

RACISM AND RESISTANCE IN NADINE GORDIMER'S *BURGER'S DAUGHTER*

Dr Hina Tahir

Designation: Assistant Professor, Department of English, Maulana Azad National Urdu University, Arts and Science College, Satellite Campus, Budgam. Jammu & Kashmir. India.

Affiliation: University of Religions and Denominations, Pardisan, Iran

Email: hinatahir2@gmail.com

Address: Dr Hina Tahir, MANUU, Arts and Science College, Near KSERT College, Upper Humhamma, Jammu & Kashmir. India, 190021

Abstract

History is witness to the fact how racism was practiced in the world and the resistance of people towards this ideology. Race and racism deprived people of their rights and this ideology was very inhumane. In South Africa, the system of apartheid was very strong and the forces that led to its development as well as the efforts of the people whose sacrifices led to its downfall. Resistance from various fronts have changed the conditions of people who faced the brutal race laws. However, its legacy is evident in the conditions of these people. Diseases, poverty and illiteracy are all the living legacies of racism. Literature was a tool to protest the inequality and discrimination under the apartheid. This paper analyses Nadine Gordimer's *Burger's Daughter* which was written in 1979, a time when the Black Consciousness Movement put the blacks in front, deciding their own futures and fighting their own problems. Gordimer's novel shows the involvement of the white South Africans who fought against the brutal race laws along the blacks.

Burger's Daughter (1979) was Nadine Gordimer's response to one of the important incidents in the history of South Africa. On 16 June, 1976 thousands of school children gathered in Soweto to protest against the enforced use of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in black schools. Although the protests were peacefully conducted, by the end of the meeting two children were shot dead by police. With this an unexpected resistance burst with extraordinary intensity in South Africa which came to be known as the Soweto Revolt. It was an episode of cultural and political resistance. It was not only the issue of use of Afrikaans but the assertion of black dignity and identity as well. Hence, Soweto gave rise to the 'Black Consciousness Ethos' and earned a central place in the history of South Africa's resistance. In *The Novels of Nadine Gordimer: History From Inside*, Stephen Clingman considers:

It was... pre-eminently, a revolt of children. For the school children consciously saw their assertion as being not only against the white state, but also against their parents whom they felt had been passive for too long. This was a revolt that started in schools, spread through schools and sometimes reached the universities, but in which the youth led, and their elders, if anything, followed

(180).

One of the striking features of the Soweto revolt is that it was the revolt of children against parents. This happened in Soweto in 1976 and this is what Rosa Burger, the white protagonist of *Burger's Daughter* goes through in relation to her father, Lionel Burger.

Burger's Daughter is about the white anti-apartheid activists in South Africa who seek to overthrow the racist regime. The novel follows the life of Rosa Burger as she comes to terms with her father's legacy as an activist in the South African Communist Party (SACP) over a course of thirty years. The perspective shifts between Rosa Burger's interior monologue (directed towards Lionel Burger or her friend Conrad) and the omniscient narrator. The omniscient narrator, according to Nadine Gordimer reflects:

Rosa's conscious analysis, her reasoning approach to her life and this country, and (...) my exploration as a writer of what she doesn't know even when she thinks she's finding out (Bazin and Seymour 179).

The novel is rooted in the history of anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa. In her interview with the *Academy of Achievement* Gordimer said that the idea of *Burger's Daughter* had been with her for a long time and that she was fascinated by the role of "white hard-core leftists" in South Africa. She returns to the question, "Whether whites can participate in the future it predicts" (Clingman 171). She attempts to assess whether there can be a role for whites in South Africa after Soweto. The novel suggests new developments in Gordimer's consciousness of history. It is concerned with the 'moment of revolution' in South Africa and its effect on the subjects. Being herself involved in the struggle and politics; Gordimer knew many of the activists. She was inspired by the work of Afrikaner advocate and communist Bram Fischer who was Mandela's treason trial lawyer. For the first time Gordimer concerns herself with an obviously recognisable public figure. Although she never said that *Burger's Daughter* is about Bram Fischer, Per Wastberg in "Nadine Gordimer and the South African Experience" writes about Gordimer's description of the novel as "a coded homage" to him (Retrieved on 20 Nov 2012 <<http://www.nobelprize.org/nobelprizes/literature/laureates/1991/gordimerarticle.html>>).

