

Alan Paton's Novel *Ah, But Your Land Is Beautiful* - A Protest against Segregation

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Abstract: When the Europeans settled in South Africa, they introduced many laws in order to bring the natives under their control. They segregated the natives using the apartheid system which was implemented by the Nationalist Party government. The colonizers allocated separate dwelling place for the natives. The non-Europeans were separated, allocating separate seats in the buses, trains, waiting-rooms etc. School functions and competitions were strictly segregated. The blacks were not allowed to worship along with the whites. During the colonial period, a person was not considered to be white if one of his or her parents was non-white. In *Ah, But Your Land is Beautiful*, Prinsloo expresses his pain that he has lost his job as he has coloured skin. There was segregation in education and the natives were not allowed to own a house. And it was pathetic that the blacks were not allowed to attend a funeral service in the church which was allocated for the whites. Alan Paton depicts the condition of the natives in South Africa and he expresses his protest against the discriminatory laws. He dreams of a South Africa, shedding all the evils existing in the country so that the natives can enjoy liberty, equality and fraternity.

Keywords -segregation, competitions, worship, education, funeral, dream

Introduction

In the history of South African literature, Alan Paton is recognized as a major writer of fiction dealing with serious questions concerning the social political and cultural life of the people. His voice is a powerful one in protesting against apartheid. Alan Paton sympathises with the suffering aborigines of South Africa who are subjected to racial discrimination and segregation by the European colonizers on account of their colour, race etc.

Alan Paton was born to the British, educated and religious parents and brought up in South Africa and so he had the first hand knowledge of South Africa, and his job as a teacher in a Zulu school in Ixopo, a

country town in Southern Natal, provided him a chance to have a close contact with the natives of South Africa. Alan Paton acquired the skill of writing at an early age and he was greatly influenced by writers who opposed the apartheid government. He opened his home as a meeting place for the members of different races to share their experiences and longings and this enabled Alan Paton to grasp their inner struggle.

He understands their struggles and feelings and intends to bring racial equality in the land of his birth. He finds South Africa is corrupted by the colonizers and he predicts that purification is required and this finds its expression in all his works. The King James Version of the Bible and his parent's faith have deeply influenced him and his writings.

Being a politician and the founder of the Liberal Party of South Africa Alan Paton protested against the racial discrimination in South Africa and on witnessing the cruelty of the colonizers he remained a fierce opponent of apartheid legislation. The members of the Liberal party comprised both the blacks and the whites who were outspoken against apartheid and worked for the men and women of different racial groups to live together peacefully.

Racial Segregation

Alan Paton highlights the inhuman attitude of racial segregation in all his fiction. He considers apartheid hateful and he is repelled by racism all around in his homeland and mirrors the horrible picture of discrimination and the sufferings of the natives under this terrible system. Alan Paton's novel *Ah, But Your Land is Beautiful* deals with a chain of stories, letters, speeches, news and records which projects genuine photograph of the lives of the natives in South Africa under the apartheid system of racial discrimination and their struggling situation in which they cannot move freely in their motherland.

In the novel *Ah, But Your Land is Beautiful*, Alan Paton highlights many situations in which the non-Europeans experience racial discrimination. During the colonial period the blacks and coloured people are not allowed to live in a white area. In *Ah, But Your Land is Beautiful*, Alan Paton pictures this system which prevents the existence of Dr Monty a non-European,

who would no longer be able to live in a white area, but would have to take himself and his family to an Indian group area where they could speak their own language, cherish their own culture, and pursue their own social, political, religious and economic goals in peace unhampered by the proximity of alien races. (15)

The cruel policy of segregation is prevalent everywhere, In the railway, airport waiting-rooms, separate seats are allocated for the Europeans and non-Europeans. Based on the Separate Amenities Act, there is segregation in public places, on trains and buses. In, *Ah, But Your Land is Beautiful*, One of the activists of Defiance Campaign, Prem Boda Singh goes to the Durban Municipal Reference Library takes a book and is reading but above the doors it is clearly stated, '*Whites only*', Prem is there only to defy the law.

At the same time Mr. Joy Perumal reports that his grandmother is sitting in the white –waiting rooms at Beree road, protesting the unjust law.

