



# **INTRODUCTION**

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# PROTEST IN ALAN PATON'S SELECTED NOVELS

## Introduction

### A) Tradition of South African Novel in English:

The National Party came to power in South Africa in 1948 and instituted apartheid. Various laws were made to keep races apart and suppress resistance or protest. The white minority enjoyed the highest standard of living in all of Africa and the black majority remained disadvantaged by almost every standard, including income, education, housing and life expectancy. There are numerous writers in whose writing we can find realistic portrayal of contemporary social situation. In South Africa Nadine Gordimer, Alan Paton, Alex la Guma, Peter Abrahams, Ezekiel Mphahlele, J. M. Coetzee, Zakes Mda etc. are a few important writers whose writings often studied for their social environment. In a long period of harsh suppression by the government various anti-apartheid movements most notably the African National Congress (ANC) and violent protests, strikes, marches, resistance and sabotage by bombing and other means are found. During the apartheid regime in South Africa, most writers could not find a greater and more pressing theme than apartheid. Prison, rough treatment, racial humiliations are constant themes in the African protest novels.

Olive Schreiner's novel *The Story of an African Farm* (1883) is generally considered to be the founding text of South African Literature. The novel represents aspects of South African society of its day. The first novel by black South African is Solomon Plaatje's *Mhudi* which was published in 1930. Plaatje also wrote *Native Life in South Africa* (1916), attacking the Natives Land Act of 1913 which declared that only certain areas of the country could be owned by natives. There was a trend in literature to comment on South Africa's racial problems. Nadine Gordimer's novel, *July's People* (1981), depicts the collapse of white

minority rule. Her other novels such as *A World of Strangers* (1958) shows frightening encounters between white and black people in the thrilling days of Sophiatown.

Peter Abrahams' *Mine Boy* (1946) depicts the problems of rural people in a depressed urban environment. *Mine Boy* published the same year in which large miners' strike was violently suppressed by Smuts' government. Other works by him include *The Path of Thunder* (1948), which deals with interracial love; *Return to Goli* (1953) is about his journey back to report on life in Johannesburg. Ezekiel Mphahlele's autobiographical *Down Second Avenue* (1959) is a landmark in the development of South African fiction. His novel *The Wanderers* (1971) articulates his own experiences, first as an adult South African and then his move into exile. Alex la Guma's *A Walk in the Night* (1962) shows the crime of slum inhabitants and his *And a Threefold Cord* (1967) contrasts the existence of a black worker in a white home with her employer's affluent life. His later novel, *In the Fog of the season's End* (1972), shows the developing consciousness of a man dedicated to the underground struggle for freedom. His other novels are *Looking on Darkness* (1973) and *A Dry White Season* (1982). Bessie Head's novels show a marked sympathy with ordinary peasant woman. Her heroines are poor but strong-willed women whom have to face up to various forms of prejudice. Her other novels are *When Rain Clouds Gather* (1968), *Maru* (1971), *The Collector of Treasurers* (1977) and *A Question of Power* (1973). Another writer to make his name in the 1960s was Wilber Smith. His novels deal with sex and violence, often set against a backdrop of political turmoil. His earliest novels are *Where the Lion Feeds* (1964) and *The Sound of Thunder* (1966).

Alan Paton's *Cry, the Beloved Country* (1948) establishes Paton as the most eloquent voice of South African liberal humanism, and other novels such as *Too Late the Phalarope* (1953) and *Ah, But Your Land is Beautiful* (1981) show protest against apartheid, racial prejudice and the oppression of black people. The most important novelist to emerge after

Gordimer was J.M. Coetzee. His novel *Life and Times of Michael K* (1983) won Booker Prize. His novel *Disgrace* (1999) won him second Booker Prize as well as the 2000 Commonwealth Writers Prize. He is also a recipient of Nobel Prize for literature in 2003. South African English writing has produced two Nobel Prize winners: Nadine Gordimer and J. M. Coetzee. Another famous novelist Zakes Mda won the 2001 Commonwealth Writers Prize for his novel *The Heart of Redness* (2000). Exploitation of the African peasant or worker under the colonial system has also provided the subject for several novels. All South African novelist efforts to concentrate on the racial situation, the inhuman life imposed upon the people by Europeans. South African literature depicts the crisis and contradictions faced by the people.

