

ISSN: 0976-8165

The Criterion

An International Journal in English

Vol. 7, Issue- 3 [June 2016]

7th Year of Open Access

Editor-In-Chief: Dr. Vishwanath Bite

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ISSN 2278-9529

Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal

www.galaxymrj.com

Race Relations in Andre Brink's *A Dry White Season*

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It is an old human habit to believe that one's own family or race is better than the neighbor's, but it is relatively a new idea to ascribe this superiority to inherited biological qualities. The Oxford English Dictionary (1910) defines 'race' as "A group of persons, animals, or plants, connected by common descent or origin" (qtd. in Banton 53). While John Rex considers race as "a taxonomic concept of limited usefulness as a means of classifying human beings, but probably less useful than the more general concept of populations" (120). O. C. Cox in his book *Cast, Class and Race (1970)* analyzes race relations from Marxist point of view. He defines 'race' as "any group of people that is generally believed to be, and generally accepted as, a race in any given area of ethnic competition" (319). Further he defines 'race relations' as "behavior which develops among peoples who are aware of each other's actual or imputed physical differences" (320). Robert E. Park, in his essay *The Nature of Race Relations* defines race relations as:

The relations existing between peoples distinguished by marks of racial descent, particularly when these racial differences enter into the consciousness of the individuals and groups so distinguished, and by so doing determine in each case the individual's conception of himself as well as his status in the community... Race Relations, in this sense, are not so much the relations that exist between individuals of different races as between individuals' conscious of these differences (105).

All these relations of cultural or racial minorities with dominant people may be described as types of race relations, even though no evidences exist either of active race conflict on the one hand, or of obvious racial diversity on the other. According to Leo Kuper, "Ideologies of cultural differences are an almost invariable phenomenon in race relations. They convey racial characterizations and derive from them principles of race relations. They are significant elements in structures of race relations and may perhaps serve as an index of the state of these relations" (11).

The presence of race relations is dependent on the presence of colonial characteristics in the societal environment. South Africa is, perhaps, the best example of a colonial society. South African history has been shaped by different stages of colonial rule. According to Eva- Marie Herlitzius,

Colonialism understood in part as an (ongoing) discourse that helps to legitimize and maintain especially in the form of racism, a hierarchically structured cultural and social value system which supports a fundamentally unjust and exploitative relationship between peoples of colonial and colonized ancestry – has influenced

almost every aspect of social and cultural life in South Africa during the last few centuries (66).

Racism in Africa is multi-faceted and dates back several centuries. It is also called as racialism. It is any action, practice, or belief that reflects the racial worldview—the ideology that humans are divided into separate and exclusive biological entities called "races." The term maintains that there is a causal link between inherited physical traits and traits of personality, intellect, morality, and other cultural behavioural features. It also maintains that some races are innately superior to others. In all parts of the world there have been some forms of racism. Racism is still a fact of life in South Africa. The end of Apartheid might have removed the legal framework allowing institutionalised racism. Racism in South Africa both predates and encompasses more than just the institutionalised racism of apartheid. In this connection Pradnya Ghorpade observes, "Racism was thus a distorted representation of social reality, especially of the unequal social relations of capitalist production and exploitation" (50). She further points out that "Racial exploitation in South Africa has been called by various names; apartheid is only a new name for an old process" (50). Apartheid was a policy that governed relations between South Africa's white minority and non-white majority. It sanctioned racial segregation and political and economic discrimination against nonwhites. Apartheid; an Afrikaans word, meaning "separateness", or "the state of being apart", literally "apart-hood" was a system of racial segregation in South Africa. It was enforced through legislation by the National Party (NP), the governing party from 1948 to 1994. The implementation of apartheid was often called as "separate development" since the 1960s. It was made possible through the Population Registration Act of 1950, which classified all South Africans as either Bantu (all black Africans), Coloured (those of mixed race), or white. A fourth category—Asian (Indian and Pakistani)—was later added. Under apartheid, the rights, associations, and movements of the majority black inhabitants and other ethnic groups were curtailed, and white minority rule was maintained. The term is currently used for forms of systematic segregation established by the state authority in a country against the social and civil rights of a certain group of citizens due to ethnic prejudices.

South Africa's unique social and political history has generated a rich variety of literatures, with themes spanning pre-colonial life, the days of apartheid, and the lives of people in the "new South Africa". Mali and Ghorpade observe, "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" (1). Literature by black South Africans which emerged in the twentieth century reflects the inner turmoil of the people. The conflict between the people of the land and the rulers from the European continent left scars in the minds of the natives, which were recorded by the victimised writers of South Africa. Many of the first black South African print authors were missionary-educated, and many thus wrote in either English or Afrikaans. One of the first well known novels written by a black author in an African language was Solomon Theki so Plaatje's *Mhudi*, written in 1930. Notable white South African authors who wrote in English include Nadine Gordimer, J. M. Coetzee and Andre Brink. Andre Phillipus Brink is acknowledged as one of the prominent novelists in South Africa and one of the most dogged Afrikaner critics of the apartheid system. He wrote both in Afrikaans and English languages. Through his work, he had prompted an awareness of the problems of his society, explored their roots and expressed opposition to repressive authorities. His novels present race relations and racial conflict with an emphasis on the Afrikaner's role, frequently using inter-

racial sexual relationships as a symbol of liberation against the confining political and social system.

