

**Social Disintegration and Moral Reformation in *Cry, the Beloved Country***

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**Abstract**

*This paper examines how Alan Paton reveals the impact of racism and industrialisation on traditional rural African community of the processes of industrialisation and racism. It focuses on the connection which Paton makes between the exploitation of the black urban migrants by the white minority, the loss of their traditional values and the social disintegration. It examines Paton's message that only through reconciliation and cooperation between the races can catastrophe be averted in South Africa. The paper examines evidence of paternalism in Paton's attitude. The literature is the mirror of social reality, as the Marxist literary theory argued that, the write is affected by the ramifications of his age, therefore it can be said that in South African community the race determines the social class. Further, the paper examines the social disintegration in the African society which finally ends with some sort of moral regeneration.*

*Cry, The Beloved Country* is a classic commentary of South Africa and is considered as one of the valid story of that country. The novel captures the tragedy of Kumalo Family. It also bears witness to the fact that the racial tensions are still prevalent in South Africa.

*Cry, The Beloved Country* is about South Africa, its people and more particularly about father's quest for his lost Son. This brings the man reverend Stephan Kumalo to Johannesburg. After a long journey, Kumalo visits a parish priest named Msimangu for help in locating his ill sister Gertrude. Finally, he finds her out with a child. She was working as a prostitute. He then visits his brother John Kumalo, a black political leader. Kumalo then tries to discover the whereabouts of his son, Absalom. As he goes to Johannesburg with Msimangu as his guide, he witnessed the terrible conditions of the "Kaffirs" (native people): the congestion, the isolation from the white people where the natives have to work, the lack of transportation, the price hike and low wages. The black people have initiated a bus strike

to protest against rising fares, and Kumalo and Msimangu had to walk many miles in search of Absalom. Some generous white people drive up and down giving the “Kaffirs” rides in their cars in order to support their strike, Kumalo is highly impressed by this kindness. Finally, Kumalo's search ends at a reformatory where Absalom has been sent as a convict for theft. The authority of the reformatory has released Absalom early in view of his good behaviour. Absalom has a girlfriend too and is expecting a child, and he is to marry her soon. The Msimangu lead Kumalo to Absalom's new home so that he can meet his lost son after so long. However, when they reached Absalom's home they discovered that he has deserted his pregnant girlfriend and resumed his criminal life again. Absalom has been involved in many crimes; he and his companions have broken into the home of a white man, Arthur Jarvis, and killed him because he caught them in the middle of robbery. Arthur Jarvis was an important advocate among white men of native rights. This crime and its consequences weigh heavily on Kumalo's mind.

James Jarvis, the father of murdered man lives in Ixopo and has a large estate. Jarvis is only imprecisely aware of the “Kaffirs”. When the news comes that his only child, Arthur, has been murdered in Johannesburg, Jarvis was shocked and with difficulty informed his wife and his daughter-in-law's family. Since Jarvis knew little of his son's opinion and admiration for the withered conditions of the natives, he attempts to understand his son's thinking on the race issue. Jarvis realises that the white ruling class has shattered the tribal life of native people by using them as cheap labour. He sees that his son was trying very hard to change the deteriorating conditions of these natives by giving them a handsome share in the profits and opportunities. Finally court condemns Absalom to death by hanging but at the same time, other two convicts are acquitted for the lack of evidence. When Kumalo goes to take Gertrude with him, he finds that she has started her old life again and has left her son behind. Kumalo returns to his village with the boy and his pregnant daughter-in-law as Absalom has married her in prison to give their child a name. Both Kumalo and Jarvis have returned to their respective homes in Ixopo. Jarvis's grandson, the young son of Arthur Jarvis, makes friends with Kumalo in order to learn and speak Zulu.

The novel *Cry, The Beloved Country* is a protest novel. Kumalo learns this reality very quickly that the whites, have disrupted African values and social order. Even the Reverend Theophilus Msimangu, a priest who offers his assistance to Kumalo, believes that this disintegration of social values is so deep rooted in the culture that it cannot be mended. Msimangu does, however, envision hope for liberation of this society from this racial segregation. The land, in this case, South Africa, is the centre of this novel. Like the land that is divided and eroded, so, too, are the people who live on it.

Alan Paton believes that the country of South Africa has new hope for restoration of its values, especially in the sons of Arthur Jarvis and Absalom Kumalo. Paton parallels character to character and action to action to dramatize the social ills of South Africa and its

native people. The safe, calm village life of Kumalo and the farm life of Jarvis parallel the city life in Johannesburg, a city of immorality, corruption, and moral inequities for both blacks and whites. The need for truth and justice is paralleled by Kumalo's search for his son Absalom, whom he finds in prison, with Jarvis's news of his son's death. Each father must come to terms with a loss. Ironically, it is Kumalo's son who shoots and kills Arthur Jarvis. Paton makes this parallel to function in two ways: first, to reflect the suffering of each father; second, to show that both Absalom and Arthur fall victim to apartheid. This Paralleling acts as a tool to focus on the issue of race relations in South Africa.

