Chapter-IV

The Moment of Liberation

Gordimer talks of a new kind of literary work which would secure her place as a white writer in “a new indigenous culture of the future by claiming that place in the implicit nature of the artist as an agent of change” (Thurston 104). According to her, South African literature is didactic, self-indulgent and self-condemning. She maintains that the South African writer should try to escape the trammels of the dark historical and political moment. Her next novel, *A Sport of Nature* is a fictional call to this duty. It is the most historically, geographically, and politically broad of Gordimer’s fictional work. It can also be seen as the most challenging of her novels so far. *A Sport of Nature* not only covers the entire period of the history and politics of the South Africa’s National Party’s apartheid regime, it also traces the complete period of Gordimer’s writing career which spans from the late 1940s to the publication of this novel in 1987, and then spreads out into the future also. From the revolution point of view, *A Sport of Nature* provides an extensive outline of the armed struggle functions as a point of departure into the future happenings. Dominic Head posits that, “it offers, as its organizing principle, an exaggerated re-evaluation of the issues and forms of her previous novels. This lends the book a ludic, metafictional quality which sets it apart from her earlier works” (136).

This novel can be viewed as a conventional work, which brings the real events to surface; it is realistic in its narrative stance, in its view of goal-directed political action and how it propels the historical change. The ultimate issue behind the writing of this novel is to create a work of fiction which is free from superficial philosophical instructions and which lays out questions pertaining to historical and political discussion through its content. Many critics have called *A Sport of Nature* as Gordimer’s most ironic novel that often troubles its readers. The novel is set across several decades of contemporary African events and it details the success of not only its protagonist’s but also of other couples as well. It can be read as “Gordimer’s personal and artistic refusal to
submit to the logic of oppositional forces in South African history” (Thurston 104). In an attempt to depict the present condition of the country, Gordimer has shifted her art through fiction and the imagination beyond the existing history into the future where she transforms her concentration from the unwholesome present state to the creative possibilities of a post apartheid country of South Africa. Her work shows an urge to come out of the bondage of race and class into a more inspired and imaginative future.

_A Sport of Nature_ is concerned about the history and politics of black Africa. It captures the people’s struggle against injustices, experiences of home and exile and the political scenario in the era of 1980s. The novel touches many of Gordimer’s key concerns. As a Bildungsroman it is similar in its form like _The Lying Days_, makes an analysis of South African bourgeoisie as in _Occasion for Loving_. Similar to _A Guest of Honour_, nationalistic politics of Africa are a major centre of attention, with a considerable emphasis upon sexuality of the main protagonist. The central character in the novel is Hillela Capran who changes her name from Kim and undergoes the first of many modifications in her identity and character. In the following chapters, she grows from apolitical onlooker to activist, from mistress to wife and a significant behind the scenes force on her own. She changes from an ordinary woman to a quintessence of the liberation movement. Hillela is seen as a white woman who is an irresponsible daughter of a feckless mother. Her adulterous mother, Ruthie, abandons her to the care of her two sisters and leave for Mozambique with her Portuguese lover.

As a “sport of nature” Hillela represents, “abnormal variation or a departure from the parent stock or type” (1) or “a spontaneous mutation; a new variety produced in this way” (1). She appears in the novel as an “adoptive daughter” (4) under the care of Olga, her aunt who is a rich bourgeoisie. In her school days, she is watched over by Pauline, her other aunt who is a liberal and is disillusioned by her omission from the world of the blacks in which she previously exercised her liberal principles, sends her to a private school to get education with her own daughter and son, Carole and Sasha. She and Joe are able to “avoid segregated education for their son Alexander by sending him to a school for all races, over the border in an independent neighboring black state” (22). Sasha is send to school with black kids as “the law says I’ve got to go into the army and
learn to kill blacks. That’s what the army’s really going to be for, soon. They talk all the
time about unjust laws. He’s up there in court defending blacks. And I’ll have to fight
them one day” (40). Hillela’s mother, who is “forbidden” by her father, lives an
unacquainted life with “another man” (3). She comes to know about her mother late in
life in an indifferent and strange contact with each other. Hillela is soon ousted from her
aunt’s home because she is caught sleeping with her cousin, Sasha and then begins a
journey of adventures and otherwise. Since her childhood, Hillela is aware that “she was
a white child, with choices; that was the irony of it. Young blacks had no choices, only
necessity and plenty of ignorance about how to deal with that, in addition” (71). Hillela’s
courage to smash the rules of her white society can be seen when her photograph appears
in a paper dancing with her school friend, Mandy, titled “Go Go Dancers” (42). She even
becomes the lover of a duplicitous white journalist, a beach bum in East Africa, the
mistress of a Belgian ambassador in Tanzania, the wife of a black African freedom
fighter who gets assassinated in Ghana and then returns to South Africa for its
independence celebrations as the wife of the president of Organization for African Unity
(OAU), General Reuel.

Hillela makes her passage clear through every degree of society without
connecting herself to any class. A Sport of Nature is a South African novel in which
Hillela drifts in the stream of race and politics. Numerous events in her life have a glaring
reference to the politics. Hillela is presented throughout the novel as the “organic body”.
Clingman states, “organic in that body and mind are in total harmony and seem to be
uncomplicated extensions of one another” (xiv). In this novel, Hillela crosses one
boundary after another, running away from the world of apartheid in all its transparent
and more restrained manifestations and thus entering in an unlimited world of
experiences. Unlike Hillela, Sasha for most of the time in the novel is seen as a useless
man—a person profoundly aware of the oppression and injustice prevalent in the society,
but also, excruciatingly of his own powerlessness and irrelevance as he exists in a world
of paralyzed state of mind, marked by threat and vulnerability. Finally, he ends up in an
isolated confinement in prison. The letters written by him, both outside and inside prison
are either never sent or never delivered, never cross the space from one world to another.
Hillela’s life is similar to the present condition existing in the country of South Africa; both are going through adventurous and tough time. She works at a number of peculiar jobs and get into various relationships, one of which takes her to an independent country of Tanzania with a fake white activist. On being abandoned by him she is rescued by the black revolutionary organizer of South Africa, Whaila Kgomani. Her life as a Tamarisk beach bum was one of her exciting experiences where she got along with people of all colours, blacks as well as whites. She became a part of:

