert kill each other. He has loved another Sarie, who has been destined to be Gert’s wife. His feelings have been reciprocated but Gert’s destruction of his humanity has
also destroyed the woman they both love. By this time, very close to the end of the story, Lanny is aware of all this. And this scene of violence leads swiftly into the climax, in which Lanny and Sarie barricade themselves with guns into the Villier homestead and shoot it out with Gert’s henchmen, the local whites. The final burst of violence is a symbolic climax. It is symbolic because in it Lanny has a gun, the ultimate defiance, the final assumption of equality with the white man in South African society. It is, ironically, a version of the superb image, with Lanny and Sarie as the trekkers make striking away from the limitations imposed on their freedom by a regime that is alien to the life of the spirit.

At the beginning of the novel, Lanny returns to his people in Stillveld with some missionary zeal to improve his people. In this small micro-cosmos are to be found all the elements of explosive racial situation. There is a challenge to the pattern of racial ascribed roles which dictates that ‘Coloureds’ should be servants, fools and, generally, ignorant. Lanny’s very presence as an educated person upsets this pattern of racism. Thus, the stage is set for the inevitable violence. In fact, operative symbol in the novel is violence – it starts with it and ends with it. Lanny’s identity sets the tone in Stillveld throughout the novel.

_The Path of Thunder_ is full of ‘Fear in various forms’. All the characters are haunted by it almost to the point of paralysis. Mako gives way to fear when he counsels Lanny to run away:

You see, you cannot protect your love and keep the outside world away all the time. You live in the world and the world is going to find you out. And because it is a stupid, mad world, this in which
we live, it is going to hurt you and your love and your woman. Perhaps in other lands, though they are very few, where colour is not a crime, you would have been happy. Here you cannot be….

Come then, my brother, will you go away? (PT 2201 - 2221).

Wade makes the statements about Mako, “Mako is one who submits the fear and despair throughout the novel. The view of South Africa is portrayed as a moral wilderness where it is an act of weakness to submit to humane feelings. In order to win, it is necessary to be hard, as Leah seemed to have demonstrated in *Mine Boy*, and to suppress all humanity. Oppression intensifies the herd instinct, and so does a state of war, but interracial love symbolizes a union stronger than any group identity such as tribalism or nationalism” (Wade 145).

Lanny’s original duty is towards his community, the Coloured people of Stilleveld, for whom he plans to open a school. Lanny knew the fact that teaching in the Coloured community is not only a career but it is the contribution to the social liberation. His identity symbolizes group aspirations. He transcends this narrow label when he puts aside personal safety, even the immediate interests of his people, and fights for all humanity by asserting his right to love a white girl. It is left to another character that has been through fire to spell out what it means:

Sam touched his face with his sound hand. The left side of his face twisted upward. Deep wisdom showed in his eyes. Fieta turned away. It was impossible to keep looking at Sam when he had that light in his eyes. It was like looking at God if there was a God.
‘You can’t stop it, Fieta,’ he said in a faraway voice. ‘You see, love is strong. Stronger than hate even. Love is the only thing that can kill hate, nothing else. You see, hate destroys and that’s why love is stronger. It builds. There is hope for all Coloured people in this country, while one white woman can love one Coloured man. Love keeps one alive. It makes you understand and fight... Look at me, Fieta’ (PT 169).

Lanny is “Coloured” (of mixed racism background) and a good deal of the narrative is concerned with resolving old mysteries arising out of his past and the past of individuals in the village. ‘Home’, the novels first section challenges the identities of impoverished mother, Sister Swartz and his community. The question aroused in his mind was how his community could have found the money for her son’s education to degree and diploma level in Cape Town.

Abrahams provides major weight of action and feeling on his women character, is called one of his most prominent and consistent attitudes throughout his literary work as a novelist. In *The Path of Thunder* there are five women around Lanny. Each of whom except his mother is as a character both more dramatic and more convincing than the hero. Mabel, his sister, except for the disastrous from every point of view dream-like interlude with the honest young English anthropologist on whom she has a crush is neatly and perceptively realized. The strains of poverty and monotony that provoke her to petty theft, rebellion against her mother and more than ordinarily intense adolescent despair are keenly felt and conveyed by the author. The last thing she needs to provoke her into running away to Cape Town is an unanswered love affair with a
mysterious Anglo-Saxon academic in a motor car who feeds her dreams of escape. The purpose of the episode in relation to the novel as a vehicle for the burden of the Coloured people is quite clear and manifests itself straightforwardly enough in Mabel’s feelings as she sits in the anthropologist’s motor car:

Tentatively she touched the steering wheel and looked at him.

