

THE ALIENATED PROTAGONIST IN BESSIE HEAD'S - A QUESTION OF POWER.

JOSEPHINE I. IWE

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ABSTRACT

A Question of Power is an existential struggle of a protagonist-narrator whose alienation and recovery emphasize her search for the identity of her true self. It is an exploration into the outrageous facts of life as manifested in apartheid South Africa. Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. South Africa's absolute power rendered the blacks subhuman with their rights subdued. Elizabeth's rights are violently attacked from many angles and her feelings of resentment caused by the great injustice against her dignity reduces her to a state of insanity which takes her through many dark alleys of subconscious horrible experiences. For three or four years, she is insane believing that Sello sat in her empty chair persistently commenting on all her thoughts, perceptions and experiences. Bessie Head depicts a protagonist whose alienations and loss of identity started at birth with her rejection by her relatives. She is alienated from her immediate as well as outer environment and this makes her look inwards in search of her roots and reasons for existence. She succeeds in this search when she realizes that love controls the universe. She participates in the communal farming of Motabeng village, regaining her lost self, identity and sanity.

KEYWORDS: Alienation, Protagonist, Bessie Head, Power, Question.

A Question of Power is Bessie Head's third novel which portrays her keen search for social, sexual, political and spiritual values in human relationships with an acceptable social order. In spite of her optimism in this search, she records in-depth alienation everywhere she turns her attention.

The word, alienation, which is derived from the latin term, "alienare" resounds in the novel giving vent to series of interpretations and analysis. It continued to be used in the Middle English period where it had such meanings as renouncement of ownership, mental disorder and interpersonal estrangement. In Modern English, it accumulated an endless list of synonyms which include separation, objectivization, exteriorization, reification, rationalization, ritualization, isolation, detachment, distancing, estrangement, bifurcation, disorganization, marginalization, etc. This plurality of synonyms makes it rather difficult to define. No wonder the Danish social theorist, Israel calls it an ambivalent term.

Nonetheless, it continued to be used frequently by scholars as a concept, a notion and even as a phenomenon through the centuries sometimes generating serious controversies amongst them. By the 20th century, scholars used the term on one of three levels, namely, the sociological, the psychological or the socio/psychological. The sociological level involves social conditions and processes which generate group or individual manifestations of alienation. The psychological level concerns behaviour and perceptions of individuals as they are explained by personal or interpersonal experiences. The socio/psychological level is individual or social behaviour which manifests alienation

as a result of social conditions and vice-versa. The topic under discussion in this paper falls under the socio/psychological level of alienation as we shall see Bessie Head engaging in a series of explorations into

the society through the individual lives of characters depicting the inner workings of their minds.

Scholars have tendered many definitions of alienation. Paul Meadow's definition which focuses on its socio-psychological dimension is most appropriate here. He defines it as " a sense of separation from something substantial, a sense of separation that creates concern over that which has been lost" This definition emphasizes the idea of psychological estrangement and a sense of loss from the essence and the society. It is a situation that generates identity crisis, personal as well as social identity crisis. It is a pathetic condition of separation and loss which calls for a restoration of that which is lost. This was the condition of the South African non-white in the apartheid regime. He was alienated from the white community through discriminatory practices and he was also alienated from self.

The feeling of alienation pervaded the society depicted by Bessie Head in *A Question of Power*. Significantly, she is a product of alienation both at birth where she was "born to be hated" and as a colored citizen of apartheid South Africa where she perpetually faced outrageous acts of extreme discrimination, oppression and segregation. These kept her agitated and completely on her toes until she left the scene. She tells us that "People cried out so often in agony against racial hatreds and oppressions..." (53).

Bessie Head lived twenty-seven years of her life in South Africa before she went into exile in Botswana where she lived till she died. At her death in 1986, she was forty-eight years old, which means that she put in twenty-one years in Botswana where she wrote and set all her books. *A Question of Power*, which was her third book, was greatly influenced by her experiences in South Africa.