In the Introduction to *Nadine Gordimer's Burger's Daughter: A Casebook*, Judie Newman writes that in South African apartheid era censorship was a dominant feature. She argues that the censorship bureau was active in every province of South Africa and that only three censors were required to agree in order to ban a book. The judges had no literary qualifications but they were loyal to the ruling racist regime and were paid for their services. Books were sometimes banned for sale and distribution but not for possession. However, some documents were banned for possession as well. This was the case with the Soweto Students Representative Council handbill that Gordimer had included in *Burger's Daughter*. As a result of this the possession of *Burger's Daughter* was also a criminal offense. Although *Burger's Daughter* could not be published in South Africa, it was published abroad and there were protests from John Fowles, Heinrich Böll and others for banning the book which created a storm of negative international press coverage. Gordimer published a text *What Happened to Burger's Daughter or How South African Censorship Works* on the history of the banning of *Burger's Daughter*. In the text Gordimer reproduces the comments of the Publications Control Board on the reasons for banning the novel and rebuts them systematically. Subsequently, she participated in an active protest and resistance by answering to the Publication Board. On a range of grounds specified in the Publications Act of 1974, *Burger's Daughter* was banned for import and distribution in South

Africa. This included propagating communist opinions, indecency and offensiveness to public morals and religious feelings and convictions of some people in South Africa. The novel was also banned for being prejudicial to the safety of state, general welfare and peace. In *What Happened to Burger's Daughter*, Gordimer writes that the book was banned for creating “a psychosis of revolution and making several unbridled attacks against the authority entrusted with the maintenance of law and order and safety of state” (6-14).

A number of prominent and literary authors including Paul Theroux, John Fowles as well as the Associations of American Publishers protested against banning *Burger's Daughter*. With the result the South African government lifted the ban after about six months. In her interview with Jannika Hurwitt in 1979 and 1980 Gordimer herself attributed the unbanning of the book to her international stature (Bazin and Seymour 142). Although she was pleased that this, “established something of a precedent for other writers” (141-2), she voiced her objection to the unbanning. In “Threading a Righteous Path Between Inwardness and Activism” Adam Kirsch writes that Gordimer objected the unbanning because she felt that the government was placing her with ‘special treatment’ and she believed that the same thing would not have happened had she been a black author (Retrieved on 24 Nov 2012 <<http://www.hughbeam.com/doc/1p1-182849497.html>>).

After unsuccessfully challenging the banning order, Gordimer published a pamphlet in Johannesburg in 1980 entitled *What Happened to Burger's Daughter*. She was offered help by an African lecturer at the University of the Witwatersrand who had been publishing anti-apartheid literature. He offered help to print the booklet that was sent to bookshops to be given free to customers free to avoid attention of the authorities.

Although the Black Consciousness Movement was not without its success, it has often been criticized. Baruch Hirson in *Year of Fire, Year of Ash - The Soweto Revolt: Roots of Revolution* criticizes the Black Consciousness Movement in terms of its ideology. He believes that the organization failed to generalize the revolt more widely in society, especially by linking it with workers. However, in *Black Politics in South Africa Since 1945*, Tom Lodge suggests that the ‘sheer emotional power’ of Black Consciousness should not be underestimated as an organising force of its own kind. Clingman puts forth that the black children were fearless when they confronted the police but believes that the leadership was not ‘equipped’ to deal with wider issues of political organisation. The country wide revolt led to death of hundreds of people, most of them school children and wounded thousands of people. Amongst those who died, the death of Black Consciousness leader Steve Biko in jail led to massive protests.

One of the striking features of the Soweto Revolt is that it was the revolt of children against parents. This happened in Soweto in 1976 and this is what Rosa Burger, the white protagonist of *Burger's Daughter* goes through in relation to her father, Lionel Burger. The Soweto Revolt was not only a threat to the official white supremacy; it also challenged the white liberalism and radicalism. As Clingman points out:

If Black Consciousness was the challenge in theory, then the Soweto was the challenge in practice... it was a challenge not just to liberalism but also to white radicalism. Black children were being shot while white liberals and radicals could at most only look on in horror. Now mountains of words spoken in the past could only seem sickeningly shameful in the view of the blood of children running in the streets. If anything seemed to demonstrate the irrelevance of white dissidents on the periphery of the democratic struggle, then that was the Soweto Revolt (182).