‘Like it?’ he asked.

She nodded vigorously. For Mabel the world was transformed she wasn’t Coloured and she wasn’t poor and she wasn’t Mabel and she didn’t work. She was a grand white lady and this was her car and this was her husband beside her. Her clothes were fine. And the world on which she looked from the little car was a beautiful fairy world. In vision things were what she wanted them to be. The cocky hardness went out of her eyes, her face softened. Wistfulness played round her mouth (PT 105).

Fieta, who intervenes in their final encounter, is stumped by the depth of Mabel’s emotion. Fieta is in the Abrahams pattern of a dominant and powerful yet ambivalent female character; fiercely protective of what she considers right and deeply conservative a sort of archetypal mother figure. She is related to Selina in A Wreath for Udomo, to Martha Lee in This Island Now and to Leah in Mine Boy. Her powerful first reaction to Lanny’s arrival is to reject him, to tell him to go back to Cape Town and not to disturb the precarious balance of the Coloured community at Stilleveld. She is sexually attractive again like Martha Lee and Leah, but also like them, a loser in the game of love: she has always loved Mad Sam. When Mabel has finished crying, Fieta asks her:
‘Feeling better, Mabel?’
Mabel raised her head and looked at Fieta.
‘You don’t know how it hurts, Fieta.’
Fieta looked away and said:
‘I do know . . . Many, many years ago, before you were born I met a man and I loved him the first day I met him. He was fine and young and strong. He was educated and there weren’t many educated Coloured people in those days . . . But he didn’t love me. He was Coloured like me but he didn’t love me, he loved a white girl. You don’t know her. She died before you were born. Your mother knew her. She lived in the big house’.
‘Here?’
‘Yes, Mabel, here . . . He loved her and she loved him too . . . The white folks nearly killed him . . . He’s different now and I still love him and it hurts as much to love him now. That is why I go to Cape Town and sleep with other men’. I still love him ‘Sam?’ ‘Yes,’ Fieta said heavily (PT 114, 115).

Thus, Fieta, together with Sam, fulfils a symbolic identity, a challenge to the white stereotype of the fecklessly immoral and fertile Coloured woman. In the end, Sam declares his love for her, before going out to save Lanny and kill his tormentor, Gert Villier, in the final encounter. And Fieta bears his body back to the village, followed by Isaac and Mako, the helpless witnesses, in a procession which expresses triumph as much as sorrow.

Sarie saves Lanny from a vicious assault by Gert’s henchmen at their second encounter and invites him into the kitchen of the homestead
to tidy up. Sarie gives Lanny a bowl of water and watches him wash the blood from his face. She wants to help him by dusting the back of his jacket where he had lain in the sand. But something holds her back. She is White and he is Coloured. It is hard, though, to remember it all the time. He doesn’t behave as though he is Coloured. She had to force it into her mind in order to remember it all the time.

And now, should she give him a towel to wipe his face? Impulsively she gave him her own hand towel. She watched him wipe his face, then looked curiously at the towel when he returned it to her. It was so strange. He thanked her, but as a matter of course, as though he were used to getting towels from white girls, but he couldn’t be or could he? (PT 213).

The presence of identity of Mad Sam provides a sub-plot to the main story. Abrahams’ theme is not death, but life; not the destructive realities of hatred, but the resurrecting potentialities of love. Sam has been almost done to death by Gert Villier’s hatred, but the persistent devotion and love of Fieta has kept him alive and human by providing the only focal point of sanity in his disordered world. Other than Mad Sam no other character, without being physically deformed like Mad Sam, do not come alive even for one moment.

Mako, the native gets more attention from the author, deliberately, for he is fashioned as a mouthpiece. Like all of Abrahams’ surrogates, he is slender and small-boned, detached and thoughtful; and besides his profession as a school teacher, he is indeed an artist, for he reveals himself as a poet. Mako’s one-man audience here is Isaac Finkelberg, the Jew
who has attended college in the city, which explains his admiration for both Lanny and Sarie, although his common sense opposes the relationship:

It was a break with tradition and convention and the racial nonsense of the past. It was a revolt against nationalist tyranny, an assertion of the basic fact that a person was a person irrespective of colour ... living on the highest plane, love like this, free of nationalities and racialism (PT 246, 247).