Nadine Gordimer posits that the South African culture had been battered and distorted through its historical experiences with the result that her writers could not draw from the indigenous culture, which had continued to enrich the literatures of other parts of Africa. This, according to her, resulted in South African writers tending to write in a vacuum. Moreover, because of the harsh, violent and frustrating atmosphere, they wrote pouring out the anger, frustration and bitter experiences, which had been bottled up in their bosom. *A Question of Power* is littered with outrageous acts, statements and outcries which depict the feelings of the author in a society that discriminated against a section of its people. In reference to the social defects of the society, the protagonist-narrator had an outcry, "Oh, this filthy environment where men sleep with the little girls they fathered and other horrific evils!" (137).

The perversions of different forms, which were rampant in the society, were vehemently condemned by Elizabeth. She did not only raise an outcry openly but went to Motabeng Post Office and pasted on the wall a signed outrageous statement which reads: "Sello is a filthy pervert who sleeps with his daughter" (175). Having failed to achieve much from such protests she resorted to shouting in public: "These bloody bastard Batswana!" (175).

A Question of Power is the story of a woman's outrage caused by alienation; of her relentless struggle to conquer alienation and achieve some form of identity with the world. Elizabeth, the protagonist-narrator goes through series of horrible experiences in form of hallucinations to discover herself and the world around her. The narrative starts on a note of defiant outcry by Sello, a principal character: "I am just anyone" (11) which significantly depicts self-alienation and loss of identity. He is not any particular individual man or woman, adult or child. He is anybody. In other words, what transpires in the novel concerning Sello can apply to anybody.

The novel, which is characterized by many orgies, depicts three major subconscious states in the portrayal of the protagonist. The reader identifies nightmarish experiences, dreams and visions of Elizabeth. These are so intertwined in the narrative that it is not easy to differentiate them. For three or four years, the protagonist believed that Sello sat in her empty chair persistently commenting on all her thoughts, perceptions and experiences. Dan, another chief character in the novel, prophesied that Elizabeth would become a loose woman and would have eight love affairs. But it is Dan himself that becomes loose with women for he is depicted as constantly gyrating his penis in front of women boasting: "when I go with a woman, I go for an hour" (159).

Head explores in *A Question of Power* various ways in which power is used to victimize women in their relations with men. These victimizations take place not necessarily in the physical real world but in the subconscious of the protagonist through dreams, hallucinations and nightmares. Dan is portrayed having sex with seventy-one Nice-Time-Girls in Elizabeth's presence. These girls are inhumanly sexual and as their names sound, depict grotesque exaggeration of their sexuality- Miss Wriggly Bottom, Madam Loose Bottom,

Miss Body Beautiful, Madam Squelch Squelch, etc. These names portray not only obscene sexuality but also prostitution, sexual promiscuity and even death through sexual misapplication. One of them asserts: "I have an insatiable desire" (129). Dan does this to make Elizabeth jealous and more depressed. He accuses her of being inferior and incapable of sexual experience;

"I go with all these women because you are inferior...

you are supposed to feel jealous

you are inferior as a colored

you haven't got what that girl has got" (129)

These short sentences are poetically rendered with enough inflammable bombast to offend, insult and make Elizabeth go wild with anger. She did go wild almost immediately screaming and slapping old Mrs. Jones who did nothing to her. Carefree sexuality, and pervasions of all kinds are portrayed in the novel.

Both Sello and Dan are portrayed as men with a weakness for women, "the women dominated effeminate slob" (105). Dan is portrayed as an animal flaying his penis as if his phallus power is the only dominating power that can achieve female subjugation. He is a homosexual and a pervert, "sleeping with cows and anything on earth" (148).

Sexual promiscuity and perversion are part of the day-to-day activities in the society. Medusa is depicted as the symbol of female sexual power, which dominates both men and women and Elizabeth faces her as evil with the aim of destroying the evil she represents. Sello asserts: "It wasn't power that was my doom. It was women." (199)

By depicting Dan and his elegant, seductive nice-time whores with their obsessive sexual orgies, Bessie Head condemns whoring as evil representing the devilish apartheid South Africa with its obnoxious rules and laws which did not do anyone any good. So also is lesbianism as represented by Medusa. They are two evils which must be avoided as much as apartheid is to be done away with. Sexual promiscuity in *A Question of Power* becomes a mode of interpreting the perverse unnatural world of apartheid South Africa where "nobody loves anyone" (168) people 'operate from the bottom'. (175) Lloyd Brown sees Head's portrayal of South Africa as a moral wasteland which inspired an intensively moral idealism in her.