After the advent of colonisation the School functions and competitions were conducted separately. In the novel, *Ah, But Your Land is Beautiful*, Dr William Johnson, the Director of education has issued a circular stating that they should not encourage racially mixed school functions Robert Mansfield used to take his students to play cricket against Mr. Nhalapo's school students but the education department forbids him to do so and so he has to resign his job.

Alan Paton reveals the cruel attitude of the colonizers and how they segregate the blacks from the whites in the name of racial identity in the places of worship. A bill had been passed by South African parliament which made it a crime for the blacks and the whites to worship in the same church, Alan Paton's novel refers to a woman who lent her garage for black services says, "We denied the use of our church building to black people not because of any desire to help them to cherish their identity, but because of the hardness and coldness of our heart" (86). Native Amendment Act of 1957 empowers a Minister to forbid a Bantu to attend any function in a white area.

The government has offered generous help to all legitimate non-white organizations provided "there are no inter-racial competitions, no mixed teams and no mixing of spectators" (215). The South African Olympic Council has decided that no competition between the white and the black would be allowed in any part of the country. In Johannesburg, John Parker, a games master has resigned his job because the Transvaal Education Department has banned all sporting relationship between the white students and others. Here the author expresses his protest against segregation.

Nelson Mandela in his autobiography, *Long Walk to Freedom* presents the life of a native in the Apartheid land,

An African child is born in an African only hospital, taken home in an African only bus, lives in an African only area and attend African only schools, if he attends school at all. When he grows up he can hold African only jobs, rent a house Africans Only townships, ride Africans Only trains and be stopped at any time of the day or night and be ordered to produce a pass, without which he can be arrested and thrown in jail. His life is circumscribed by racist laws and regulations that cripple his growth. (89)

In *Ah, But Your Land is Beautiful*, Alan Paton shows a painful picture of Mr Lodewyk Prinsloo, a clerk-in-charge of the South African Railways and Harbours. On a holiday, two inspectors reach the house of Prinsloo and start their conversation

- Mr Prinsloo, let us begin our business. You are Lodewyk Hofmeyr Prinsloo, are you not ?
- Yes inspector.

- And you were born on the Sunday of February 1914 in the city of Cape Town
- Yes inspector
- You married Petronella Margaretha van Vollenstein on the sixth day of June 1942 in the city of Cape Town/
- Yes inspector
- Mr, Prinsloo, how do you explain the fact that on your birth certificate you are classified as coloured but on your marriage certificate as white
- I put myself down as white meneer. My whole family passed for white. My father was a white man and my mother was a coloured woman, but she was as white as my father.
- Mr. Prinsloo, We do not have anything to do with racial classification, I am from the Department of Labour and it is my duty to inform you that as a coloured man you are not allowed to hold the position of clerk-in-charge in the Railways and Harbours Administration. (242-43)

He is dismissed from his job for being coloured and under the administration of Group Areas Act he will no longer live in Claremont so that he has to buy or rent a house in any area for coloured people. When his wife comes to know that he is a coloured man she leaves him and returns to her parents with her children. Prinsloo reveals his pain to the coloured servant, "Maria, they have gone because I have lost my job, I have lost this house too. It is because I am a coloured man" (45). Here Alan Paton points out the sufferings of a man who cannot be treated as white as his mother is a coloured woman and as a result he has lost his life, wife, children and his job which he has considered as his happiness.

Education is the wealth of a country, but the colonizers introduced a school system to train the natives to work in the local administration at the lowest ranks and to assist the private capitalist firms owned by Europeans. After colonization the natives do not have a house of their own and it is expressed through the prayer of Chief Hosea Kutako, "O Lord help us who roam about. Help us who have been in Africa and have no dwelling place of our own. O, God all power is yours on Heaven and Earth, Amen." (230). In the church, the blacks are not allowed to attend even in a funeral service. Ah, But Your Land is Beautiful delineates a sorrowful story happened at Loerfested. Mr. Cornelius Bezuindhout was one of the most respected farmers in the district and twenty of his workers went to the church to attend his funeral service. But the priest refused to conduct the service as there was many coloured mourners in the church and so the funeral service was postponed.

Conclusion

Alan Paton who witnesses all the injustice prevailing in his country raises his powerful voice with a hope of achieving freedom to the natives. His intention is to see a new racial-free South Africa.

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