Paton uses simple diction in *Cry, The Beloved Country*. Kumalo speaks in solemn language emphasizing his ecclesiastic background; the Reverend Msimangu often speaks in an oratory fashion. John Kumalo uses the language of violence to demonstrate his anger over apartheid. The tribal language brings the novel credibility and revelation of a people rooted in tradition. Even the language shows social disintegration. In 1946, Paton began writing *Cry, the Beloved Country* and less than four months later, he finished it. Paton knew firsthand the tragedy that marked his homeland. He noted that although the story is not true, it is a social record of the truth. *Cry, the Beloved Country* is a classic work of world literature, not only for bringing to light a destructive political system but also for depicting the humanity among people that can be lost in the struggle for justice and power. *Cry, the Beloved Country* is a cry for one's land, a cry for justice, a cry for integrity, a cry for hope and a cry of a desolate father for his lost son. Paton succeeds to a remarkable extent in portraying a segment of South African life and he succeeds, to even more remarkable degree, in endowing this regional portrait with universal significance. He accomplishes this by including into the actualities of South Africa's physical and social setting an essential theme of social disintegration. This theme is worked out through two complementary actions: Stephen Kumalo's physical search for his son Absalom, and James Jarvis' intellectual search for the spirit of his son Arthur. In each case, the journey, once undertaken, leads to an inner, spiritual awakening. During the time that passes between the discovery of the murder and the completion of the trial, the paths of the two desolate fathers cross. Each seeks to understand his own son and to discover the root causes of his divergence from accustomed ways- the one fallen from the standards of the church his father served, the other committed to a vision of racial justice quite alien to his father's conventional assumptions. Although neither can hope to have his son restored to him, their mutual recognition of each other's suffering engenders a hitherto unthought-of sense of neighbourhood and humanity.

*Cry, the Beloved Country* is impelled by the author's urgency of his concern of human situations. Paton once described it as a desire to write those books that would pierce South African conscience. Yet it is also a successful artistic achievement. Paton draws attention to the moral aspect of his purpose in his "Author's Note" on fictional persons and events. Besides focusing on the general climate of disintegration, *Cry, the Beloved Country* draws on

many other facets of the South Africa. In this respect it is typical of Paton's fictional method, which, characteristically, seeks materials in the actualities of South African life. There are specific public events like the building of Shanty Town, the bus boycott, the discovery of rich new gold deposits at Odendaalsrust, and the air of frenzied excitement that the discovery engendered on the Stock Market and in Johannesburg as a whole. The intensity and pervasiveness of the fear is one of the central themes of the novel.

Fear shows in the eyes of the God-fearing as well as of evil-doers. There is fear, too, in the daily newspapers. The land itself is enveloped in fear. And fingers of fear reach towards the future. This intense concern with a climate of fear heightens the basic dramatic conflict of love and hate, for many of the characters know, or come to know, that fear engenders hatred, and that only through love can fear be cast out. Characteristics of actual persons and events may be more easily modified to fictional purposes than an atmosphere. They supply part of the truth of a total situation. *Cry, the Beloved Country* attempts to manifest this aspect of the truth, too, for the novel probes the less considerable but no less real problems of the sensitive, subconscious springs of racial stance. Paton composed the novel of lyric and dramatic elements. Even a superficial examination of this novel will reveal that it is free of direct narrative prose. The readers of *Cry, The Beloved Country* are struck by the simplicity of its language and the rhythmic quality of its prose style. It is this that makes the style of *Cry, The Beloved Country* unique and often described as biblical.

*Cry, the Beloved Country* is a record of three major quests of Kumalo. Book One is concerned at first with the physical quest of the Reverend Stephen Kumalo, who travels from the African village of Ndotsheni to Johannesburg in search of his sister Gertrude, his son Absalom, and his brother John, who have all "disappeared". His guide to these regions of lost people is another Anglican priest Msimangu. Msimangu, as has been pointed out, is a man of philosophic bent and clear logical mind. Finally, they find Stephen's sister Gertrude, his brother John, and, finally, his son Absalom, only to discover that he is found guilty of the murder of Arthur Jarvis. Book Two introduces us to James Jarvis, father of the murdered man. He sets out from the closed mental world of his own habitual assumptions and prejudices and seeks to understand the liberal spirit revealed to him in his son's reputation and writings. Book Three is the Book of Restoration or Moral restoration. In it, the physical and psychological quests of the earlier books turn towards the spiritual path of redemption. However, with every quest, Kumalo witness the moral and social disintegration of people and society at large.

Paton's *Cry, The Beloved Country* offers no plan for society but reveals the individual recognition of personal responsibility. Such recognition depends on a process of self-discovery, a process which both James Jarvis and Stephen Kumalo endure in the novel. The reader of *Cry, The Beloved Country* undergoes a process of self-discovery. The crucial development for both Jarvis and Kumalo is that each comes to recognize how fear or

indifference infects society with moral paralysis. They do not wait, therefore, for some miraculous healing of this paralysis to be brought about by the direct intervention of God rather they act by taking whatever steps are possible to them for their own self liberation.

The novel suggests that societal change will only come when there is a change within men's hearts, but it holds out the hope that such change can and will happen. Therefore, novel ends with a positive note that social disintegration can be tamed by moral reformation.

**Works Cited:**

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