Insanity which is regarded as total alienation is another dimension portrayed by Bessie Head. Elizabeth, the alienated protagonist became insane because of the pressures of apartheid. The reader is made to see that Elizabeth's insanity did not come as a

surprise not only because of the weight of the cruelties of apartheid but also because her mother had her in a mental hospital and throughout her stay in the mission schools, they had kept an eye on her to ensure that she does not become insane like her mother. So, they lived on the alert for Elizabeth's insanity, isolating her whenever she showed signs of aggression.

Bessie Head uses insanity as a mode of interpretation of apartheid in South Africa. Apartheid is an insane policy by insane people who can only produce mentally deranged population through oppression, discrimination and dispossession. Elizabeth's mother, who was isolated in a mental hospital many years previously on the reason that she made love to a black man, sees the stigma of insanity as something to be shared because all those perpetrating apartheid in South Africa are insane too. Elizabeth's mother committed suicide after the suffering of isolation, rejection and insanity meted on her by her own people who were supposed to protect her. Elizabeth's enquiry over her mother's life and death met with the reply: "When you were six years old, we heard that your mother had suddenly killed herself in the mental home". (17)

Bessie Head's theme of madness is not new in African Literature. Chinua Achebe's Ezeulu in *Arrow of God* goes mad because he could no longer carry the burden heaped on him as the spiritual head of Umuofia. Amamu in Kofi Awoonor's *This Earth my Brother* also goes mad as an escape valve from societal pressures. Femi Ojo-Ade addresses the issue of alienation and oppression in colonized society and asserts that such alienation leads very often to insanity. Elizabeth's madness is as a result of the physical and spiritual pressures on her psyche. She moves in and out of madness throughout the book to the end when she receives her healing.

Sello and Dan, the two looming apparitions in Elizabeth's room are surrounded by an air of insubstantiation. They appear to have been created out of a fairy tale for they have no endowment of vitality. The sense of the real in terms of environment, work and family life are not vital to their mode of existence in the novel. Bessie Head writes about Sello:

"The faint silvery-white outline of his robe and his face were clearly discernible to her at all times, and so overpowering was the experience at first that in the early morning, as she poured out a cup of tea, she would pour a second cup and absent-mindedly walk towards the chair and say: 'Here's a cup of tea,' and then jolt back to reality, shaking her head: 'Agh, I must be mad. That's just an intangible form'.

Yet he was so vividly alive" (23).

No wonder Elizabeth asserts that she was not sure if she was awake or asleep or whether it was dream perception or waking reality. These apparitions attempt to fondle her but having failed, they try to debase and ill-treat her. But they failed to achieve this too.

In her reference to the relationship between Sello

and "The father", she says:

"They seemed to be easily interchangeable souls, because Sello stood up, walked straight into his person and totally disappeared" (30)

Many characters in this novel are likewise interchangeable with others as they walked into one another and disappeared, for example, a slenderly-built woman stepped out of a monstrous woman and walked straight into Elizabeth. She underwent transformation during the night and at dawn she emerged from Elizabeth's chest area... (107).

During her period of insanity, she is seen screaming and swearing in public and this resulted in her loss of her teaching job. She is accused by the principal and the school Board in the following words:

"we have received a report that you have been shouting and swearing at people in public. Such behavior is unbecoming to a teacher. We are doubtful of your sanity, and request that you submit to us a certificate of sanity from a medical officer within Fourteen days of the receipt of this notice". (66)

Elizabeth was flustered and she walked out of the school for good. She has become rejected again. V. U. Ola asserts that Head's exilic life in Botswana characterized by the realities of alienation, racial prejudice, rejection and victimization as well as the typified South African power in its ugliest form, aroused revulsion in Bessie Head as well as a special reverence for human life and dignity. This is the reason why she does not like the idea of exclusive brotherhoods like the Black Power Movement or Pan Africanism. She would prefer a movement that encompasses the whole of humanity. James M. Garret sees the narrative strategies of Bessie Head's novels as symbolic through the use of aesthetic resolution. The symbolism of insanity in *A Question of Power* is not only a narrative strategy; it is also an aesthetic framework giving form and pattern to the novel.