#### **B) Alan Paton: The Novelist:**

✓ Alan Stewart Paton, a South African writer, founder and president of the South African Liberal Party (1953-68), which opposed apartheid and offered a non-racial alternative government policy. He was born in Pietermaritzburg, Natal on January 11, 1903 in the east of South Africa. His father James Paton was Scot who had migrated to South Africa in 1895 and his mother Eunice Paton was a descendant of English immigrants. His parents were not highly educated, but they were faithfully religious and Paton grew up reading the *Bible*. His parents' Christian faith and the Old Testament deeply influenced his writings. His strict father used to beat his sons, and it was this traumatic experience which deeply affected his views about authority and corporal punishment. His father's influence is not altogether negative; however, he encouraged Paton to love books and nature. Paton was a very keen reader of literature, such as the works of Charles Dickens, Walter Scott and Rupert Brooke. From his early childhood Paton witnessed the increase of white power at the expense of the rights of the black majority.

He attended high school at the Maritzburg College from 1914 to 1918 and completed his college education at the Natal University College in 1924. After studies, Paton worked as a teacher at the Ixopo high school for white students and then at a high school in Pietermaritzburg. In Ixopo, Paton met and fell in love with Dorrie Francis Lusted who was married. After her husband's death, they were married in 1928 and remained together until her death from emphysema in 1967. Their life together is documented in Paton's book *Kontakion For You Departed* published in 1969. Paton and his secretary, Anne Hopkins, were married the same year. In 1935, Paton was appointed as the principal of the Diepkloof Reformatory for young offenders from 1935 to 1948, where his reformatory work began. There were about 600 boys to whom he provided more freedom. He trains the boys better so that after better preparation they can adjust themselves to the outside world. His contribution was significant to the reformatory. Most notable among these were the open dormitory policy, the work permit policy and the home visitation policy, this experience formed the basis of his political consciousness. Paton resigned from this job and in 1953 formed the South African Liberal Party.

During this period Paton continued to work on behalf of race relations: in 1942 he is nominated to the Anglican Diocesan Commission to inquire into church and race relations in South Africa. He also wrote a series of articles on crime and punishment.

Paton volunteered for service during World War II but was refused. After the war, Paton decided to make a study of prisons and reformatories, and travelled to Sweden, England, Canada and the United States of America. It was on a visit to Norway that he began to write his first and best known novel *Cry, the Beloved Country* and finished it on Christmas Eve in San Francisco in 1946. There he met Aubrey and Marigold Burns who read this manuscript and found a publisher to publish it and it was published in 1948. Several months after the publication of the novel, the National Party came to power in South Africa and

instituted apartheid. The publication of this novel which was a great success, allowed Paton to resign as a principal of the reformatory to devote himself fully to his writing.

Paton also wrote several nonfiction works, including biographies of famous political figures such as Jan Hofmeyr, the cabinet minister and Archbishop Geoffrey Clayton. Paton's autobiographies are *Towards the Mountain* (1980) and *Journey Continued* (1988).

His short story collection *Tales From A Troubled Land* (1961) also deals with racial theme. *For You Departed* (1969) is an intimate memoir of the life he shared with his wife. His other nonfiction works include *The Land and the people of South Africa* (1955), *Hope for South Africa* (1958). We can judge his Anglican faith from his work *Instrument of Thy Peace: The Long View* (1968) which is a volume of essays edited by Callan. The novel *They Sat Down and Wept by Grand Central Station* by Canadian author Elizabeth Smart (published in 1945) impressed him. Other books which impressed him were the novels *Death Comes to the Archbishop* (published in 1927) by Willa Cather and *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* by Thornton Wilder.