The company that lay like a fisherman’s catch spread out on the sand, holding post-mortems on political strategies used back home, exchanging political rumours and sometimes roused, as a displacement of the self each had accustomed to living like this. (171)

The law in a country like South Africa needs to be revived again in order to set up a just social order. Pauline’s husband, Joe, feels that they cannot set up a home in the house where only white people can live and no place for blacks. He feels that his children, like Hillela, would grow as wanderers as there can never be any family life for whites and blacks together in South Africa. Gordimer’s A Sport of Nature observes and shuns a majority of South African roles such as, conservative, hedonist, and liberal and presents a view of a more revolutionary substitute. However, this vision appears less convincing to Gordimer herself. She realizes that the proposal of power relationships, existed in her earlier works, which is crucial for a change in South Africa, did not come across well in her present work of fiction.

In A Sport of Nature, Hillela’s female relatives showcase the less satisfying white preferences. She herself in the beginning instinctively follows her mother’s pleasure-seeking diversion, but subsequently develops through numerous more steadfast approaches. In aunt Olga, Gordimer takes up again her task of criticizing conservative whites. Olga is sympathetic towards her servants and is respectful to Jewish traditions, but is thoughtful of her bourgeoisie values and inattentive to political happenings. She and her husband “can’t take pleasure in anything that hasn’t a market value” (21). Pauline tells Hillela that Olga’s reaction to the Sharpeville massacre is that, “I’ve no right to
deprive you of a holiday. For reasons of my own. That was her phrase exactly: ‘for reasons of your own’. That’s all Sharpeville and sixty-nine dead meant to her” (33). The entire novel has an international setting, and returns to the themes of political and familial restoration. Hillela through her gift of wayward brilliance breaks the ruthless rules of a society tainted by racial chauvinism. Bazin and Seymour remarks:

[H]er novel is not politics camouflaged as fiction but rather fiction that must also be read as politics. Gordimer does not merely narrate in well-crafted works of art; still, the stories are her contribution to what she calls “the liberation of my country.” All the same, Gordimer is perhaps more political outside of her books than in them. (270)

The current political scenario in the country leads to Olga’s reaction to politics “is always to be afraid of trouble!” (30). She feels secured with the presence of the police and the courts as they “lock away burglars, rapists, embezzlers, car thieves, murderers where they couldn’t threaten decent people any longer” (327). The novelist sees apartheid as unsustainable for long and comes out in open revolt against it. She considers those as complacently uninformed and worldly who support it and they should be ridiculed for it. Gordimer has shown interest over the years in those who have left South Africa. Several characters in her fictions have escaped from the country for some reason or the other. Hillela initially takes flight from the country because she is unaware of the South African realities and move to other destinations for hedonistic journeys. However, Gordimer discards this approach and thinks that there should be more of human contact, one of the best ways to damage the racial boundaries. The protagonist’s several self-indulgent journeys figures as foremost in A Sport of Nature. Hillela is not liberal in her thinking; she is unscrupulous in her intentional overlooking of politics in South Africa. To justify this statement Gordimer recurrently juxtaposes political happenings and Hillela’s total oblivious nature to them.

In one of the first incidence, Hillela greets Pauline and Carole as they show their disapproval against the formation of the South African Republic, then departs to her coffee bar to sing folk songs, and is thrown out when the proprietor smell marijuana.
Such juxtaposition is related to the torture in the observation that “while electric currents were passing through the reproductive organs of others, Hillela had an abortion” (145). When Hillela leaves South Africa with a white activist, Rey, Pauline remarks that, “smoking pot in a coffee bar, that was more in that little girl’s line…. She has no political sense, no convictions, not the faintest idea…” (154-55). Pauline’s description of Hillela’s getaway is exact and clearly ascertains the resemblance with her mother, Ruthie, “attached herself to some man—that’s what it was all about. He was the one who had to go. Pauline and Olga were only two of three sisters, after all; still. Attach herself to some man. My poor Ruthie” (156).

The novel contains a link between the personal and the political events like in the previous novel *A Guest of Honour*. There are references to various political figures such as Mandela, Nkomo, Luthuli, Tambo, and many others that establish a link with the political history. As a result, the division between real political figures and other literary characters is purposely hazed. There are some allusions of certain important political episodes in the childhood and teenage years of Hillela and her cousin Carole, there is an impact of the Alexandra bus boycott upon the schoolgirl Carole, and then Carole’s afterward contribution in protest meetings “in which thousands of black people tramped at the roadside; for many weeks” (64) and were asked for the passes. Hillela even performed at protest meetings to which:

Joe and Pauline gave their support: against the pass laws, apartheid in the universities, removal of black populations under the Group Areas Act…. The two adolescents were absorbed into activities in which a social conscience had the chance to develop naturally… (28)

Pauline’s commitment to the struggle of the blacks is clearly perceived as a comparison to Hillela’s role. The reader discovers that Hillela is taken in by the family of Pauline in the year before Sharpeville incident took place. There is an incident in the novel where Pauline is worried about Hillela’s location, at the age of seventeen, on the Day of Covenant, when several terrorist bombs exploded. According to Head, “Undoubtedly such historical references contribute something important to the texture of
the novel, and the way in which it contextualizes itself” (139). Sasha who is Hillela’s cousin and the only white characters in the novel who understands her well speaks of South Africa’s problems:

> Instinct is utopian. Emotion is utopian.... It’s all got to come down, mother. Without utopia - the idea of utopia - there’s a failure of the imagination - and that’s a failure to know how to go on living. It will take another kind of being to stay on, here. A new white person. Not us. The chance is a wild chance - like falling in love. (236-37)

