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Editor-in-Chief

Dr. Vishwanath Bite

Managing Editor

Madhuri Bite

www.the-criterion.com
criterionejournal@gmail.com

Political Protest in Alan Paton's *Ah, But Your Land is Beautiful*

Mali Ujwala Vishwas

Research Scholar

Shivaji University, Kolhapur.

&

Dr. Ghorpade Pradnya Vijay

Associate Professor

Dept. of English,

Arts and Commerce College, Kasegaon.

Dist Sangli.

Abstract:

Alan Paton is one of the most famous South African novelists who offered a non-racial alternative government policy. Alan Paton wrote three novels namely *Cry, the Beloved Country* (1948), *Too Late the Phalarope* (1953) and *Ah, But Your Land is Beautiful* (1981). Alan Paton's *Cry, the Beloved Country* establishes Paton as the most eloquent voice of South African liberal humanism, and other novels such as *Too Late the Phalarope* and *Ah, But Your Land is Beautiful* show protest against apartheid, racial prejudice and the oppression of black people. His novel *Ah, But Your Land Is Beautiful* tells the story of a group of people who come together to fight against the apartheid laws. There is formation of different political parties and through these parties they protest against the apartheid laws. Though, it is a fiction, it is a true story. Political protest includes formation of political parties, organizations and plans to protest against for the political purpose. This novel has multiple storylines that alternate one another, all reminiscent of the true-life experiences faced by Alan Paton and his political colleagues in resisting National Party rule in South Africa during the 1950s.

Keywords: Political Protest, Anti-apartheid, Racial Prejudice, oppression, Ah, But Your Land is Beautiful.

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. There are innumerable writers who reflect the contemporary social situation in their writing. 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. Alan Paton is one of the most famous South African novelists who 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 a Scot who had migrated to South Africa in 1895 and his mother Eunice Paton was a descendant of English immigrants. From his early childhood Paton witnessed the increase of white power at the expense of the rights of the black majority. Paton was appointed as the principal of the Diepkloof Reformatory for young offenders from 1935 to 1948, where his reformatory work began. Further in 1953, he formed the South African Liberal Party.

Alan Paton wrote three novels namely *Cry, the Beloved Country* (1948), *Too Late the Phalarope* (1953) and *Ah, But Your Land is Beautiful* (1981). He also wrote several other non-fiction works. Alan Paton's *Cry, the Beloved Country* establishes Paton as the most eloquent voice of South African liberal humanism, and other novels such as *Too Late the Phalarope* and *Ah, But Your Land is Beautiful* show protest against apartheid, racial prejudice

and the oppression of black people. His novel *Ah, But Your Land is Beautiful* is set in the 1950s. It is the period when National Party was in power and there was also the emergence of South African Liberal Party, the Passive Resistance Campaign and Sophiatown Removals. The novel *Ah, But Your Land is Beautiful* largely deals with the political protest than his other two novels. In this novel, different political parties engage in the protest against apartheid. The government tries to suppress their protest but they continue it. The novel is a fictional account of Paton's own experiences working as a political activist and as a president of the South African Liberal Party. It is an anti-apartheid novel.

Human society is divided into different segments from ancient period. The social discrimination forces man to fight for the equal rights. Protest is the formal declaration in writing or speech, expressing the strong objection or it is disapproval on certain acts, issues or things. An *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English* defines Protest as "the expression of strong disagreement with or opposition to something; a statement or action that shows this" (Hornby 1213).

Man has to face various types of discrimination while living in the society which are based on race, class, caste, gender etc. that leads to protest. Political protest outbreaks when regime faces a crisis of legitimacy. Regime transition is a complex process with multiple phases. It is difficult to capture its information as a whole. The leaders force people to the streets to express political concern, to demonstrate that they feel doubt that the existing government institutions, which are capable of responding to the popular demands. Narendra Mohan, an important Indian critic while arguing the dimensions of protest, states that, "Protest is the awareness that arises when man confronts an unjust inhuman situation, and decides to get rid of it by way of raising of his voice against it and acting to remove it" (Mohan 16). He further says, "Protest is not ideological in its orientation, but is, essentially activist" (16).

Political protesters withdraw the permission to be governed and proclaim that although the state may remain dominant it has lost supremacy. Political protest breaks out more frequently in some African countries than any other. Political protest includes the formation of different political parties and the protest through these parties; these organizations plan to protest against the government for the political purpose and protesters make explicit demands or leadership. The protest is for justice, liberty and equality in the society and writers reflect it through their writing.

Nelson Mandela is the significant anti-apartheid activist in South Africa. He protested against the ruling National Party's apartheid laws after 1948. He visited many places in South Africa signing up volunteers who were prepared to break apartheid laws. After the 1948 election, victory of the National Party, Mandela began actively participating in politics. He worked prominently in the ANC's 1952 the Defiance Campaign and the 1955 Congress of the People whose adoption of the Freedom Charter provided the fundamental basis of the anti-apartheid cause.