✓ Paton's first novel *Cry, the Beloved Country* is published in 1948. Paton wrote this novel during his visit to Norway. He read John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* and when he began his own novel he adopted Steinbeck's method of representing dialogue by preliminary dash. The novel deals with racial discrimination, inequality, exploitation of black people by the white people. Alan Paton protests against all this social injustice in the novel. Stephen Kumalo, an ageing Zulu minister travels from his tribal village Ndotsheni to Johannesburg, where he finds that his only son Absalom, has murdered the only son of a white man, James Jarvis. The tragedy connects these two men, and later they begin to work together. *Cry the Beloved Country* was influenced by his writer colleague, Laurence van der Post's *In a Province*. By the time of Paton's death, the novel had sold more than 15 million copies worldwide. It was also adapted into two films.

In an interview taken by Roy Holland while talking about his first novel *Cry the Beloved Country* Alan Paton says,

... It was really the story of a young Afrikaner who comes to Johannesburg. He certainly has the gift of healing, and he also begins to transgress against the laws of the country — doesn't take any regard of the colour bar — goes to places he shouldn't go to without permit. (Paton 23-24).

Kumalo goes to different places without permission and in this way he protests against apartheid laws. The Group Areas Act of 1950, which was the heart of apartheid system, keeps groups of races apart geographically. A white person needs a permission to go into black area, and a black person needs a permission to go into the area where the whites live. Alan Paton uses Kumalo as a mouthpiece. According to David Rubadiri, "...The novel is in many ways unique for being the first work in the history of South Africa in which a black man is the main character..." (Rubadiri142).

Kumalo's journey in the novel reflects Paton's concern with major themes that influenced his life, such as authority, racial discrimination and religion. Paton's sympathetic portrayal of Kumalo, a black Anglican priest was regarded by many white South Africans as either sentimental or revolutionary. At the peak of apartheid in South Africa, his disdain of racial discrimination and his idealized vision of eventual reconciliation of the two racial groups were deemed too revolutionary. Paton stood on the line that borders the two worlds of white and black South Africans. Most of the white Afrikaners rejected him for his sympathy for the black Africans and some viewed his writing with suspicion evidently shown in the mixed reactions to his portrayal of characters and interracial relationships in the novel *Cry, the Beloved Country*.

Paton's next novel *Too Late the Phalarope* published in 1953, explores the themes of racial and political inflexibility. It is the story of Pieter van Vlaanderen, a promising

Afrikaner police lieutenant. When he is discovered violating the South African Immorality Act of 1927 by engaging in sexual intercourse with an African woman, Stephanie, he is imprisoned. At that time, according to South African social conventions, to behave like this is a shame and it indicates the downfall of his family. So he is avoided by his well established and conservative family. The setting of this novel is South Africa. The protagonist of this novel is a white man. His downfall is recorded by his father's sister who watched the train of events, half foreseeing the danger but she is unable to prevent it. Now in anguish she blames herself. The major character in this novel is Afrikaner policeman, Pieter van Vlaanderen. He usually enforces the laws in the country but eventually he breaks the law, from both a legal and moral standpoint. Their fate reflects the effects of National Party's apartheid laws. The South African Immorality Act strictly prohibited sexual relations between the races.

Paton's next novel *Ah, But Your Land is Beautiful* is published in 1981. The setting is South Africa in the years 1952 to 1958. It is an anti-apartheid novel. It is a fictional reworking of Paton's own years working as a political activist and the experience he gained working as the president of the South African Liberal Party. In the foreword Paton describes how the novel contains both real and fictitious characters, but that two of the real characters like Mrs. Helen Joseph and Archbishop Huddleston were alive at the time of publication of the novel. Both of them gave permission to Paton to introduce them, without seeing the text. Some real characters were no longer alive like Chief Albert Lutuli, Dr. Monty Naicker, Mr. Patrick Duncan, Advocate Molten and Archbishop Clayton. The novel is a reminiscent of the true life experiences of Alan Paton, the president of the South African Liberal Party and his political colleagues in resisting National Party rule in South Africa during 1950s.