Gordimer draws on Hillela’s youth as a base for more serious commitment in later period. She valorizes her protagonist’s love for a black man as a source of her utopian vision and motivates Hillela in order to realize that vision. Gordimer’s strong efforts to move beyond the line of colour make her increasingly unforgiving of those who come in favour of this gap. Such a hypocritical attitude contributes nothing towards the nation. In the current years the writer has apparently spotted her political task of perforating the false impression of South African whites and proposes more dedicated substitutes. In A Sport of Nature liberals like Joe and Pauline are attacked severely, despite the fact that they are more devoted and active in political circles than most of Gordimer’s other characters in the novel. Pauline disapproves Joe’s interest as a lawyer, standing up for political cases, inquiring, “what will you be at our Nuremberg? ... The one who tried to serve justice through the rule of law, or the one who betrayed justice by trying to serve it through the rule of unjust laws?” (84-85). But her own actions are also not better; she comes in defense of a black waiter who is verbally abused by a schoolgirl. She opens a Saturday school to recompense the deficiency of “Bantu Education” (27) and distributes leaflets against the “Verwoerd republic” (75), until she learns that a number of white liberals have been arrested and tears down the left over leaflets. She and Joe also give help and support to a fleeing Black Consciousness activist. But Pauline declines to give shelter to an activist fearing that it would put Joe’s absolutely indispensable work as a lawyer in danger, “since he was the man to deal with the law, legal representation, prisoners’ rights-” (394). Hillela notices a sense of duplicity in Pauline. Even Sasha accuses his parents of hypocrisy. Hillela finds doubt and vacillation in Pauline and Joe’s
attitude. The novel considers the marginalization of Africans who are relegated in the literature of Africa.

The narrative technique of the novel is highly extraordinary. The narrator compose her history as if searching for a public figure, accepting lacunae in the account, and tracing a momentary subject through manifold changes of identity. Regressing in South Africa to Hillela Capran, she is later metamorphosed into Mrs. Whaila Kgomani, and finally reintroduced as Chimeka that in Igbo represents ‘God has done very well’ (384). Gordimer makes use of intertextual component by making fictional Rosa Burger walk in the vicinity of the novel which also introduces many real life political personalities, all who add to the present-day charm. Head postulates, “The way in which Rosa’s story parallels contemporary South African history is also a point of reference for the career of Hillela” (138). The narrative technique is intentionally Marxian, as Hillela makes a change happen in herself according to the forces of situations and political arrangement in South Africa. The narrator comments the variation and stillness in the life of Hillela, which are associated with the lives of individual conquerors:

Everyone is familiar with memories others claim to have about oneself that have nothing to do with oneself. In the lives of the greatest, there are such lacunae-Christ and Shakespeare disappear from and then appear in the chronicles that documentation and human memory provide. (127)

Gordimer repeatedly criticizes in strong words the inability of the white liberals to search for a role in a South African society, which has a mixed culture, and largely black. The relationships of Pauline and Joe with other cultural groups are shown as anything but easy and comfortable. Pauline is suspicious of others of anti-semitism, and all other members of her family are evidently unfair against Afrikaners. They have strained relations with blacks. Pauline supports a campaign for a “‘No’ vote in the referendum for white people to decide whether the country should leave the British Commonwealth and declare itself a republic with a whites-only government” (64). Similarly, Hillela witnessed from a coffee bar a crowd of blacks and whites who were raising the slogan of “NO TO A RACIST REPUBLIC” (66). Sasha points out that Pauline’s “blacks were like
aunt Olga’s whatnots, they were handled with such care not to say or do anything that might chip the friendship they allow her to claim” (317). Gordimer condemns this by contrast with more cordial relationships which Sasha develops with blacks and by also with Hillela’s reluctance to classify people of dark colour and her soon after marriage alliances with blacks.

Hillela is aware of the existing racial differences in her society but prefers to set eyes beyond them. When she marries the black revolutionary, Whaila Kgomani, she had what Pauline and Joe couldn’t find: a sign in her marriage, “Not the sure and certain instruction they had been waiting for, but something to which one could attach oneself…” (83). Hillela discards her whiteness but testifies that Pauline and Joe who also wanted to cast off their white colour but did not know the way. They lack a positive vision of the future and of the proper means of arriving at it. Their son, Sasha hated them because he expected them to search for solutions but they end up having questions only. In the later part of the novel when Sasha gets back to revolutionary activity, there is “nothing in the advantages of his youth had prepared him” (424) for such conditions.

Hillela’s marriage with Whaila Kgomani, a black man comes as a turning point in the novel and gives birth to a daughter, Nomzamo, named after Nelson Mandela’s wife, Winnie Mandela. However, Hillela’s idea of a perfect “rainbow” marriage does not last long and is shattered by the brutal assassination of her husband, “Hillela learns the need for commitment to the liberation cause for which she now works untiringly” (Thurston 105). After Whaila’s death, Hillela speaks that:

*The real rainbow family stinks. The dried liquid of dysentery streaks the legs of babies and old men and the women smell of their monthly blood. They smell of lack of water. They smell of lack of food. They smell of bodies blown up by the expanding gases of their corpses’ innards, lying in the bush in the sun.* (317)

She moves to Eastern Europe where another person Karel introduces her to a gruesome war memento, a gas container used by the Nazis in their gas chambers in Berlin. It appears that Karel has sparked off an outburst of Hillela’s grief for her murdered husband, but this sorrow is:
Clearly associated with an emerging historical and political understanding: the violence of the holocaust, symbolically recontained in the transportable canister, is the violence of political struggle which, in another context, had found its way, fatally, into Hillela’s marital home. (Head 139)

Hillela is now coming to terms with the concrete reality of brutality and death in her personal as well as political commitment, which Whaila had earlier strived to convince her, and which the liberal Pauline never wholly accepts. Hillela is an intensified description of the Gordimer heroine for whom “sensuality can be the channel of political enlightenment” (Head 140). In Hillela, Gordimer takes to an extreme level her thoughtfulness of the fundamental political potential, which embodies Hillela’s personal advancement, and her influence upon others is expressed at every stage of the novel. Gordimer’s characters recurrently dwell on physical difference; this is an important feature of Hillela. She is knowledgeable about racial difference and is supportive of inter-racial harmony, which depends upon an initial celebration of racial distinction instead of repudiating it. Such a celebration is made possible by Hillela’s sensuality.