The present paper aims to present race relations in Andre Brink's novel *A Dry White Season*. Throughout the dark era of racial segregation and apartheid, Brink feels that his responsibility as a writer is to report on and scrutinize the harsh aspects of South African society. This urge generated the novel *A Dry White Season* which explores the race relations with an emphasis on the Afrikaner's role. In the novel Brink attempts to subvert the repressive and oppressive apartheid system. It is a serious appeal to humanity for a reflection upon the marginalization of black as a racially discriminated class of second-rate citizens. The novel is set during the 1976 Soweto uprising. As Alice Brittan points out:

This novel was written, at least in part, in response to the 1977 murder of political detainees by the Special Branch of South African police, including Black Consciousness leader Steve Biko. It is an overtly 'political' novel; in that sense its subject is the corruption and brutality of the Afrikaans government and judicial system (58-59).

The vote-less black majority gets terribly suppressed by the government because of race laws, which very conveniently assure the whites of a good wealthy living in South Africa. Many blacks see the injustice being made against their brothers and sisters and cry out for equality. But the youth see their fathers and brothers being killed in the streets by the police and they burst out in the rage trying to get even with whites. Not even remembering that it was not revenge or hate but equality that they were fighting for.

It is a story of a white school teacher, whose life and values are threatened when he asks questions about the death of a young black boy, who dies in a police custody. Ben DuToit, an Afrikaner, is a typical suburban family man- a model citizen with a wife and three children. Like most ordinary citizens, as his life moves forward with measured serenity, he is contentedly oblivious to the machinations of the ruling political regime. Shortly after the Soweto riots of June 1976, however, Ben's complacent life begins to crumble. It begins harmlessly enough. He leads comfortable suburban life that prevents him from questioning the core values of South African society. He believes in essential fairness of the South African government and its policies. Gordon Nguben is a black cleaner at Ben's school. He asks Ben to help him to locate his son Jonathan, who is disappeared during Soweto riots. He was last seen among the protesters at Soweto. Ben agrees to help him and with the aid of a lawyer they begin petitioning the Special Branch of South African police for information on Jonathan's whereabouts. From the outset, the authorities stall and give them conflicting reports. At first they claim they know nothing of Jonathan. Then, after Gordon and Ben confront them with statements by black informants who have seen the boy in jail and in a hospital, the officials tell Gordon's lawyer that Jonathon has been detained after all, and that he has died of a heart attack. When Gordon attempts to claim his son's body, however, he encounters more evasiveness. Finally Gordon and Ben are told that all previous information was incorrect and that Jonathan was fatally wounded on the day of the riots and buried a month later, after no one had claimed the body. The case, so far as the authorities are concerned, is closed. For Ben, the word of the Special Branch is enough, but Gordon is obsessed with his son's mysterious death and continues the investigation on his own. Then he, too, is arrested, and the affidavits he has collected to prove that his son had been detained in jail are confiscated. Brink throws light on brutality of Special Branch. He exposes power politics and popular perception about apartheid.

After Gordon's arrest, his wife Emily pleads for Ben's assistance. He again agrees to help her. But each time he moves closer to unravel the matter, his efforts are frustrated by the Special Branch. Witnesses, who confirm that Jonathan had been detained and tortured to disappear, fall victim to strange accidents; Gordon "confesses" to being a terrorist and later, official say, commits suicide. Ben's house is searched and his phone is tapped; he is blackmailed and forced to resign from his job. His friends and eventually, his wife Susan and family turn against him. His commitment to unearthing the truth has thrown him into a deadly conflict with "the invisible and shapeless power"(244). Brink posits how state power controls the race relations. He maintains that the power does never forgive anybody who tries to threaten its core values, either the person is from opposite race or a part of the system itself. Though Ben is a white Afrikaner, he cannot raise questions about inequality, injustice made to black and he himself is thrown into a collision course by the State.

His relations with black flourish through his humanistic view to help them. Besides his relations with his own family, society and race shatter because of their prejudices towards black. Ben is supported by Stanley, an African taxi driver; Julius Nqakula, a black lawyer and Melanie, a persistent reporter. He is opposed by his family (except for his son, Johan), his school and his community. In his journey towards unveiling the brutality and crimes of the Special Branch, Ben descends from respected family man to an isolated man. Melanie is the only white person who wants Ben to help Gordon. She encourages him when she says "Just that very few people seem prepared to be simply human- and to take responsibility for it"(116). Brink clearly suggests here that race relations should rely on humanistic views and not necessarily on the colour or any other physical differences. Melanie describes Stanley as "A big black rough uncut diamond"(119). She assures Ben that in case he ever really needs someone, "a man you can trust with your life, it's Stanley"(119). Being a journalist, she is aware of social, political, economical conditions of black as well as that of white Afrikaners'. Brink presents Melanie as interlink between native black African and ruling white Afrikaner races. She makes it clear to Ben that the black Africans "have nothing left to lose. Only their lives"(119). Further she makes him aware of threat that his single handed fight against Government may create to his life because he has "everything to lose"(120). Stanley makes him aware of his whiteness and its advantages. He tells Ben "You're white. Hope comes easy to you. You're used to it"(83). So Ben is forced to use his whiteness in his search. But the antipathy of the special branch toward blacks is expressed and acted upon with a single-mindedness and brutality that go far beyond the group-centered prejudice and snobbery. This creates a great obstacle in his way. So in spite of his wish to help them, Ben is unable to do so.