The novel is composed of letters reflections, character-sketches, bits of dialogue, the transcripts of a trial, a summary of newspaper accounts and a small pieces of official documents placed together by narrator. It seems that the narrator himself is the possessor of a



long patient irresistible historical vision. The story begins with the arrest of an Indian girl, Prem. She is arrested because she used a white library in violation of the colour bar. Prem refuses to obey the authorities and shows her protest against the authorities. Her struggle provokes the sudden imposition of new strict apartheid actions and unceasingly severe harassment of anti-apartheid forces. The novel concludes with the election of Prime Minister, a character that represents Dr. Henrik Verwoerk which marks the beginning of the bitterest period in South African history. The novel is in essence historical fiction, giving an accurate account of the resistance movement in South Africa during 1960s. Paton's works against apartheid won him the annual Freedom Award in 1960. Since 1989 the Alan Paton Award has been given annually for the praiseworthy works of non-fiction. Paton's main contribution to South African literature lies in his balanced perspective and optimism unaffected by the bitterness that often accompanies other African writings. Alan Paton died on April 12, 1988 in his home near Durban, Natal.

#### **C] Origin of the Research Problem:**

South Africa suffered greatly under apartheid laws. South African people had to live under the laws imposed by colonialist and had to face the crisis of values generated by the colonial politics. South African writers depict the crisis and contradictions faced by the people. The writers like Ezekiel Mphahlele, Peter Abrahams, Dennis Brutus, Alex la Guma, Bessie Head, Alan Paton, Nadine Gordimer, J.M. Coetzee and Zakes Mda deal with racial problems in South Africa in their fiction. The present study is an attempt to examine Alan Paton's selected novels such as *Cry, the Beloved Country* (1948), *Too Late the Phalarope* (1953), *Ah, But Your Land is Beautiful* (1981) from the perspective of protest.

#### **D] Hypothesis:**

Alan Paton's novels like *Cry, the Beloved Country*, *Too Late the Phalarope* and *Ah, But Your Land is Beautiful* will be assessed from the perspective of protest. The

researcher feels that protest in these novels is bound by themes like prison, rough treatment, racial humiliations etc. The researcher will assess and examine the protest in his novels critically.

#### **E] Objectives of Research Study:**

1. To analyze Alan Paton's literary sensibility.
2. To determine the place and significance of Alan Paton in South African English Novel.
3. To examine protest in the novels *Cry, the Beloved Country, Too Late the Phalarope, Ah, But Your Land is Beautiful*.
4. To assess Alan Paton's novels from the perspective of anti-apartheid movements.

#### **F] An Overview of the Relevant Literature:**

No serious attempt as far as the investigator's knowledge is concerned has been made on protest in Alan Paton's selected novels. Some articles such as "Alan Paton's *Cry, the Beloved Country* after Twenty-Five Years" by Charles R. Larson, "Radical Democracy and Literary Form: Alan Paton's "Ah, but Your Land Is Beautiful" by Jean-Philippe Wade have been written on the selected novels. The interview of Alan Paton taken by Roy Holland has been published in the book *Alan Paton Speaking (2008)*. It records the activities such as Alan Paton's political activities as well as his professional and personal life. Some reviews and articles have been written on the selected novels which have been listed in the bibliography. However, no extensive research work has been carried solely on his novels from the perspective of protest.

#### **G] Scope of The Study:**

The scope of the present research study is to study the novels of Alan Paton such as *Cry, the Beloved Country, Too Late the Phalarope, Ah, But Your Land is Beautiful* from the

perspective of protest. The researcher also wants to study social and political protest in the selected novels of Alan Paton and the suffering of the black people under apartheid laws.

#### **H] Methodology:**

For the present study, an emphasis is laid on a very close reading of the primary and secondary sources. The researcher intends to use analytical and interpretative method for the present study.

#### **I] Significance of the Study:**

Many scholars have studied themes like race, the self-consciousness that comes with a search for identity and politics, oppression of South African blacks in the novels of Alan Paton. But nobody has made detailed analysis of protest in his novels like *Cry, the Beloved Country*, *Too Late the Phalarope* and *Ah, But Your Land is Beautiful*. The researcher wants to study the social and political protest in Alan Paton's selected novels. The present study will help to understand the nature of black resistance in the selected novels.

#### **J] Research Design:**

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A] Tradition of South African Novel in English

B] Alan Paton: The Novelist

C] Origin of the Research Problem

D] Hypothesis

E] Objectives of Research Study

F] An Overview of the Relevant Literature

G] Scope of The Study

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J] Research Design

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