Gordimer was affected by these incidents in the history of anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa. In *Burger's Daughter* she attempted to deal with this psycho-historical problem. It was a time when white action was called into question and Gordimer tries to find out how such action can be revived. As such, Black Consciousness is central to *Burger's Daughter*. The novel is about the white anti-apartheid activists in South Africa who seek to overthrow the racist regime/government. The novel follows the life of Rosa Burger as she comes to terms with her father's legacy as an activist in the South African Communist Party (SACP) - over a course of thirty years. The perspective shifts between Rosa's interior monologue (directly towards her father Lionel or her friend Conrad) and the omniscient narrator. Just as Rosa Burger tries to find her place as a white in the anti-apartheid liberation movement, so does Gordimer.

I do believe that when we have got beyond the apartheid situation - there's a tremendous problem for whites, because unless you put down cultural roots, unless whites are allowed in by blacks, and unless we can make out a case for our being accepted and we can forge a common culture together, whites are going to be marginal (ibid 168-69).

The novel is rooted in the history of anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa. In the novel Gordimer returns to the question whether there can be a role for whites in South Africa after Soweto. The novel suggests new developments in Gordimer's consciousness of history. It is concerned with the 'moment of revolution' in South Africa. Being herself involved in the struggle and politics; Gordimer knew many of the activists. She was inspired by the work of Afrikaaner advocate and communist, Bram Fisher who was Mandela's treason trial lawyer. For the first time she concerns herself with an obviously recognisable public figure. In the novel Rosa Burger's career is measured out in relation to that of her father. Lionel Burger was born an Afrikaaner who betrayed his people and became a member of South African Communist Party in the late 1920s. Lionel Burger was an active member of the campaigns of 1940s and 50s and remained active when the party dissolved itself in the face of Suppression of Communism Act. He was captured in the mid-1960s and sentenced to life imprisonment. He died in jail in early 1970s. His fictional character, as such coincides with many of people involved in revolutionary activities in South Africa. Although Lionel Burger's character bears a strong resemblance with the real-life figure of Bram Fisher, *Burger's Daughter* is not about Lionel Burger himself but about his daughter Rosa Burger. Gordimer is primarily concerned with the predicament facing the inheritors of revolutionary tradition in South Africa. In her interview with Academy of Achievement, Gordimer said that being friends with many of the activist families she knew that their children are "politically groomed" for the struggle and that "the struggle came first" and they came second (Retrieved on 20 Nov 2012 <<http://www.achievement.org/autodoc/page/gorlint-1>>). Hence, one of the major themes of *Burger's Daughter* concerns a challenge to the whole idea of political and historical commitment.

In an interview with Jannika Hurwitt Gordimer said that *Burger's Daughter* is more than just a story about white communists in South Africa. It's about "commitment" and what she as a writer does to "make sense of life" (Bazin and Seymour 140). During the 1991 Nobel Prize Award Ceremony Stieve Allen in his speech cited *Burger's Daughter* as one of Gordimer's novels in which "thought and impressions... are called forth" (Retrieved on 24 Nov 2012. <<http://www.achievement.org/nobel-prizes/literature/laurets/1991/presentation-speech.html>>). In *Burger's Daughter* Gordimer puts forth a racially divided society in which well-meaning whites unexpectedly experience the other side of black life. Rosa

Burger's role is imprinted on her from a young age by her activist parents as she grows up in her father's political legacy. While Lionel Burger was able to work with black activists in the African National Congress, Rosa Burger discovers that with the rise of Black Consciousness Movement (in the mid-1960s) many blacks view whites as irrelevant in their struggle for liberation. Black Consciousness posed the question of authenticity for whites who were politically involved in the struggle. The proponents of the movement argued that despite their outward protestations - whites participated in deep rooted patterns of white supremacy. *Burger's Daughter* is the fictional way of working out the same problem. Stephen Clingman in *The Novels of Nadine Gordimer: History From Inside* writes:

The only way in which the novel, and Rosa as a character, can avoid the accusation of even a subconscious participation in the supremacist syndrome is to internalize the accusation by first displaying it, then analysing and eradicating it (176).