Ben's childhood, though similar to that of a black man, he is unaware of their socio-political condition, of which he gets aware only after getting involved in Jonathan's and later in Gordon's case. When he helps Gordon in investigation, Ben comes to know about the social and cultural differences between blacks and whites, racism, prejudices, segregation and other brutal effects of apartheid. A colonel, who is prejudiced towards blacks, tells him that the government is doing so many things for blacks. But in return they burn down and destroy whatever they can lay their hands on. And so in the end they are the ones who suffer for it. He argues that it's not State that causes sufferings to blacks but they themselves are responsible for their inhumane condition. He thinks that no white child would behave like that. Ben refuses to accept his views and argues "But if you were given the choice, Colonel: wouldn't you rather be a white child in this country than a black one"(62)? Brink posits that cultural norms and value systems assign a secondary role to black in relation to white. He reproaches the society for its colour bias and indifference to black as a lower class.

Brink depicts two photographs in Ben's life which cause threat to his social as well as familial relations. The two photographs play an important role in deciding race relations throughout the novel: one is of Ben and Emily and the other is of Ben and Melanie. The verdict against Gordon concludes bluntly and abruptly. It declares Gordon as a criminal and his death as suicide. Emily collapses by this injustice. She seeks brotherhood and humanity in Ben and "simply threw her arms around his neck and started sobbing on his chest"(120). This incident is photographed and published in a newspaper with a headline "The face of grief"(138). This incident threatens Ben's relations at all levels. Such a public display in a newspaper annoys Ben but he knows that Emily had acted without knowing what she was doing. Yet he has to face absolutely blunt and sharp reactions of his colleagues, friends and family members. The second photograph has "A background of fuzzy out-of-focus wallpaper, a bedside table, a crumpled bed; a man and a girl naked in a position of intimate caressing, apparently preparing for coitus"(120). The man and the girl are nobody else than Ben and Melanie. This photograph is sent through mail to Ben's school and to his family members by the Special Branch. The reactions are as clear as crystal. He is forced to give resignation from his job. His marriage collapses as Susan breaks up with him and his younger daughter rejects him. He is alienated from his family members, friends and colleagues. The erotic scene, the exposure of the body, enrages and shames the Afrikaners community. But Gordon and Jonathan's murders do not make any difference to it. Brink suggests that though the relations between two people, two races depend upon their own wills to interact with each other, in the present South African scenario it depends upon the will of the Government. In this connection Brittan points out: "The outrage which should have been aroused by the fate of these black men and by the condition of the black community generally, is instead, and focused upon the supposed immorality of extra-marital affairs, upon the sordidness of the female body that has been violated by the hidden camera"(64).

Ben's relations with colored and black are directly affected by apartheid. On the other hand his relations with his own family, with his community are broken up due to their prejudices towards black community. The biggest shock from the State to Ben is the shock to his relation with Melanie. She is forced to leave South Africa and could never meet him again. Slowly Ben notices the impact of his inquisitions on the people around him and on himself. He starts doubting himself when slowly the people around are being taken from him. His relations with them are controlled by the absolute State power and slowly his life is also being taken from him by the special branch. He realizes that justice as he thought it, doesn't exist. He finds himself fighting with an invisible enemy. It's like that dry white season, when he was young. Once again he is left in search of himself and of the world. It is the price demanded by his single handed struggle against the apartheid.

Ben doesn't want to be a hero, but just on the part of humanity he helps a black man whom he knows well. Until his help is limited at financial level, all is fine, but at the moment he is engrossed in Jonathan's case, his relations at all levels including familial, societal, institutional changed drastically. It is no longer before Gordon himself is 'killed' and Ben is thrown into an investigation which progressively alienates him from his social milieu and even from his own family. Shortly before his murder, and directly following his disastrous trip to Soweto, Ben Du Toit recognizes that an unbridgeable gulf separates him from the very community to whom he tried to help. "I am white" (304), he realizes and understands for the first time the ideological implications of his skin colour. Black people like Gordon, Stanley seek assistance in Ben, more and more strangers turned up on his doorstep to ask for help. On the other hand, majority of the black men reject to keep faith in him just because of his skin

color. People don't even remember that it is not revenge or hate, but equality that they are fighting for.

Thus, the malevolence consequences of apartheid cause total disruption of human relationship. Brink presents here different manifestations of race relations through which his disapproval of apartheid is empathetically revealed. By writing about this aspect of relationship between races, he has touched a sensitive nerve of the multiracial society of South Africa.

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