The point of meeting between Mako and Isaac is really not the tedious evening seminars where they analyze race, nation, and nationalism—although Abrahams uses these sessions to keep us informed of his own standpoint on these issues but that they are both young and not afraid to take issue with their elders. Mako, African teacher explains the difficulties Coloureds face because they have no independent nationality of their own. Abrahams is urging that the predicament of the Coloured is different of that of the African in that the Coloured has no taken-for-granted national identity that exists outside the space and time of colonialism. Coloureds have no independent language and territory that pre-dated the arrival of the Europeans settlers. To be a Coloured is to be wholly product of colonialism. Because of this absence of independent national identity, the novel argues, Coloureds like Lanny cannot be a part of the dominant national struggle against colonialism. Hence Lanny love affair with Sarie is justified:

‘Because they have no roots of their own. Not the past, not the tradition of the white or of the black. This is why they try to grade
upward. The whites are in power, they control everything. There is
disadvantage, the colour bar, in grading towards the African so they
grade towards the white. An English poet said: “Only ghost can
live between two fires:” he was right. They are between two fires.
They are trying to get out of it. For me, there is the problem of the
Coloured people….’ (PT 35).

Abrahams has his own identity related with Lanny is exposed in
Tell Freedom, when he describes his own youthful experiences as a
teacher in a poverty-stricken Coloured place on the Cape Flats. The Path
of Thunder describes an episode that took place just before the author
made his decision to leave South Africa, and which apparently helped to
launch him as a prose writer. The experience provided some of the
inspiration for The Path of Thunder and the descriptions of Stilleveld life
quite clearly have their roots in it. “It is a pity the flowers are so peculiarly
synthetic and in a way insincere in their appearance. It is the same failure
as that which occurs later in Abrahams’ work, in Wild Conquest in his
treatment of the Matabele, in A Wreath for Udomo in his description of
tribal life and in This Island Now in the rendition of the ordinary people of
the island. Of course, the difficulty is embarrassing enough to the writer at
a stage in his career where he is ideologically committed to an idealization
of man as a member of a socio-political group” (Ogungbesan 57).

Gert Villier, the local white baas, represents Abrahams’ identity of
the Afrikaner. He is shown incurably opposed to change and progress.
Up on the hill, Gert’s identity is as the figure of the villain.
Abrahams has used his optimum to sketch the female characters better than their male counterparts, both as individual identity and collective. There is more individuality here which means more than just the physical differences noticeable among the men. In spite of their difference, the women seem to understand one another, sharing what we may call a feminine attitude to life which is something missing among the men. The most interesting with unique identity is the character in the novel is Fieta. Her type is fairly firmly established Daisy in *Song of the City* and Maisy in *Mine Boy*, from whom she got her voluptuous figure, happy disposition, as well as her easy morality. Fieta takes a hand in straightening everybody’s problems. We see her in one moment reclaiming the insane Sam, in another arranging a meeting between Sarie and Celia, Lanny’s city-bred Coloured girlfriend from the Cape. As in the case of Mabel, Lanny’s sister, whose world has come to an end because her lover has left her. Fieta gives everybody a chance to find a new life, or at least to pick up the shattered remains of the old one. Her quest for identity is hidden in taking the interest in everybody’s life prior to everybody’s consent.

In the novel *The Path of Thunder* a minor character is found in search of her identity, named as Mabel. Her love and its loss serves as another sub-plot which further makes the novel read like a collection of short stories. She moans: “I want beautiful clothes and shoes and I want to go places and meet people young men who are nice” (PT 100). Later, Mabel has run away from home to fulfill her ambition. Mabel, physically matured but mentally a child before her brief love affair began, has at last become a part of her harsh surroundings; her personal suffering has
integrated her into her world, so full of suffering. It is rightly said, conventional tragedy is too easy to understand: the hero dies and we feel a purging of the emotions. A real tragedy takes place in a corner, in an untidy spot. The rest of the world is unaware of it. Mabel doesn’t know, but we know and even her mother and brother know, that there is no hiding place in South Africa from the colour situation.

One of the reasons the readers feel pity for everybody’s identity that Abrahams conceived of the novel as a tragedy. Mako never allows us to forget how tragic the situation is:

The tragedy is not in Swartz and this girl. The tragedy is in this land and in our time. You must be first a native or a half-caste or a Jew or an Arab or an Englishman or a Chinese or a Greek that is the tragedy. You cannot be a human being first. That is the crime of our time (PT 227).