Rosa Burger realises that whites are not always welcome in anti-apartheid liberation movements. She faces the challenge of political commitment and is in revolt against her historical heritage and the demands of her current situation. She rejects the ideology of the Communist Party as well as her father's legacy that made her to deny her own individuality in favour of political needs. She opts for a private life which determines her to go to Europe and leave the revolutionary struggle and the problems that accompany it. Her aim is to learn to 'defect' from her father and the historical legacy that he has handed over to her. She believes that Lionel Burger's ideology is inadequate to cope with the 'complexities of existence' in South Africa. This becomes clear in two episodes in the novel. The first occurs at lunch time in Johannesburg where a hobo sitting on one of the benches near Rosa Burger in a park dies suddenly. This to Rosa Burger signifies the blunt realities of life and death which are beyond the scope of political framework. The second occurs when Rosa Burger is returning from Soweto to Johannesburg. She comes across a black man, violent and drunken repeatedly whipping a donkey that can no longer pull a cart in which a woman and a child are sitting. This to Rosa Burger is the incarnation of cruelty and despair. This appears as 'the sum of suffering' and she feels helpless to act to it. She reflects:

I didn't do anything. I let him beat the donkey. The man was a black. So a kind of vanity counted for more than feeling; I couldn't bear to see myself - her - Rosa Burger - as one of those whites who can care more for animals than people. Since I've been free I'm free to become one (Gordimer 212).

The donkey whipping scene acts as a final thing that prompted her to leave her country. She defected from politics to live out her own life. She tells her friend, Conrad that, "After the donkey I couldn't stop myself. I don't know how to live in Lionel's country" (213). As such, she turns her back to all that her father worked for and leaves her country. Rosa Burger's decision to rebel against her dead father is a bold step. She leaves South Africa and goes to Katya, her father's first wife in France. As Gordimer says, "it seems... there is nowhere else to go... Rosa thought to learn from Katya, how to defect? Because Katya has 'defected' from Lionel Burger" (Bazin and Seymour 172). However, it is in London that Rosa Burger confronts Black Consciousness in a most direct way. At a party given in honour of some Frelimo representatives she comes across Bassie, a black boy who had once been like a brother to her. Bassie refuses to acknowledge her at the party. Nonetheless, later that night he tells Rosa Burger that he refused to recognise her only out of vengeance.

He calls her after she has gone for sleep and tells her that he is no longer her Bassie but Zwelinzima Vulindlela “Zwel-in-zima. That’s my name. ‘Suffering land? The name that my father gave me” (Gordimer 326). Zwelinzima Vulindlela bitterly rejects the false brotherhood he had with Rosa Burger as well as Lionel Burger’s paternalism. He believes both set him away from his own people and he feels the name he was given says it all – ‘Bassie - Little Boss’. He tells Rosa Burger that hundreds of black men, including his own father have died in jail and their names and heroism have been forgotten and people like Lionel Burger get the glory. He states:

Lionel Burger, Lionel Burger, Lionel Burger - Everyone in the world must be told what a great hero he was and how much he suffered for blacks. Everyone must cry over him and show his life on television and write in the papers. Listen, there are dozens of our fathers sick and dying like dogs... Getting old and dying in prison. Killed in prison. It’s nothing I know plenty blacks like Burger. It’s nothing, it’s us, we must be used to it, it’s not going to show on English television (Gordimer 328).

Zwelinzima Vulindlela dismisses every relation that he had with Rosa Burger and her family. He accuses her of being one of those whites who kill blacks. “Why do you think you should be different from all the other whites who’ve been shifting on us ever since they came?” (330). As Zwelinzima bids goodbye to Rosa Burger she feels sick, vomiting out everything she had consumed at the party with anger and shame. This scene according to Clingman has powerful significance in the South African context. He points out:

Here the accusations of Black Consciousness are clearly hitting home. Actions taken with best of intentions and out of genuine care are rejected as compromised and hypocritical. If a previous generation of whites devoted their best energies and talents to the liberation struggle, they should not expect any gratitude. The allegorical setting of the multi-racial ‘family’ gives a perfect and exact sense of earlier assumptions of inter-racial harmony and solidarity that were now being ripped apart, as well as the intimate violence aroused by the passions surrounding Black Consciousness (184).