The novel contains both real and fictitious characters, but that two of the real characters were still alive at the time of his writing. They were Helen Joseph and Archbishop Trevor Huddleston. Other real characters who were dead at the time of publication, were Albert Lutuli, Dr. Monty Naicker, Patrick Duncan, Advocate Donald Barkly Molteno and Archbishop Geoffrey Clayton. They all are political activists and protest against apartheid. In South Africa various places are reserved for whites only and blacks are forbidden from these facilities. Here, in this novel the blacks are not allowed to sit in the Reference Library. Prem Bodasingh, who is an Indian girl, sits in the library which is reserved for whites only. She breaks the law and protests against this. It is clearly written on top of the doors of the library, "for whites only- Blankers Alleen" (3). When she is asked to leave by the Superior, she refuses to leave and protests against this. Then Superior goes to the Chief Librarian. The

Chief Librarian keeps aside his important work and asks the Indian girl to leave. But again Prem refuses to leave the library and says to him that she is there to defy the law and cannot leave. The sitting in the library is the open challenge to the Government which strictly prohibits sitting in reading rooms which are reserved for the white people only. Mr. Harry Mainwaring feels dangerous that people decide the law is unjust and then disobeys it. He worries about the challenge of people to law and order. There is awareness among the people to fight for justice and also there is development in the tendency to protest. People are ready to destroy their own life so that their next generation will become free. Dr. Monty and Albert Lutuli, they both join the struggle keeping aside their own personal matters. Various laws are made to suppress the black protest. The Suppression of Communism Act is made very strict. If Dr. Monty and Albert Lutuli resist the law they will be forbidden from the world of people, from travelling, and even education but still they protest.

In the novel there are several historical figures. Patrick Duncan is one of them. He is a political thinker and anti-apartheid activist. Duncan leads a demonstration into the African location in Germiston, where they and others are arrested. Duncan believes in Satyagraha, he is a man of passionate beliefs and has admiration for Mahatma Gandhi. He believes that Satyagraha, the soul force, the power of truth can collapse the empires. Another historical figure is Chief Albert Lutuli. He was elected president of the African National Congress (ANC), at the time led opposition to the white minority government in South Africa. He was awarded the 1960 Nobel Peace Prize for his role in the non-violent struggle against apartheid. Geoffrey Clayton is also helpful to the black people. People start to wear Gandhi cap, they are taken to prison by the police. Durban Nationalists sends a deputation to the Minister and asks him to think about a twelve months' sentence for the people who wear such cap. In this way these people protest against the Government and Parliament. Dr. Hendrik is the doctrine of separate coexistence.

In the novel, National Union of South African Students (NUSAS) holds strong anti-apartheid views. The members of NUSAS want to change the government policy. The formation of the Liberal Party causes sensation in the National Party. Nationalist government regard it criminal offence to form such non-racial political party. Different people join the Liberal Party and they protest against the government. For example, Dlamini resigns from the job because he doesn't want to teach under the Bantu Education Act. Black people think that white people don't have the quality of humaneness and the example of Mr. Mazibuko's mother proves it. The law does not allow Mr. Mazibuko's mother to live in the New Castle with her son only because her home is in Eshowe. Black people think that how can the law acts like this to a widow woman, such laws are unknown to the black society. But they do not protest, except to one another. White people think that black people don't have the quality of humaneness as they killed Sister Aidan in East London. Government prohibits racially mixed school functions but Mr. Nhlapo and Mr. Robert protest against this. They organize the hockey and the cricket match between the white and black school boys.

In 1948, National Party comes to power and its policy is complete segregation of races. And according to the law blackspots become offensive. Now, people fear that their land will be taken away. Emmanuel Nene tries to aware through his speech. He says, ". . . There would be no cattle there, no milk for your children. You could not keep a cow, you could not even a garden on such a piece of land" (80). He does not understand why a white man lives in a big house in Pretoria and wants to take away the black man's little house.

The landowners of the seventy or eighty blackspots in Natal form the Natal African Landowners Association (NALA). They come to Mr. Emmanuel to offer him as their full-time organizer. The Security Police Sergeant Magwaza visits every blackspot and warns every landowner not to join NALA because the Government regards it as subversive organization. Sergeant Magwaza warns Mrs. Majola not to join NALA the woman dares to

taunt a security police she tells to give message to Emmanuel Nene, “— Tell him, . . .to come soon to my house and bring me a paper for joining”(82).

There is the formation of The Congress of the People in Johannesburg. The people from the Congresses, the African, the Indian, the White and Coloured come together to reject the plan of Dr. Hendrik of separate coexistence. They plan a course of two days for the people of South Africa. The Congress of the People adopts a Freedom Charter. This Charter is about freedom, equality, attacking apartheid laws and practices and doctrines of separate coexistence and it strongly opposes government. And they decide to fight for all these rights throughout their lives until they win liberty.

The novel shows the effect of apartheid laws on the citizens of the country as it documents the inescapable erosion of the human soul in the enactment of racist ideology. In the novel *Ah, But Your Land is Beautiful* different political parties are engaged in the protest against apartheid. Their protests are also suppressed by the government but they continue their protest. It clearly represents South African voices clearly meant to convey the patterns of conflict in the country during the years 1952-1958.

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