Gordimer tries to address the very real issue of racial disparity than to annotate over it in an openhanded notion of harmony. The focus on race is complemented by an underplay, or misrepresentation of the essential issues of class and gender. The focus on racial dissimilarity symbolizes a contrary racism, which includes its own private setback. Another charge against the writer is that the issues of class and race are underestimated in A Sport of Nature, if the novel is scrutinized meticulously as being about South Africa. Hillela’s first husband, Whaila, is a pictogram of “pure hardness against the dissolving light” (164). Undoubtedly, physicality is essential to resistance against subjugation that in the novel becomes apparent in Whaila. During this phase when conflict has been converted into an impetus towards deliverance, armed struggle becomes unavoidable, there takes place certain discussion between him and Hillela related to the matters of aggression. Her friend Udi thinks that, “It will be the big powers who’ll decide what happens to blacks. And the power of other black heads of state influencing the big powers” (315).
Violent behaviour in the novel becomes the eventual cause of Whaila’s death, gunned down by instruments of the apartheid regime in Lusaka: he paid the price of politics. It is his loyalty towards the cause that deepens Hillela’s pledge towards an active politics. After her husband’s death the road ahead is “partly through chance, partly through trauma, and partly through the necessity of her nature, is to ethicize her own inner politics by transforming them in social terms” (Clingman xvi). She supports all the political activities which Whaila was once part of and becomes a mark of evolutionary principle as a ‘sport of nature’ holding a promise to a good future. The novel informs that where apartheid has dissevered the body, which can be envisioned as a sign of reintegration, “Skin and hair. It has mattered more than anything else in the world” (225). Many critics have questioned Hillela’s uninhibited sensuality. Set not in the boundaries of South Africa, the interracial relationship between Hillela and Whaila is different from that of Ann and Gideon in *Occasion for Loving*; it is free from the restraints of apartheid’s legal discussion on race:

*The laws that have determined the course of life for them are made of skin and hair, the relative thickness and thinness of lips and the relative height of the bridge of the nose.... The laws made of skin and hair fill the statute books in Pretoria; their gaudy savagery paints the bodies of Afrikaner diplomats under three-piece American suits and Italian silk ties. The stinking fetish made of contrasting bits of skin and hair, the scalping of millions of lives, dangles on the cross in place of Christ.* (225)

The deferment from apartheid’s intervention gives the relationship a liberation that is manifested in the openness between the couple:

[Hillela] never tires of looking at his hands.... They’re you. And they’re not black, they’re all the flesh colours. D’yknow, in shops-and in books! - ‘flesh colour’ is Europeans’ colour! Not the colour of any other flesh. Nothing else! Look at your nails, they’re pinkish-mauve because under them the skin’s pink. (226)
It is the outrageousness of apartheid that has a deep impact not only on the body but on the mind as well. Therefore, it is through her entire body that Hillela feels a connection with the black world, not only in her love for Whaila, but also in his shocking death. On being hit by the refrigerator door, she feels the impact of the bullet. It is only after Whaila’s end that she comes to regain an unfetter South Africa at the conclusion of the novel. Clingman mentions, “Insofar as the organic body establishes its own, inner, imperative teleology of liberation, the whole body-at last in Gordimer’s fiction - realizes a form of political necessity corresponding to that of blacks in South Africa” (xvii). In A Sport of Nature the white figure has sympathy with the black and in a way tries to break free the hierarchies of apartheid, which is inseparable from the South African society. The novel marks out new beginning in the South Africa of the 1980s, a point already established in Gordimer’s fiction. Like her former novels, Hillela is one with the oppressed black world.

A Sport of Nature brings a resolve between a white and an African identity. In that sense the organic body becomes one with the continent of Africa. Unlike Bray, a white administrator in A Guest of Honour, Hillela is successful in attaining identification with the blacks in Africa. Like Gordimer, Hillela experience a series of overstepping of sequential boundaries. In Gordimer’s life, the first trespassing was reading, the second, writing whereas in Hillela’s case, the first was smashing the colour bar by befriending a coloured youth, and the second was incest (sleeping with her cousin Sasha). Such activities take them beyond the dimensions of conventional white South African culture. Gordimer, who has been given the status of an outsider in her own country, takes on an unrelenting progress towards the changing of an African perspective. Hillela’s move is also predicted initially by such signs like her curly black hair, which, as some African girls do, her warm heartedness towards the servants, Jethro and Betty; her partying in the townships of Fordsburg and Page view where the coloured population lived, and, then her contact with black opinions through her liberal aunt, Pauline. In her political life after the death of Whaila, Hillela follows Gordimer’s chase for a supportive role and place for white after the handing over of power from white to black hands.
It has happened for the first time in Gordimer’s fiction that an interracial relationship moves across the limits of apartheid, metaphorically as well as literally. Critics have registered their agitation against this kind of intimate interracial relationship as there has been no group or discussion in South Africa for this type of relationship and is strongly resisted. Thurston maintains, “A Sport of Nature challenges the reader to recognize racial differences as positive and interesting, as we do differences in hair and eye color, rather than to affect color-blindness” (110). The novel successfully highlights the individual difference, which brings the diversity of a culture to sight. The negative as well as positive power of racism provides the reader with an inviting glance of a culture that celebrates difference between various races. Sometimes diverse culture makes it tough to comprehend other’s point of view:

The supreme problem of culture is that of gaining possession of one’s transcendental self, of being at one and the same time the self of oneself. Thus it should not surprise us that there is an absence of feeling or complete understanding of others. Lacking a perfect comprehension of ourselves, we can never really hope to know others. (Gramsci 10)