Although Rosa Burger and Zwelinzima Vulindlela share the same political legacy, they are divided by the insights of Black Consciousness which Rosa Burger seems to have proved in her ‘defection’ from the struggle. After the phone call from her brother, she returns to South Africa and takes up physiotherapy work at a hospital in Soweto. She is overtaken by the events of 1976 and becomes involved in undisclosed work in the underground. She is detained for this under the Terrorism Act and is confined in the same way as that of her father. At the end of the novel Rosa Burger again becomes ‘Burger’s Daughter’ and accepts her father’s legacy. In her bitter recriminatory encounter with her long-lost black brother where they take up their assigned white-black roles, she realises that her happiness lies in South Africa. She finds it for herself as Rosa Burger by questioning the mores of her family tradition before accepting it. Commitment by compulsion gives place to commitment by choice. It is significant that it is the aggressive and resentful black voice of her brother which challenges her white conscience and rids her of ‘fears and complacency’ which had hampered her earlier. As Clingman puts forth:

Black Consciousness forces a white reassessment, but also

provokes a new dedication... The direct challenge that Zwelinzima has levelled determines Rosa to return to South Africa to renew the social commitment her father left off (184-85).

Gordimer's faith in blacks and hope for whites comes out strongly in the novel. She is not endorsing the old question of what the whites are going to do about the blacks. She is fixed on "the hopeful question of how to set about letting the whole thing go and living together" (Parker 14). It requires lot of efforts on the part of whites to give up their privileges and blacks their obsession with black identity. This obsession with black identity is reflected when at a public place Dhladhla, a student and teacher at black university emphasizes:

White, not blacks, are ultimately responsible for everything
Blacks suffer and hate, even at the hands of their own people;
a white must accept this if he concedes any responsibility at all.
If he feels guilty, he is a liberal; in that house where I grew up
there was no guilt because it was believed it was as a ruling class
and not a colour that whites assumed responsibility. It wasn't
something bleached into the flesh (Gordimer 159-160).

In South Africa everything is to be earned. Lionel Burger dedicated his life to the black cause and earned for himself the right to belong to South Africa. Gordimer presents an honest and unprejudiced stance. As Toni Morrison observes that Gordimer writes in a way only a few writers have been able to write.

It is not patronizing, nor romanticizing, it is the way they should be written about
(qtd. in Clark 82).

In her essay "Relocating the South African White: Gordimer's Commitment", Radha Rao holds that in her yearning for a multi-racial society for South Africa Gordimer explores a possibility of:

Whites listening and blacks speaking... She is fulfilling her
cultural task of showing that resistance to white domination
comes not only from blacks but from whites as well. Both are
finding ways of working beyond separatism to renewed vision
of a culture unfragmented by apartheid (Vijayasree et al. 102).

Burger's Daughter is a powerful testimony of the fortitude of the people who fought racism and oppression in South Africa. It is an exploration of the challenges that they face. In 1920s Rosa Burger's father, Lionel Burger realised the "terrifying contradiction" that:

White people... worship the God of Justice and practise
discrimination on the grounds of the colour of skin; profess
the compassion of the son of Man, and deny the humanity
of the black people they live among (Gordimer 19).

This contradiction splits the foundations of Lionel Burger's life and leads him to embrace Marxism and devote his life to "the pursuit of the end to racialism and injustice" (20). His daughter Rosa Burger attributes her loss of freedom as a child and a young girl to her parents, especially her mother. The novel's opening scene reveals Rosa Burger's desire to express herself to her mother even when she fulfils the political responsibilities given

to her. As she waits outside the prison, "carrying blanket... and a hot-water bottle for her mother" (6) with a concealed message indicating that her father has not yet been detained, Rosa makes a small gesture to express her private self. However, her mother's preoccupation with the communist struggle leaves her unconcerned about her daughter's needs. She requires Rosa Burger to pose as the fiancée of a detained comrade, Noel de Witt, so that she will be allowed visitor's privileges and she can carry messages in her parent's cause. As she reflects later, "Those were my love letters. Those visits were my great wild times" (65).

