Nadine Gordimer, the South African writer and political activist, was a woman deeply disturbed by the racial issues and inequalities prevalent in her country which moved her to create a body of work dealing with the issues that permeated the very fabric of the South African society. Born to white parents in a small mining town near Johannesburg, she witnessed the racial discrimination and atrocities the black population was subjected to by the whites. Even though she never had a natural inclination towards politics, living in South Africa made her interested in the subject as it was something that touched every South African in their daily life. Gordimer loved to write from a young age and published her first book when she was just 15! She primarily wrote short stories during her early years as a writer before moving on to novels. Her mother had always been sympathetic towards the blacks who were made to bear unthinkable atrocities and Nadine inherited her compassion. The Sharpeville massacre especially provoked her conscience and she became an anti-apartheid social activist campaigning for the rights of the blacks. Her literary works on racism won her a Nobel Prize for Literature in 1991.

She was born in a mining town near Johannesburg to Isidore Gordimer and Hannah Myers. Her father was a Jewish immigrant while her mother was from London. She was raised in a secular environment. As a young girl she witnessed rampant acts of racism in her neighbourhood. She also saw people fighting racism and campaigning for the basic rights of all human beings irrespective of race. She was enrolled at a Catholic convent school but seldom attended classes as her mother kept her home for most of the time being concerned about her health. She began writing out of boredom at this time. She published her first story called ‘The Quest for Seen Gold’ in 1937 which appeared in the ‘Children’s Sunday Express’. Her first adult fiction was published when she was 16. She went to the University of the Witwatersrand where she studied for a year. She dropped her studies and went to Johannesburg in 1948.

While in Johannesburg, she continued to write and had her works published in local South African magazines. She collected many of her writings and published them as ‘Face to Face’ in 1949. Her story ‘A Watcher of the Dead’ was accepted for publication in the ‘New Yorker’ in 1951. During her initial days she mostly wrote short stories and brought out her first novel, ‘The Lying Days’ in 1953. Even though she was never interested in politics initially, certain incidents like the arrest of her friend Bettie du Toit and the Sharpeville massacre pushed her to enter the anti-apartheid movement. Over the 1960s she became active in South African politics and became friends with Nelson Mandela’s defence attorneys. She also helped Mandela in editing his speech ‘I Am Prepared to Die’. In 1974 she published the novel, ‘The Conservationist’ which is about a rich white man who is dissatisfied with his life. He realizes how alone he is when he witnessed the burial of an unidentified black body and imagines his own funeral.

Gordimer was actively involved with the African National Congress (ANC) even though it was listed as an illegal organization by the South African government. She also took part in anti-apartheid activities and travelled across the world spreading awareness about South Africa’s problems. Her historical and political novel, ‘Burger’s Daughter’ was out in 1979 which was about a group of white anti-apartheid activists who are members of the South African Communist Party (SACP). In 1987, she published the novel ‘A Sport of Nature’ in which an adventurous girl marries a politician who eventually becomes the first president of South Africa. Gordimer herself stated that this work was a risky one. During the 1990s and 2000s, she was active in the HIV/AIDS movement which was a major public health crisis in South Africa. She compiled a book ‘Telling Tales’ which was a collection of stories from major writers to raise funds for the Treatment Action Campaign. Her 2005 novel, ‘Get a Life’ is about an environmental activist Paul who is diagnosed with thyroid cancer and is told to live quarantined for some time after his treatment. The story revolves around how this change affects him and his family.

Her political novel, ‘Burger’s Daughter’ which told the story of white anti-apartheid activists trying to overthrow the South African government, is considered one of her major works. Another one of her best known works is ‘July’s People’ in which she writes about her predictions on the end of apartheid. The novel is about a fictional civil war in which black South Africans overturn the system of apartheid.

She won the much coveted Booker Prize for her novel ‘The Conservationist’ in 1974 and was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1991 for being a writer "who through her magnificent epic writing has - in the words of Alfred Nobel - been of very great benefit to humanity”.

Nadine Gordimer died on 13 July 2014, at the age of 90.