

The Criterion

December 2012

ISSN 0976-8165

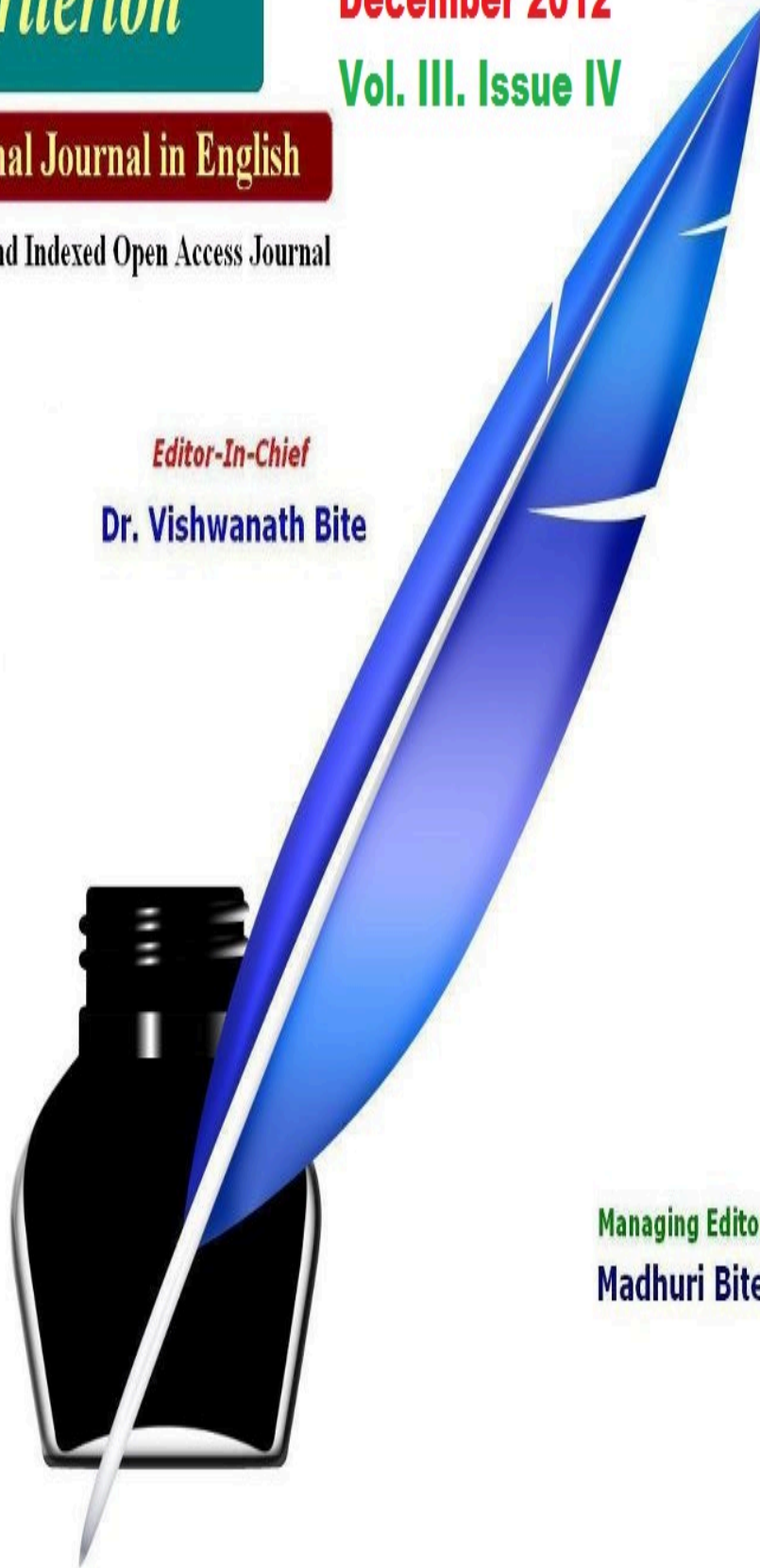
Vol. III. Issue IV

An International Journal in English

Quarterly Refereed and Indexed Open Access Journal

Editor-In-Chief

Dr. Vishwanath Bite



Managing Editor

Madhuri Bite

www.the-criterion.com

criterionejournal@gmail.com

Alan Paton's *Cry, The Beloved Country*: A Study in Humanism

Dr. S. B. Bhambar

Head, Deptt. of English
Arts & Commerce College,
Nesari. Tal. Gadhinglaj
Dist: Kolhapur Pin:416504

Humanism is a philosophy, the central concern of which is man and his happiness. It underlies the value and dignity of human beings and takes him as the measure of all things. Humanists like Socrates, Mahatma Gandhi and Ravindranath Tagore believed that man's ultimate concern is man himself. Even the religious humanists believe the same. Mahatma Gandhi and Tagore saw God in man and so proclaimed that the worship of God lays essentially in service of mankind.