The communist ideals and the associated discipline that comforted the resolve of young South African revolutionaries did not bring the expected social changes. As such, after her parents' death, Rosa Burger's duty and destiny is to 'take up the torch' and follow the footsteps of her parents despite all the dangers. For Lionel Burger and his family revolution meant fighting without fear the racist ideology and the legislation that prevented political, social or economic change. Their ultimate aim was to bring fundamental changes to the power structures in the country. Rosa Burger was brought up in a family where blacks and whites connected without reservations, where "political activities and attitudes... came from the inside outwards", where "there was nothing between this skin and that... between the white man's word and his deed", where the blacks and whites were "spluttering the same water together in the swimming pool, going to prison after the same indictment" (Gordimer 171). This was contrary to the government segregation laws. As Rosa Burger's parents violated the Act that banned South African Communist Party and its ideology, they were imprisoned for extended periods leaving her with heavy responsibility to play her part in operations and take care of people sent to prison. After her father's death the house has to be sold and the plate with Dr Burger's name removed. As she talks with a friend outside the house, she is aware of a small change within: "The telephone had stopped ringing in the house. Rosa knew by some faint lack of distraction in her ears. Somebody living there now picked it up" (40). She is intensely proud of her father and his revolution, yet she desperately longs to cut loose from both. After her father's death she feels she is free. This revelation registers "a kind of discovery that makes one go dead-cold and wary. What does one do with such knowledge?" (58). She questions herself. She experiences a kind of envy for her conventional, Afrikaner farmer cousins when she points out:

My double given name contained... the claim of MARIE BURGER and her descendants to that order of life, secure in the sanctions of family, church, law - and all these contained in the ultimate sanction of colour, that was maintained without question on the domain, dorp and farm, where she lay. *Peace. Land. Bread.* They had these for themselves.

Even animals have the instinct to turn from suffering. The sense to run away. Perhaps it was an illness not to be able to live one's life the way they did... with justice defined in terms of respect for property, innocence defended in their children's privileges, love in their procreation, and care only for each other. A sickness not to be able to ignore that condition of a healthy, ordinary life: other people's suffering (Gordimer 69).

That 'sickness' of not being able to ignore other people's suffering is something that she cannot escape and yet Rosa Burger escapes physically from South Africa. Certain incidents determine her departure (described earlier). But for Rosa Burger it is not easy to leave her country. Her legacy makes it difficult to manage a passport. She struggles for getting it as the government denies her such freedom along with the

freedom to work in Tanzania and other places. Only after Brandt Vermeulen, a cosmopolitan Afrikaner with influential government connection, helps her (Rosa), she is able to leave her country on the condition that she would keep away from expatriate political activities. Rosa Burger arrives in France and reunites with her father's first wife - Katya. She has good time in France with the 'pleasant' people. Some of them give themselves political airs but Rosa Burger believes they do not know politics the way South Africans know. For example, in her meeting with Bernard Chabalier, Rosa Burger finds that he has a superficial knowledge of people's sufferings. He had once "signed an Amnesty International petition for the release of an ageing and ill South African revolutionary leader, Lionel Burger" (283) and there had been a suggestion that he should be in the anti-apartheid committee in Paris. However, Rosa Burger is of the opinion that:

You didn't betray anybody - "Oppress" "Revolt". "Betray". He used the big words as people do without knowing what they stand for (285).

After meeting Bernard Chabalier she discovers that he is a self-centred elite whose intellectual pursuits are solely governed by greed and worldly preoccupations. Rosa Burger listens to political arguments at various gatherings and as time passes she realises that the freedom and opportunities that France offers are nothing but 'paradise invente' that is an imaginary paradise that erases time and life's asperities and abandons people in a no man's land, bereft of a past and with no future. Rosa came to France to distance herself from her father's legacy but it dawns on her that "No one can defect" (ibid 343). Recoiling in horror from her own insults to Bassie, Rosa Burger decides to return to South Africa, to the revolution, and so to the prison without any expectation of success. She says:

I don't know the ideology.
It's about suffering.
How to end suffering? (332).

When she returns back to South Africa none of the problems are solved. She is still Lionel Burger's daughter; anti-apartheid activists are still being arrested and imprisoned and a number of black youths are challenging the racist regime and are retaliated with violent responses enflaming the situation. Blacks are increasingly dismissive of whites, irrespective of their political engagement and many rally the idea "We are one kind. Black... we don't need anyone else... We don't know about class interests" (127). However, unlike before Rosa Burger knows why she is back and she knows what she has to do to give meaning to her life and also what it means to be in charge of one's destiny and to assume one's origins. She carries on, in her own way, the struggle to which Lionel Burger dedicated his life. She chooses her profession, working with crippled children and holds that:

I am teaching them to walk again at Baragwanath Hospital.
They put one foot before the other" (344).