Hillela visualizes a utopian ideology that is given to her by her lover, Whaila. The vision is of a time when there will be a free and accepted love between white and black, a time in which a black and a white can say that their child is “our colour” (227), a time in which the dream of a “rainbow-coloured family” (293) will be possible. Hillela is a girl with a broad exposure that appears from her repudiation to pay attention to the existing categories among people in the society, which is a bold facet of her hedonistic youth. She feels glad to have given birth to a black child, which is an indication of a clear political direction: she sees her perception of a black child as a gesture of her camaraderie with Whaila’s cause and a literal meaning of her interracial harmony. She lives in the world of utopia thinking that this is the reality, until Whaila’s elimination awakens her from her figment of the imagination. For Whaila this is an attractive fantasy but it does not start off with him. Hillela’s first announcement that their child should be of their complexion, Whaila’s answer is one of “colour” about this “creature made of love, without a label; that’s a freak” (227). Also this kind of foresight does not originate with aunt Pauline who
on getting the news of Hillela’s marriage with Whaila, says, “It solves nothing…. Feeling free to sleep with a black man doesn’t set him free” (236). Whaila’s comrades treated Hillela as a “white South African actually married to a black South African, she remained for her hosts at these same gatherings an embodiment of their political and ethical credo, non-racial unity against the oppression of one race” (248). However, Gordimer commemorates her farsightedness. The writer shows up through her work the human predicament the identity of humans, which is possible once the battle of race and class is won and the world becomes one for everyone.

During these years many neighboring countries of South Africa were making headway on their way to independence from the white rule, the voice of the black people was strongly curtailed by putting the activists in the prison. The apartheid government passed laws against such political activity like the Sabotage Act of 1962 and the Terrorism Act of 1967, which authorized it to protract detention of such activists without any trial. The Legislation Act of 1968 banned political parties based on multiracial lines but led to the creation of the Black Consciousness movement under the leadership of Steve Biko. This swing towards extremism in the political struggle against racial regime is brought out well in association with the main story in A Sport of Nature. The novel shows the Sharpeville unarmed protest, which led to killings of the innocent blacks by the white police in 1960 and created ‘intruder’ in the African National Congress:

I don’t want to be equal with Europeans. I want them to call us baas. I wish I can live till we rule, I will do the same to them: I will send the police to demand passes from whites. Their wives are going to wash the clothes for our wives. We don’t want to mix with whites, we left the African National Congress because we saw Europeans among us. We are fighting for the full rights of Africans. We do not fight to dance and sit with Europeans.- (73-74)

The African National Congress carried on its non-anti-white policy and called for a national convention prior to the declaration of South Africa a republic in 1961. But the white republic followed its old policy by not providing constitutional rights to the black majority. Whaila, who is the topmost Umkhonto official in the novel, admits that the
ANC is forced to fight the stubbornness of the government and its containment of the Defiance Campaign of the 1950s:

That’s the stage we reached after the Defiance Campaign. The realization that we are forces to fight. But it doesn’t make the campaign a failure. The campaign simply proved that there is no way but to fight, because the government doesn’t know how to respond to anything else. (233)

Whaila, who is an Umkhonto activist, carries on his anti-white activities in foreign countries in order to carry out sabotage missions in South Africa. When Hillela asks him about the target the group will strike, his answer is “Military installations, power stations - hard target” (241) and not the people of South Africa. But he maintains that if black people are continued to be killed and maltreated by the white government in the township, the ANC will also target the lives of the white people. Hillela tries to identity with the struggle but there is a shortcoming in her line of belief that she is living in a “time that hasn’t yet come” (233). She has duped herself by taking no notice of the realities of power that comes with the assassination of Whaila. She realizes that her rainbow family, “can’t be got away with, it’s cornered, it’s easily done away with in two shots” (232). There is a feeling of revenge in her; she understands that “the hand clasp belongs to tragedy, not grief…. A tragedy … is when a human being is destroyed engaging himself with events greater than personal relationships … tragedy is a sign that the struggle must go on” (215).

In Eastern Europe Hillela makes an attempt to devote herself to the weapons of liberation; in the United States she searches for help for those hurt by the liberation wars; and in Africa she looks for power. An important factor of the utopian desire in the novel is related to a multi-national concept of emerging brotherhood in Africa. Another facet is that the issue of racial variance does not present a rudimentary conclusion and bears in mind that Hillela’s sensuality may bring a credulous way out. However, her physical encounters, instead of providing an easy way to a cohesive politics, often cast unfavorable effects. At many points in the novel the protagonist is exposed as a symbol of powerful and positive force for the flouting of restrictive taboos, but many times the
opposite side of this force comes into light, she is an insignia of difference and inspires herself and others to a productive committed action.

Hillela’s second marriage to a black African general and president of OAU, soon to be successful president of an unidentified independent African country, conjures Gordimer’s Pan-African vision to which she sees the new nation of South Africa belonging. It also elicits Gordimer’s faith that by attaching with the forces of revolution the artist can play a functional role in the building of a new nation. For Gordimer, the white writer has to establish a new relation with the culture of a new community, non-racial but looked on with and led by blacks. She is determined to find her place in the history of South Africa. She claims that colour consciousness is an overwhelming feeling that needs to be overcome in order to bring stability in any country. She portrays Hillela’s colour consciousness as one that instead of creating a barrier unites her with the people of other colour. She is the only white person in the novel who is completely intermixed into the African community. Gordimer has shown in her works the politics of sensuality and power in South Africa, which are inextricably knotted. Through apartheid, the body becomes significant. She talks of:

[A] particular connection between sexuality, sensuality, and politics inside South Africa. Because, after all, what is apartheid all about? It’s about the body. It’s about physical differences. It’s about black skin, and it’s about woolly hair instead of straight, long blond hair, and black skin instead of white skin. The whole legal structure is based on the physical, so that the body becomes something supremely important. (Bazin and Seymour 304)