Humanism may be said to have begun with Greek philosopher Pythagoras in the fifth century B.C. Thus, it is an ancient tradition in thought having its own historical development like all ancient traditions. Pythagoras' famous dictum 'man is the measure of all things', is often expressed as a quintessence of all humanism. In due course, various doctrines on the nature of man have come into being and corresponding to each of these doctrines, various schools of humanism have arisen. It is also associated with new learning that blossomed over Europe in the fifteenth century Renaissance. The 17th century Christian humanist Erasmus' philosophy of Christ is essentially an attempt at turning away from scientific questions to the problems of moral life and religious imagination. He insisted on "the dignity of man" (Gupta1983:11), and argued that man was important though Christ's atonement and God's grace. Erasmus emphasized the necessity and importance of cultivating a life of integrity and pleaded for an understanding and practice of true Christianity.

Then there are the Neo-humanists like Paul Elmer More and Irving Babbitt, whose principal aim is to create a synthesis for all that is good in ancient cultures and religions after rejecting the belief in a transcendental deity. The relationship between a humanist and a novelist is very close; or in other words, the humanist and the novelist are intimate to each other and the association between the two is "not accidental" (Faulkner, 1975:3). D.H. Lawrence, a great novelist of the twentieth century, places the novel at the centre of humanistic culture because of its unique closeness to human experience. Henry James, another important novelist of the modern age, also makes clear that his "central concern is with human beings" (Ibid: 72). Apart from these, some of the major post-war novelists for example Kingsley Amis, Pearl S. Buck, William Golding and Doris Lessing are essentially concerned with human values, and in their novels the essential focus is always upon humanism. The Nobel Laureate Pearl S. Buck also champions the cause of humanism in her novel *Pavilion of Women*. These novelists are out to enlighten humanity and fight against the modern despair.

Humanism inspired the study of the classics – the *literae humaniores* or 'the more human writings'. In the middle Ages, God was everything and man was null; humanism removed the hierarchy of God and placed man at par with God – it deified man. Humanism debunked God from his highest pedestal and placed reason, knowledge,

power and beauty on that plane. Humanism emphasizes the dignity of man. It centers round man and asserts that the characters, the capacities, the qualities of man have to be given fullest expression. Humanism is a way of viewing things by relating them to man's concerns. Humanism envelops and comprehends spiritualism. The Indian philosophers Tagore and Radhakrishnan in particular have developed this point by analyzing the concept of humanism itself. Humanism has been oriented to reason in place of orthodoxy, dogmatism and superstition and has supported individual rights and freedom as an antidote against the violent or corrupt aberrations of power. Thus, rationalism, scientific cosmology, critical mode of investigation and sociological philosophers of history have been one of the sources for the release of humanist trend in modern thinking.

Thus, humanism is a conception of life that makes man more prosperous and hence freer, reflecting upon the innate goodness of human beings.

Cry, the Beloved Country (1948) is a monumental achievement of Alan Paton in which he champions the cause of 'blacks'. Its publication was a life-changing event for Paton as he resigned his principalship and decided to write full-time. Many people were moved by it, politically and spiritually. In order to promote brotherhood, Paton tried to show people as individuals trying to go beyond their races. In the novel he talks of the "sense of duty" (Gindin 1962:65) and his commitment to a sense of social responsibility and a pursuit of those oppressed by society, and also infuses his fiction about colonial Africa which makes his theme humanistic. It clearly shows that Paton is one of those novelists who stand with the unfortunates. Quite often Paton is discussed as a novelist dealing with the plight of downtrodden in the African society. There is, however, another dimension to his work, particularly, *Cry, the Beloved Country*. In this work he enunciates his own version of humanism, in which some visionary persons are seen as militating against what may be called human values. Taking on the largest possible obligations that a novel of development might impose upon an author, he wished to dramatize 'the individual conscience in its relations with the collective'. His example of individual conscience, Rev. Stephen Kumalo, has become a character that we mentally lift from the novel and incorporate into our own lives as a reference point of humanism. Kumalo is a shining example of purity of heart and goodness of soul. He is indeed the soul of these two great human qualities. He loves everyone. He does not make a distinction between the blacks and the whites. His humanistic and lovable nature endears him to everyone in the novel. By nature and by education he is a simple and good man and devotes the remaining of his days to bring plenty and prosperity to his native village. It is through the character of Kumalo, Paton has presented the values of humanism. He has been deeply devoted to the simple people of his ministry. He believes implicitly in the goodness of others. In *Cry, the Beloved Country* Paton successfully and brilliantly brings out the chaos, the confusion and the psychological tension of the 'blacks'. The key issue of the novel is the relationship of black and white. He is concerned with the rights of blacks in a world of whites and aspires to bring justice to blacks. This want of sympathy, love, understanding and consideration is highlighted in the title of the book (actually these are the basic tenets of humanism).