Rosa Burger realizes her responsibility towards her country and she takes up the struggle in her own way. John Cooke in "Leaving the Mothers House" points out:

In this calling she has found a means of alleviating the paralysis she had felt as a child under her parent's demands. She can act when faced with the inexplicable suffering of crippled and wounded children. One can be sure she would not run from a dead man in park or a tormented donkey

(Newman 95).

This is applicable to present day South Africa as well. Even after the apartheid era is over, it has left deep scars on the people's lives. Most of the problems are related to illiteracy, under development, health, etc. and South Africans themselves have to take their responsibilities in order to cope with these problems and progress in today's world. They cannot afford to opt out.

Burger's Daughter offers a history of the apartheid era in South Africa, but it also raises certain issues. Rosa Burger's personal struggle to come to terms with her father's legacy is one of them. The political and humanitarian preoccupations of the Burger's house neither acknowledged nor explained the mystery of life and death beyond the revolution. Rosa Burger is not able to find answers in her parents' convictions and political engagements and leaves the country like some friends who have chosen to do so. "We have to forget about them... It's not our affair. I'm not my father, ay" (Gordimer 243). Rosa Burger also challenges her legacy but discovers that although people cannot be sure of future, they can give a sense to their existence and link the meaning of past and future. People are short lived with no future. Lionel Burger's choice of Marxism and revolution to fight the evils was not predetermined but an answer to black oppression and injustice that was destroying the country. Rosa Burger decides to return to South Africa to resume her work and "like anyone else, to do what she can" (344). In October, 1977 during the school boycott, Rosa Burger is one of the many detained. In the prison at the novel's close, she has assumed the position of her mother. She gets permission to draw pictures, which visitors recognised as the women inside "and understood that these women were in touch with each other, if cut off from the outside world" (ibid 368). Rosa Burger is once again "connected" but she is not carrying messages from and about others. She now sends her own. In the dark cell, Rosa Burger is sustained by the time she spent in France. However, she does not mourn its loss, realising that it belongs to a world with different codes and possibilities than the one in which she was born and now claimed as her own. In her letter to Katya which closes the novel, Rosa Burger's reference to "watermark of light" (374) is deleted by the prison censor. Rosa Burger like Lionel Burger has accepted and managed to find pleasures in their chosen world. Lionel Burger had earlier described the watermark as a delicate 'pearly light'. Rosa Burger's story ends with her acceptance of the possibilities allowed by her order with few pleasures and a belief in future.

Therefore, at the end of the novel Rosa Burger emerges as a strong symbol of resistance. Her decision of staying back in her country even when she has better opportunities at her disposal put forth the development of her consciousness. She understands the need to be part of the revolution and we get an understanding that the struggle against apartheid in South Africa was a success because of people like Rosa Burger who sacrificed everything for the cause of their people.

References:

- Bazin, Nancy Topping, and Marilyn Dallman Seymour, eds. *Conversations With Nadine Gordimer*. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1990. Print.
- Clark, Diana. "Nadine Gordimer". *Interviews with Contemporary Novelists*. London: Macmillan, 1986. Print.
- Clingman, Stephen. *The Novels of Nadine Gordimer: History from the Inside*. 2nd ed. Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 1986. Print.
- Gordimer, Nadine. *What Happened to Burger's Daughter*. South Africa: Taurus, 1980. Print.

- Hirson, Baruch. *Year of Fire, Year of Ash – The Soweto Revolts: Roots of Revolution*. London: Zed Books, 1979. Print.
- Lodge, Tom. *Black Politics in South Africa since 1945*. London: Longman, 1983. Print.
- Newman, Judie. ed. *Nadine Gordimer's Burger's Daughter: A Casebook*. New York: Oxford UP, 2003. Print.
- Parker, Kenneth. "Nadine Gordimer and the Pitfalls of Liberalism". *The South African Novel in English: Essays in Criticism and Society*. Ed. Parker. London: Macmillan, 1978. Print.
- Vijayasree, C., et al., eds. *Remapping Culture: Nobel Laureates in Literature*. Delhi: Pencraft, 1998. Print.
- Gordimer, Nadine. *Burger's Daughter*. 1979. London: Bloomsbury, 2000. Print.