There is an endeavor to accept the unending brutality of political struggle, and to bring humanity with an acceptance through her relationship with Whaila: his indication of the requirement to include soft targets in his campaign, which in the beginning inspired Hillela’s concern for ordinary people but later admitted in her concern for the practicality of military means. But this transition is an uncomfortable one, both for Hillela and for the novel, as indicated by the presence of Reuel’s army, drawn out again, by Hillela. Her old friend Arnold notes both the change and the devotion, assessing that
“She was part of the preoccupation she once had disrupted so naturally” (276) and narrating others afterward that “she was the type to have become a terrorist, a hijacker…. It wasn’t that she was undisciplined; no discipline was demanding enough for her-” (277). She so immersed herself in the struggle that “No history of her really can be personal history, then; its ends were all apparently outside herself” (284-85). She condemns herself as she once condemned Pauline and Joe: “now I’m getting like them … I’m talking, talking” (282). She even tells her old friend Udi that she is not a bureaucrat, but has used bureaucracy. She expresses later, “I wanted to get rid of the people who came to the flat and shot Whaila … because all of them, they let it happen” (338). Nevertheless, she is deviated into an anxiety with the suffering caused by the wars, “now it’s soup powder I’ve been doling out…. When you see everything reduced to hunger … you only want to find something to stuff in those mouths. You lose all sense of what you wanted to do” (339). On her involvement with the bureaucracy Udi inquires: “what can that sort of thing achieve. It will be the big powers who’ll decide what happens to blacks. And the power of other black heads of state influencing the big powers. A waste, yes … it’s this that’s a waste of your life” (315). Her second husband, General Reuel explains to her, “They send us guns and soup powder, eh. Some get the guns. That’s the important thing, to be the side that gets the guns. You will never come to power on soup powder” (338).

As in all her novel, Gordimer is in this novel examines the nature of black and white communities and the procedure by which they come together. She records correlation between extensively scattered people of different races and classes. Another aspect of the novel is that there are no individual solutions in the complication of the South African situation; still, Hillela tries to produce a change in a palpably unfair society. It is not only a novel about war of freedom, but is the deeply moving story of characters injured by the absence of peace, both, physical and personal. For Thurston, “Hillela, however, becomes a newly imagined route to an emerging freedom only now possible by the progression of history” (113). All of Gordimer’s novels have a multifaceted meaning. Despite the laws against mixed marriages, “Selina Montgomery and Hillela Kgomani - personages in some race joke: there was this black woman married to a white man, and this white woman married to a black man” (256). Gordimer’s later
fiction is sensitive towards issues of race and identity in the South African world. It can be detected in the conversation between Whaila and Hillela regarding the colour of their baby in the novel:

The blackness was a glove…. Something God gave you to wear. Underneath, you must be white like me. - Or pale brownish, it’s my Portuguese blood. - White like me; because that’s what I was told, when I was being taught not to be prejudiced: underneath, they are all just like us. Nobody said we are just like you. - … If you are white, there, there’s always a skin missing. They never say it…. I wonder what colour the baby will come out, Whaila? -- What colour do you want? (226-27)

It is significant to note that the first happy relationship between a black man and a white woman occurs in this novel, *A Sport of Nature*. Her earlier novels have rendered the relationship between mixed couple as laden with variance. They can be seen as couples because of the connection between racism and oppression. The pairing of the black man and white woman is dissenting, since neither half of the pair has the supreme political power of the white man as “power is like freedom” (388). The consequences for black men in such relations were worse as they had to face imprisonment, exile, or even death, either inside or outside the legal system of the country. Cooper talks of Gordimer’s protagonist, Hillela:

It is interesting that it is still possible in the 1980s for a woman writer to create such a “heroine,” or, perhaps, it is only still possible in a situation like South Africa, where the priority issue that Gordimer is handling is that of race, and her primary concern is to illustrate the ways in which her new breed of white South African can love, serve and physically worship black men. (82)

Gordimer presents a vast range of social and political problems faced by the whites as well as the blacks in contemporary South Africa. She acquaints the reader with Hillela’s revolutionary asset as her capability, to be always on the move from place to place and work to work. Much to her politically involved aunt Pauline’s surprise, Hillela is the one able to “feel the tug of history” (83) and bring together various political events
in a beneficial way. She grows out of the impracticality of her first marriage into expediency of warfare. Her second husband, Reuel is kept in power by his army, but along the way to attain power he does not shrivel from compromise, “the mopping-up operations … included the looting of bars and brothels by some of his long deprived troops” (287). Hillela also makes related negotiation by exercising what was once termed as revolutionary necessity, in a new situation of power as one of three wives to Reuel. She invents an existence beyond the rainbow family. Though Hillela shows commitment to the obliterating of apartheid in South Africa, still her participation in the struggle is limited. Even Sasha carries on the struggle, but ultimately his story is eclipsed by Hillela’s efforts towards the political cause. She does not return to South Africa until after the revolution is won. Gordimer gets back to a utopian vision, and as the flag unfurls, Hillela is naturally reunited with Whaila:

It also may be true that a life is always moving-without being aware of this, or what the moment may be, and by a compass not available to others - towards a moment.

Cannons ejaculate from the castle.

It is noon.

Hillela is watching a flag slowly climb, still in its pupa folds, a crumpled wing emerging, and - now! - it writhes one last time and flares wide in the wind, is smoothed taut by the fist of the wind, the flag of Whaila’s country. (432)

Gordimer’s novel is fused with the yearning for a free South Africa. The tensions between the mixed race couples of Gordimer’s preceding novels are resolved in this novel. She terms Hillela’s exile:

On the bare boards of this no-place, no-time, she was an assertion of here and now in the provisionality of exile, whose inhabitants are strung between the rejected past and a future fashioned like a paper aeroplane out of manifestos and declarations. (230)

According to Brahimi, Hillela is like, “the newly independent African states with which, in fact, her story merges symbolically: it begins in 1961 and ends with the
ultimate victory, the proclamation of an independent South Africa” (145). Hillela being a white woman lives in the same manner as black African men do, with no purpose other than the struggle and its anticipated victory.