In *Cry, the Beloved Country* Paton's intention seems to show that *apartheid*, or the policy of racial segregation, is a moral and social evil. This novel is meant to make people think about this policy and do something to remedy it. Thus, Paton's purpose seems to make men aware of the evils of *apartheid*. The racial conflict in South Africa is

depicted in the novel with rare compassion and insight. It shows the great injustice done by the whites to the blacks. South Africa is a rich and beautiful land. Its people can live there very happily. But as the symbolic title suggests neither the blacks nor the whites are happy. They both have to cry. Due to *apartheid* policy the non-white people of South Africa are stripped of property and voting rights. There are separate residential areas for the whites and non-whites. There is prohibition of mixed marriages and total separation of African from European. The coloured people are forced to elect white representatives in the government. There is no compulsory education for black. On buses and trains sign are read “Europeans” and “non-Europeans”. There are localities and public places in towns and cities where the non-Europeans are not allowed to go. The non-white patients are separated from the whites in hospitals and clinics.

The very natives have to live in Shanty Towns away from the natives. The whites have forced the natives to take up ill-paid jobs in the mines, live in the slums like animals, and face horrible things like T.B., drinking, prostitution, gambling and fighting with guns and revolvers while robbing people. Obviously enough, as a result of all this, the native youths become dangerous and hardened criminals. Due to these criminals around, the whites live in constant fear. Moreover, there are smugglers, illicit liquor dealers, owners of unlicensed guns, etc.

The black leaders believe in having big strikes, so that they can get for themselves a higher standard of living. Dubula, a native leader of Johannesburg, brings about the boycott of buses to get the bus fare reduced. John, the great public speaker, stirs his black brothers to rebellion. He demands a share for his people in the new-found gold. This violent leaders, such as, Dubula, John and Tomlinson, hate the whites. Thus, the novel faithfully presents the great racial conflict of South Africa.

Absalom and his bad companions break into Arthur’s house for the sole purpose of burglary. They face certain difficulties there. So the native servant is knocked down unconscious by them, and Absalom fires the fatal shot at Arthur out of sheer fear. It is the separation of the blacks and the whites that is completely responsible for turning the native youths, such as Absalom, Matthew and Pafuri, into dangerous criminals. These young men are uprooted and aimless. There are certain reasons for this. First of all, the natives live a life of stark poverty in the countryside. The whites own all the land that is fertile and the inferior, and the low-grade land is given to the natives to till. The unfortunate natives are unable to grow enough food on the barren land. Thus, the land cannot hold the native youths and they leave their homes to settle down in the towns and cities. There they work in the gold mines at low wages, and live in the slums like animals. They face horrible things and start drinking, stealing, smuggling, gambling and fighting with dangerous weapons. These evil influences of the big city turn them into criminals. That is what exactly happens to Absalom.

Absalom confesses his crime. Mr. Carmichael, Absalom’s lawyer, defends him saying that he shot out of fear. But the white Judge rules out his argument. According to the white judge the loaded revolver that Absalom carries to the scene of the crime, amply proves his intention. The judge goes by the letter of law and sentences him to be hanged by the neck till he dies. However, the acquittal of Pafuri and Matthew is a miscarriage of justice. Through this theme Paton poses a question, can the native crime be stopped by means of the Capital punishment? Significantly enough, this question is answered by

Jarvis the other guardian of the book, by extending his full co-operation to the black for their economic development and social upliftment.