Rejection resounds constantly in the life of the protagonist as portrayed in the novel. She is rejected right from birth by her white relatives because of streaks of blackness in her appearance thereby rendering her completely alienated from the first day of her life hence she was brought up by foster parents. The line of demarcation between Elizabeth in *A Question of Power* and Margereth Cadmore in *Maru* is not very distinct since each faced rejection at birth and had to be brought up by foster parents. But it is believed that the protagonists represent Bessie Head, the author, who also suffered the same fate. She is just recreating her life through her protagonists. While Margereth in *Maru* was lucky with her foster mother who determined to bring her up as a dignified and responsible woman, Elizabeth in *A Question of Power* was not, she had to be moved from her foster parents and sent to an orphanage because "hours and hours of her childhood had been spent sitting under a lamp-post near her house crying because everyone was drunk and there was no food, no one to think about children". (15)

This rejection continued even in the orphanage and mission school where the other children would avoid sitting near her. The principal constantly embarrassed her with her mother's insanity and the possibility that she could become mad too. This earned her instant isolation from the pupils and consequently loneliness. The reader is told that the other pupils were free to fight and scratch and yell but any attempt at that would earn Elizabeth isolation. This rejection, marginalisation and isolation against Elizabeth gave the other children the opportunity to molest and torment her. Her extreme condition of total rejection motivates her to evoke the rejection of the Jews by the Germans. Elizabeth sees this as another act of rejected human beings on earth by their fellow human beings. This escalated her feelings of wrongful treatment over unwanted people of the earth for which she is one and the heavy weight of the burden must have contributed to her insanity.

This isolation with rejection continued into her marriage to a gangster just out of jail who later became a flirt preferring other women's company to Elizabeth's—another level of rejection. This deepened her loneliness and she decided to leave South Africa for a neighboring Country, Botswana. Rejection, loneliness, isolation and alienation all followed her into her new place of abode. For many years she was rejected and refused citizenship in Botswana. She became a refugee and a stateless person, neither a South African nor a Botswana, an outsider who identifies neither within nor without. She is indeed an alienated protagonist to the superlative degree. Lloyd Brown believes that racial conflict is internalized within the protagonist, Elizabeth, who experienced an intense sense of isolation, profound alienation. To him a "colored" is depicted as the perennial and archetypal outsider in a system of apartheid which fragments the individual's sense of personal identity and integrity.

She became so frustrated and disillusioned that she lost close contact with people. Head tells us that "when she did not take tablets to counter the high screaming hysteria, she turned around and snapped at people and often walked blindly past them without returning greetings" (160). In her suffering she saw herself completely rejected in "a country where people were not people at all" (17). The hallucination of Elizabeth knows no bounds. We are told that for nearly one year, she had sleepless nights, her endurance broke and her mind no longer functioned. At a point, two black hands moved towards her head and we are told:

"They had opened her skull. One of them bent his mouth towards the cavity and talked right into the exposed area. The harsh grating voice was unintelligible. It just said Rrrrrrrraaaaaa. It had shot through her body with the pain of knife wounds she pulled and pulled struggling to free herself of the hands holding her head. She'd awoken gasping for breath" (177).

She sees this as her war with hell—her soul death—a strange journey into hell and darkness. Gloria Chineze Chukwukere sees Bessie Head's philosophy about victimization and evil as the renewal of man by direct confrontation with and victory over evil for the extreme

torture of Elizabeth's mind become a disguised blessing as it also provides the source of her liberation.