The situation between Lanny and Sarie has also tragic potentialities but they are unrealized, because it is impossible to make a tragic hero of a puppet. Lanny is too mechanical to be a full human being, although we may partly blame as he does the situation for his predicament; it is fear, according to him, which parches his throat and renders him both physically and emotionally impotent. It is perfectly true that the situation described is full of violence of any possible South African plot. The violence begins, in fact, with the Kaffir Wars, which the old grandmother was living in old exile in a corner of the Villier farm because she knows Gert Villier’s guilty secret. Years before the action of the plot again repeated when Gert Villier has kicked the head, a young and handsome
Coloured man from Stilleveld who had won the affections of the woman Gert and wished to marry. The Coloured man accepted the attack but subject to fits of madness. He is called Mad Sam and is symbolic of the relationship between white and non-white in South Africa. Lanny’s first direct encounter with violence takes place significantly early, in fact immediately on his arrival at Stilleveld:

Afrikaner lass tended it. A lorry stood a little way from the stall. Two bronze, muscular men were drinking coffee. They all looked at Lanny. . .
—’Do you see what I see?’ one of the men asked.
The other pursed his lips and looked doubtful:
‘I’m not sure. It looks like an ape in a better Sunday suit than I have but today’s not Sunday so I’m not sure.’
‘Perhaps he wears suits like that every day. . . . Besides, you are all wrong, he’s too pale to be an ape. That’s a city Bushy.’— (PT 18).

It’s quite difficult to understand Sarie’s personality. She is shown quite complicated to be easily pigeon-holed, too firmly rooted on earth to dwell permanently in the clouds. We are fascinated with the simplicity with which she defeats Celia Richards, Lanny’s city-bred fiancee from Cape Town, who comes to Stilleveld to claim her own. Celia is also more beautiful than Sarie, more educated and more sophisticated. Yet Sarie unwittingly turns all these disadvantages to her favour.

For hers is not a destructive love. We know this even before she discovers her passion for Lanny, when she and her dog unwittingly arrives
on the scene just as Gert is about to crush Lanny, as he has crushed Samuel DuPlessis. Sarie, then invites Lanny to her house to wash the blood from his mouth and dust off his coat. This is the beginning of their love. And throughout, the emphasis is on what she does for Lanny, the extra dimension which she gives to his life, by making a full human being out of him, soothing the tensions that race hatred has injected into the nature of all the oppressed. One can defend confidently that identity of Sarie has not been free of colour prejudice as is evidenced at their first meeting when she finds Lanny too forward for a Coloured. Abrahams drops this, and emphasizes that there is, in fact, something in Sarie’s nature that is fundamentally against colour discrimination. “There was something calm and quiet that flowed from her. Flowed into him and eased and rested him. Made him want to lay his head on her lap and go to sleep. Made him forget that she was white and he was Coloured. Made him feel like a man’. Sarie is able to perform this function because she herself has made the transition from being a white woman to just being a woman. She is not conscious of Lanny’s colour: “she swept race and colour and nationality away as though it were a filthy little cobweb” (PT 163). The scene of running away to Portuguese East Africa with her man brings out the contrast between Sarie’s open nature and the closed surroundings in which she lives:

In her heart was a song. She was going with her man. Away from all this hate and bitterness. And they would walk together in public and be normal and happy and free. No hiding. No fear that someone might find out and harm Lanny. Everything was going to be all right. And she would be able to look after him. Wash his clothes,
mend his socks, see to his food, and keep his home clean and happy. And on Sundays they would lie in the sun and listen to the birds. And of an evening they would walk in the lighted streets without being afraid of being seen. And suddenly it dawned on her how much fear there had been in their lives. Whether they had known it or not, fear had controlled and dominated them. It had made them shun the paths trod by other men. It had made them seek quiet, secret places where they could share their love in safety.