The novel suggests that societal change will only come when there is a change within men's hearts, but it holds out that such change can and will happen. It is this spiritual quest that imparts the novel its value as a classical novel. In the village Kumalo is concerned about the villagers, as the crops are poor in that season and the people are hungry. He prays for the unlucky people and works for them. He goes to the chief of their tribe to request for help, but the chief is the selfish man and does not bother to help his tribe.

At this crucial moment, hope comes in the form of a child – the grandchild of Mr. James Jarvis, father of the man Absalom killed. Mr. James Jarvis has always helped the natives. After his son's death he gives all his time to the work begun by his dead son. He builds a dam and orders good seeds. He also sends milk for the native children and gets an agricultural demonstrator for the black people who may help them to grow more food.

Through the acts of Mr. James Jarvis Paton preaches the Christian brotherly love. In the novel this spiritual Christian love becomes imperative to life. The novel is full of this faith and an awareness of spiritual reality. Kumalo, the hero of the novel, and Mr. Jarvis, his benefactor, emerge as the spiritual adventurer in the novel. It is the death of Mr. Arthur Jarvis that transforms Mr. James Jarvis, and Mr. James Jarvis becomes the spiritual benefactor of the blacks. The carefully thought - out essays of Arthur Jarvis, the humanitarian, as they are read after his death by his father, provide the spiritual tone to the novel. Paton is of the view that human society can not be made happy only by the law. In the same way the native crime cannot be stopped by means of the Capital punishment. The proper solution to this problem is put forward by Paton. The solution is to educate the children of the natives. That's why he introduces the agricultural demonstrator in the novel. The black children must get the same type of the quality of education that the white children are given. If this is done, the coming generations of the black people will become good citizens of the land. And, they will share the great wealth of the beloved country with the white, and make South Africa a happy nation of the black and the white. There are three characters in the novel that hold this view, they are: Msimangu, a black man and a priest, Father Vincent and Arthur Jarvis, the two whites.

The dream of these three characters is brought into reality by the friendship of Rev. Kumalo and James Jarvis. Their beautiful friendship makes a small opening towards Arthur's great dream. It paves the way, to some extent, for better relations between the two races, the black and the white. It is through Arthur's death that Alan Paton supplies a model answer to the racial conflict in South Africa. Kumalo and James Jarvis come across their spiritual adventures only after Arthur's death.

The central philosophy of this novel is an affirmation of transcendental principles like Truth and Goodness through a delineation of the pursuit and practice of higher values like love, charity, compassion, repentance, forgiveness and the concurrent negation of vices like hatred, anger, selfishness, indifference, revenge, and so on. Thus the acceptance of higher values and the concurrent negation of rejection of vices naturally pave the way for the better relations between Kumalo and James Jarvis and through them between the two races.

The novel's third book is an exposition of the way that Paton believes will work. With the words and lives of the characters as well as with expository passages Paton

presents a careful thought out body of ideas which are concerned with the causes of the South African dilemma and approaches to its solution. While he presents several points of views on these aspects of the problems, it is clear, that he believes in only one that is the Christian gospel of brotherhood.

The basic philosophical and spiritual concerns towards which the novel proceeds emerge out of man's fear and suffering as depicted in Johannesburg society and culminate in the Christian concept of brotherhood demonstrated by the friendship between Jarvis and Kumalo. Paton points out that if man acts according to the idea of the brotherhood of man there cannot be any conflict between men of races. It is the entire action of the novel, in its totality, that forms the affirmative spiritual vision of Alan Paton. The 'third book' of the novel is the essence of it as it is full of the Christian religious consciousness. The human and spiritual come together in the third section of the book. Paton has depicted Stephen Kumalo, James Jarvis, Arthur Jarvis, and Arthur Jarvis' son on the spiritual level.

Paton holds the philosophy that man can enjoy the life when he overcomes his fear by love. But what Paton means by love is something greater than personal or fatherly love – it is universal love – based on the Christian idea of 'the brotherhood of man'. If such love springs in every heart there will be the bright 'dawn' of humanity.

Works Cited:

- Faulkaer, Peter. 1975. *Humanism in English Novel*. London: Pemberton.
Gindin, James. 1962. *Post-War British Fiction: New Accents and Attitudes*. London: Cambridge University Press.
Gupta, Balrama G.S. 1983. *Humanism: An Overview*. Calcutta: Writers Workshop.
Paton, Alan. 1948. *Cry, the Beloved Country*. New York: Macmillan.