The indignity suffered by non-whites in apartheid South Africa just because of their skin pigmentation is given wide metaphorical portrayal in *A Question of Power*. The usual greeting to them is "Hey Kaffir, get out of the way!" and non-compliance to this order definitely would be followed by different levels of assault, attack and perhaps counter attack which may turn into a broil between the two opposing races. We are made to understand that this was a very common occurrence in South Africa whereas in Motabeng, Botswana, their greetings last for about thirty minutes as they enquire about the general well-being and day-to-day activities of their relatives. Bessie Head would want us to see those two contrasting sides of life in the two different countries and perhaps make our conclusions concerning apartheid. Elizabeth's nightmarish and obscene encounters are nothing but Bessie Head's life of abuse

and private sufferings among the people of Botswana and by extension, the suffering of the Blacks in South Africa and all the displaced, rejected and oppressed people in human history.

The close relationship between good and evil is depicted in the dual perception of Dan as both evil and divine. He is an obscene pervert and homosexual. Like in Alex La Guma's *A Walk in the Night*, Head uses excrement, obscenity and filth to show the horrors of oppression and rejection. Dan and his colleagues are rotten and they represent apartheid South Africa and Bessie Head portrays this in putrid human waste and says, "It was as if excreta were everywhere" (64). At a point, she portrays a crater full of excreta to show the large extent of the evil in South Africa.

This anal image is depicted constantly and in an anecdote, Bessie Head tells the story of the drunk teacher who would hide in the toilet to take a few sips from his bottle, looking out occasionally whether the principal of the school was coming. Sometimes he would peep into the toilet basin to see whether the principal was inside it. Head sees this as a corollary to South African perverse attitude to life. She discovers that the power of evil which has overtaken apartheid South Africa, can also be found elsewhere such as amongst Buddhists like Dan; Husbands like her husband; Botswana cattle owners like Sello; school Principals like the principal of Motabeng secondary school; and teachers like herself. Her revulsion to the ugly sides of apartheid is constantly portrayed.

The black man in South Africa was not only seen as "a boy" but was also seen as depraved and stupid. Bessie Head asserts:

"There they said the black man was naturally dull, stupid, inferior, but they made sure to deprive him of the type of education which developed personality, intellect and skill" (54)

Camilla, the Danish woman is depicted as enjoying the humiliation of black farm hands and according to Bessie Head, she "never saw black people as people but as objects of permanent idiocy" (76). She goes all out to address them likewise.

The pangs of apartheid with its loneliness,

rejection and isolation in the lives of the characters extended to inanimate objects such as the crops and farm area in Motabeng farm. One of the farm areas says to Elizabeth:

"Take me. Turn me into a one-acre plot of cabbage, green beans, carrots, beetroot, tomatoes, onions, pea and lettuce. You'd be surprised at all the fancy ladies with baskets on their arms who'll come and visit me. I have been so lonely with only goats to talk to."(112).

Bessie Head wants to say here that every body needs company because man is a gregarious animal. People should not discriminate against or isolate others for selfish reasons and make them feel lonely and unwanted for even inanimate objects desire company. The world will be a better place if we all work together for the betterment of humanity.

CONCLUSION

In depicting apartheid south Africa in *A Question of Power* Bessie Head portrays the chaos of the modern fragmented society which produces the psychologically disoriented individual as is seen in the life of Elizabeth, a typical 20th century protagonist who becomes so alienated that she becomes insane. Much would have been achieved in South Africa with such ideologies as democracy, freedom of thought and of speech, social consciousness; but these eluded apartheid South Africa because of the wicked and devilish acts of the system and because it is, unfortunately, a country with mad rulers, sadists who do nothing else but dehumanize their fellow beings.

Elizabeth's insanity is a metaphor for the loveless apartheid South Africa which is associated with cruelty and insensitivity towards a section of the population. It is accused of discrimination, evil, powerlessness, misuse of women and emasculation of African men. Eugene once told Elizabeth: "This is a terrible country to live. You just dry up and die inside. I feel as if I had died a long time ago" (28). Bessie Head explores Elizabeth's hell in *A question of Power* just like Milton explores Satan's hell in *Paradise lost* and discovers that apartheid South Africa is a hell that is inextricably intertwined with life even if she tries to avoid it through alcohol, drugs, mental derangement, isolation or exile. We are told that "she swallowed six bottles of beer and six sleeping tablets to induce a blackout" (14) but when she regained consciousness, the situation remained the same for her tormentors were still around waiting for her. The representatives of evil, Dan, Sello and Medusa plagued her life just as the Verwoerds, Vorsters and the Bothas in apartheid South Africa plagued on the blacks day by day to destroy them in the land of their ancestors. Depravity and perversion of the basest degree was its natural habitat.