The title of the novel, A Sport of Nature indicates the racial intricacy that was widespread in South African society. Hillela and Whaila do not wish the identity of their children to be branded as coloured because they are a new variety and not a mutation in South African sense. Thurston states, “A Sport of Nature becomes Gordimer’s imaging of a new kind of culture based on holistic politics that include the politics of the body; it is the artist’s attempt to make whole the disintegrated consciousness of apartheid, to create a new integrated Africa consciousness” (111). As Hillela’s second husband, Reuel, put into words:

“It’s all part of my African-made-work, love-making, religion, politics, economics. We’ve taken all the things the world keeps in compartments, boxes, and brought them together. A new combination, that’s us. That’s why the world doesn’t understand. (337)

But the idealism, which Gordimer put forth in her novel, is confused with an ironic tone that determinedly gets into the novel; it breaks the consistency and generates competing interpretations. Reuel is described with an exaggeration that gives a hint of an emasculated irony, “The commanding shine that was always on his full face and majestic jowl used the dim theatrical lighting of the bar as a star performer attracts the following beam of a spotlight” (335). Irony abounds in this novel. Whites who still remain in South Africa after freedom are materialist Olga’s two sons, an international banker, and a wine connoisseur. They are part of the political throttlehold with whom Hillela’s husband and other politicians must affirm. Sasha is absent at independence celebration as his activist nature has landed him in jail.

There is a reference of the African myth of Qamata, the supreme Xhosa god in the novel when Hillela’s journalist boyfriend, Rey, is putting questions to a group of black activists. Qamata was linked to Poqo, a black organization associated with numerous revolts in the Trankei in the 1950s and 1960s; it’s preaching of violence against whites. A
prophecy was made by the prophet that the ancestors of African people would rise out of the sea to eradicate the whites completely, so to appease the ancestors the people started to slaughter their cattle. When no revival took place, the people turned on each other. Whaila is repeatedly colligated with the gods, “the disguised god from the sea” (198) and the “obsidian god from the waves” (273), but he is also viewed as the nineteenth century catastrophe by his emergence from the sea. This conflict is further seen in the real life of African hero, Nkrumah. Despite his beneficial role in promoting black economic and political power in Africa, he is devastated by the very people who once proclaimed him a god. Gordimer tries to destabilize power by exposing its erratic and wavering nature. There is uncertainty of the narrator in the novel, which rests in contrast to other voices. One of such voices is that of Sasha, coming out of his letters to Hillela, though they never attain their destination. His letters contain an historical overview of the whites:

There has been madness since the beginning, in the whites. Our great grandfather Hillel was in it from the moment he came up from the steerage deck in Cape Town harbor…. It’s in the blood you and I share. Since the beginning. Whites couldn’t have done what they’ve done, otherwise. Madness has appeared among blacks in the final stage of repression. It is, in fact, the unrecognized last act of repression, transferred to them to enact upon themselves. It is the horrible end of all whites have done. (409)

But, “the brutal reality of oppression and deprivation, Hillela understands, destroys the dignity of the African family” (Head 149). The optimistic unity and brotherhood of Africa, which was Whaila’s dream, gets a surface in Reuel’s expression to a new holistic politics. This is a new political group, the significance of a continent rather than a single state. Hillela’s aunt Pauline, questions the white man’s attitude towards black life in South Africa where “whites are the ones with property-it’s something blacks don’t have” (234). When her daughter, Carole, come home in tears because one of the white girls at school reprimands a black waiter who serves lunch in school cafeteria, “don’t lean your smelly arm over my face”, Pauline speaks:
Exactly! Idiots we’ve been. No possibility to buy your way out of what this country is. So why pay? Racism is free. Send them to a government school, let them face it as it’s written in your glorious rule of law, canonized by the church, a kaffir is a kaffir, God Save White South Africa. (23)


There is an everlasting channel of communication in A Sport of Nature on the question of power and its operation, which is recorded mainly through the figure of General Reuel who tries to gain righteous ends for his country through various means. His view of power is that “you get there with guns and you stay there with money” (338). Infact, when he becomes president, he and Hillela help the South African liberation movement by providing safe houses to the activists. With the arrival of the South African revolution the president “was part of the negotiations that continued outside the country concurrently with undeclared civil war there” (426) and he proved to be useful adviser to the black liberation leaders in their compromise with the corporations. In many ways, he can be “regarded as a brother who has been part of the South African liberation struggle in accordance with the old Pan-African ideal” (427). By coming in contact with Reuel, Hillela has found a way to apply influence in the South African power game while leaving it to blacks to carry on the revolution and decide the future of South Africa. Her contribution as a white is by large a phenomenal one as compared to any other white in the novel. In the opening of the novel Hillela gives a signal of rootlessness when she changes her name, with both names having no meaning for her. When the president gives her an Igbo version of his name, there is a completion in her itinerant life. Aunt Olga identifies her in the newspaper only by her face, as there is nothing familiar left in her
name. Gordimer considers such peripatetic as a necessary condition in order to be able to give up whiteness.

Gordimer praises Hillela’s flexibility and survival instincts. She makes use of every opportunity. The novelist has also placed emphasis on Hillela’s Jewish background and the Holocaust survivors. There is a connection between the Holocaust and the condition of South Africa. Hillela is adept at the manipulation of limited sources of power and use herself to gain power. Her physical attractiveness is used in getting aid for Africa, “Lust is the best aid raiser” (309). Subsequently, it is helpful in establishing her association with the General. Towards the close of the novel, Gordimer depicts the release of Mandela and other political prisoners, the lifting of ban on various opposition political parties, which included the ANC, which for a long period was regarded as a terrorist organization. An open dialogue took place between the government and its erstwhile enemies on the ending of apartheid and the establishment of a new South Africa. A Sport of Nature offers a far-reaching view of South African political history from the commencement of apartheid to its future course of action. With the coming of black majority rule in South Africa, the history of the apartheid era is entwined with the story of personal torment of families. A reader witnesses the many-sided life of Johannesburg: the rich who don’t know much about the black community, those sympathetic to them live in apprehension and fright, the family relations between the white boss and black servants; the prisons. Hillela, who grows and matures in the novel, visits many countries that share South Africa’s territories. There are no individual solutions in the complication of the South African situation.