Racial Hierarchy is shown in the novel is probably a blow to the identities of many characters in the novel. Lanny makes friendship with Mako, the African teacher in the native community. The Coloured priest dislikes the idea of Coloured coming closer to a black, considered racially inferior. *The Path of Thunder* is about inter-racial sex. Lanny’s predicament is symbolically represented in Sam’s Identity who was mangled by the Boers for daring to sleep and love with white. Lanny’s story is an exact image of Mad Sam whose physically mangled body is a constant reminder of what white are capable of doing to Coloureds and blacks; if they breaks the rules. Gert Villier lives out this attitude when he tells Lanny:

I’m going to kick you and kick you until you are like Sam. They called him Mad Sam. But he was like you. Though he was good enough for a white women… I made him what he is today. My slave!...I kicked him and now he moves like an animal. That’s what’s going to happen to you, Mister Swartz! (PT 53).
“The three major ‘Coloured’ characters symbolize different identities in the racial hierarchy. Lanny is the educated, idealist, with romanticism who dared to cross the institutionalized sexual and racial borders; the ‘Coloured’ preacher stands for that spaces which retreats into religious passivity; Mabel, Lanny’s sister is stereotyped, for a moment in the English mans scalp all fleece and fluff character” (Oungbesan 66). The white characters in the novel are the spiritual descendants of the Jansen family as we found in his next novel about the Great Trek by Abrahams, *Wild Conquest*. It is Finkelberg, a Jewish intellectual who ironically explains to Mako, an African, the lowest category on the racial totem pole, what has happened between Lanny and Sarie:

‘You don’t understand, Mako. There are two ways of falling in love… You and I know one way… But there is another kind too. By that love people are just drawn together without looks or anything else mattering, not even the fact that this is the Highveld.’

‘I don’t believe it, Finkelberg.’

‘Yesterday I would have said the same, Mako.’

‘Swartz must be a fool. Why didn’t he go away?’

‘You’re are asking why a drawing man struggles for his life.’

‘This fatal, inevitable love is nonsense.’

‘For you Mako, yes. But not for Swartz. I don’t know what it is. I know the fact that your internal freedom is greater than his has something to do with it.”
You are at once freer as well as being more restricted because you have a past and a tradition whereas he has none’ (PT 128).

Abrahams could have thought by portraying a love story with a happy ending where Lanny and Sarie praise be to God Almighty, free at last would lie in the sun and live happily ever after. The ‘right and normal and natural’ could happen. But who else than Abrahams would understand the plight of South Africa? With a firm grip of reality, Abrahams makes the story-end unhappily, for his generation, not the fulfillment but the struggle.

Sarie does all that is necessary under the circumstances fights with him and dies with him for love. What greater love is there, than that an Afrikaner girl should lay down her life for her Coloured man? The two lovers’ courage, which has already ignited the youths of Stilleveld, contrasts with the cowardice with which the white press reports the incident in the closing words of the novel:

The Eastern Post of the next day carried a story on its front page in bold black letters. It told how a young Coloured teacher, one Lanny Swartz, had run amok, killed a prominent farmer, Mr Gert Villier, and then been chased into the house of Mr Villier.

Alone in the house was Miss Sarie Villier. He had found a gun, shot her, and then turned the gun on his pursuers. In the ensuing battle three other people had been killed before Swartz had finally been shot down. The story ended with a strong protest against educating black people (PT 262).
Lanny’s identity is portrayed as young, good looking, well spoken. For a coloured man in South Africa this is about the ultimate inspiration and Abrahams is apparently sublimating a whole people’s frustration the posing relationship of Lanny and Sarie. Abrahams makes Lanny’s identity equal to white men. Abrahams is realist enough to concede that and bring the story to a tragic climax. Abrahams looks at the problem from every side in one of his finest chapters Lanny argues it out with a Negro and a Jew. All are of the disposed but the Negro has an anchor in his tribe and the Jew in his age-old past with neither a past nor a future. Abrahams has exposed a naked reality on the landscape of ‘love between Lanny and Sarie’. However sometimes dialogues sound awkward and gawky at times, this is probably because he is writing in English but thinking in Afrikaans.

_The Path of Thunder_ ends as a strong protest novel that attempts this love of theirs, is a symbol of man’s attempt to move beyond the chains that bind him. For them there is nothing in it. For others there will be a lesson in it, and the lesson will be very big.

### 2.5 CONCLUSION

The novels discussed above rightly expose the writer’s zest to bring out the theme of the quest for identity. The characters in each novel though at surface level seem pursuing their ultimate aim of life to achieve bread and butter and sometimes the dignified life; but in real sense all of the thirsty to prove their personal, social, cultural and political identity. None of the characters in the above discussed novels feel that they have their own culture and identity; they always think that they have been
uprooted from their own soil. In all over the novels it obviously seems that the characters are fighting for their freedom and existence because the white people have denied their personal, social and cultural identity, turning them simply into the objects and working hands. So, this chapter focuses on the struggle of each character for their self identity to be first of all human beings and then black Africans.