Though growing into tough political conditions, Hillela remains unreserved by the family and the cultural model of her native state, recreating a new image at every turn and blows off successive lives and moves ahead. In the midst of the harshness rampant in South Africa, individual love is perceived as egotistical, while love between siblings becomes an idea beleaguered by sophistry. In South Africa the laws that govern the lives of Africans are based on the body and therefore have to be wrestled through the body. Leading a life of displacement, Hillela promptly learns to move to consecutive postings for political reasons. Whaila becomes her lover and brother to her in the great cause for
the nation, “She might be white, but she was the right wife for a revolutionary” (239). Whaila comprehends imperialism in familial terms as originating with foreign national economies. Hillela believes, the only love that matters the most is the one owed to the poor African crowd. Her obligation towards African nationalism develops from hard-bitten perception of the economic picture of the country. There is an embedded connection with a children’s revolt of a specific political nature and with the image of whites as killers of innocent people in present day South Africa which can be observed clearly through the fate of Sasha, Hillela’s counterpart in the freedom struggle who remains trapped in the terrible House of Atreus of his South African family.

The novel underscores the ambiguous nature of its characters. Pauline, a reformist, gives shelter to black Alpheus, but does not support his marriage and children. For all her liberalism, Pauline’s style of maintaining cultural house reflects her status quo. She finds political acceptance again by establishing a committee of detainees’ parents. Gordimer while creating Hillela imagines a new white person who is accomplished enough to break the barricade of apartheid and believes that underground and exile would decide in a paper the constitutional manner upon the dismantling of apartheid. Utopian inter-racial union is seen in A Sport of Nature as creating a new apartheid free country. The action of the novel is set in the era when “Killing is killing. Violence is pain and death” (88) on the political sphere of South Africa. Hillela, the central figure in the novel remains unaffected by her past, lives completely in the present, and tries to engage herself in the political activities around her. It is appealing to see that how this flawed woman acquires her chivalrous stature, dealing with the world with a daring poise. Incest, infidelity, and even bliss have not affected her. She gives complete attention to political matters. There is a sharp criticism of President Nkrumah’s economic policies in the novel, and the disasters associated with such policies as there is “no choice between an army coup and complete anarchy” (241). Hillela, “felt a strange dissolution; she suddenly understood fear, fear of the plans, orders, missions, the suppressed conflicts” (242) which shook her ambition of serving the nation.

The blacks in Africa have been subjected to violence by the police and white people instead of reacting to this brutality have preferred to remain away from it,
although the beatings and killings of the innocent people have been done on their behalf, they have let it to happen for so many years and “one day the blacks will have to carry the struggle into white areas. It’s inevitable. The violence came from there. Violence will hit back there” (263). Several women and their small children are forced to move to other places because of chaotic atmosphere of the country. It is the big powers that have decided the fate of the blacks in the country and “it’ll take another generation to make up what was destroyed and provided for all the people who have come to the towns” (290). The longer the revolution stays in a country there is more of danger that it turns out to be a bourgeois revolution. States have taken over banks and capitalist industry.

Hillela is pulled into politics through an assortment of events and connections, first as a follower and later on as a full-fledged revolutionary. Her faithfulness towards politics is serious and unpretentious. Raised in a racist society, she does not suffer from stereotype racial feeling and does not cuddle any such dogma. Her ideology is tremendously practical. At every stage in the story she remains a mysterious character. She creates a rebellious world around her where apartheid has certainly no power over her. *A Sport of Nature* is a mature achievement of once politically distant writer. Through this novel Gordimer has evolved and exultantly come of age, like her heroine Hillela. In this novel, the writer has recorded her rational discourse along with a dexterous construction of plot and character. Hillela starts as a charismatic stray and ends up as the remarkable wife of a heroic African president. She accepts the political stature of her husband and becomes an eyewitness to the declaration of the new order.

Gordimer never reveals a cross-racial relationship, which has the audacity to withstand the pressures of apartheid. Hillela and Whaila’s relationship also got shattered in the political struggle and became a passing phase. For Gordimer and her characters in a number of novels, the top priority is the revolution. She has also faced the problem of writing about her country and its history and politics. She underscores the stalemated political attitudes of her South African countrymen. She seeks to bring a change through reason against a strong sense of discrimination, which surrounds the nation. Like Hillela, Gordimer is also an ideal example of political activism and is always on the move. Head rightly says:
The novel, as a whole, embodies a self-conscious recognition of the importance of this strategy: the ambivalence between celebration and irony, which is irreducible, is the result of Gordimer’s simultaneous delineation of an idealized African politics and its inevitable points of compromise; and this ambivalence is articulated through the novel’s re-evaluation of the previous novels, a re-evaluation which both celebrates the ideological orientation, and ironizes the shortcomings of the earlier work. (150)

The forthcoming amendment in power in the late 1980s converged Gordimer’s attention on the formation of a new nation. The novel takes on a political self-consciousness that distances the reader from its narrative and brings him close to the problems of a turbulent nation struggling to create its new identity. Her writings are a mirror to the problems of South Africa. As a writer she feels that, “It’s a political and a professional and artistic responsibility” (Bazin and Seymour 313). Wade reacts that A Sport of Nature has “puzzled and perturbed its readers perhaps more than any other of Gordimer’s works since the 1950s” (124). In both the marriages of Hillela, the bond of marriage is offered as liberating. Wade feels a sense of change in A Sport of Nature as “the transcendent marriage; the successful use of power; and realization of the most cherished telos, the liberation of South Africa” (128). Wade wraps up by declaring “what Gordimer brings to consciousness is the black component in white identity” (128-29). He sees A Sport of Nature as “answering to the way in which black politics have re-formed white” (134). With this novel Gordimer’s work became more politicized, more connected with the impression of a scrupulous transformation in South Africa. Her fiction questions the vibrancy of political development.