As a stranger, exile, bastard, and woman, Elizabeth is the other, the dispossessed and in her non-identity, statelessness and loneliness, she longed to change the *status quo*⁶ hence *A Question of power* can

be seen as a novel of indictment on apartheid South Africa. It can also be seen as a novel of hope hence at the end of the novel, sanity is restored to Elizabeth just as "sanity" is restored to South Africa with the end of apartheid. The De Klerks of South Africa acknowledged the cruelty, the wickedness, the plagues of apartheid as a system of government and gave hope back to the people, especially the non-whites by bringing it to an end.

The problem of evil in man and society is a potent one especially when we examine the nature of its ameliorative and redemptive forces and processes in history and documents. In *A Question of Power*, Dan and Sello are perceived as both evil and divine. Each penetrates into the domain of the other representing both good and evil at different encounters. Dan is an obscene pervert and a homosexual. Sello is a rapist, murderer and incestuous Bessie Head believes that the nature of evil, however outrageous it might be, is essentially social but the battle for its eradication must begin from within the individual and it was within the mind of Elizabeth that her restoration began.

At the end of her soul journey, Elizabeth is freed from Karma as she achieves a state of Nirvana, a beautiful spiritual condition attained by the extinction of desire. She discovers through her experiences that love is like being suddenly transported to a super-state of life where there is no physical desire to love, kiss or adore, yet there is a feeling of being kissed, loved and adored by everything the person comes in contact with –the acquisition of a vast and universal love which includes all mankind and equalizes all things and all men. This state of satisfaction makes Elizabeth re-echo David's song in Psalm twenty-three: "I have been through the valley of the shadow of death, but I fear no evil. I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever" (202). She had gone deep down into the abyss and soared up high. She became so convinced about her recovery that towards dawn, she threw her packets of tablets away through the window.

To Bessie Head, love is the most potent antidote to alienation. What she means by love is most clearly dramatized in her statement: "Love is two people mutually feeding each other. Two people in love are twin souls with closely linked destinies and the same capacity to submerge other pre-occupations in a pursuit after the soul" (12). Bessie Head believes that all human beings whatever the colour of skin have linked destinies.

Bessie Head may be writing about apartheid South Africa and Botswana in *A Question of Power*, but her vision is beyond the region. Her vision is on the world at large. She believes that man should struggle against his bonds and seek to change his bad environment rather than adapt himself to a bad situation and this is the reason why her protagonist did not give up trying to win however protracted the situation might be. Elizabeth persisted in the belief that man can change his universe and shape his future even in alienation. To ensure freedom from suffering, poverty and pain, Elizabeth believes that there must be an "Awakening love of mankind" (35) which Head often refers to as " the

brotherhood of man" (158). Significantly it is this "brotherhood" of all humanity which eluded apartheid South Africa for such a long time that Bessie Head is trying to recreate in her novel.

The abundant and long stream of images of aridity, impotence, deformity, isolation, rejection, rootlessness, filth, indignity, decay and emasculation all confirm the alienating posture of the author and the harsh environment surrounding her protagonist. She enhances this with what could be called structural alienation in her use of insanity as a mode of dramatization in *A Question of Power*.

The life-long alienation in the life of Bessie Head teaches her admirers the necessity of alienation in the sense that man must give up, forget, suppress feelings in order to grow, to have more important relationships and more valuable experiences. Bessie Head rejected her native country, South Africa, in order to form a new relationship with a new country, Botswana, which she found more fulfilling and in which she realized herself more satisfactorily. Abiola Irele's *In Praise of Alienation* gives credit to the manifestation of alienation in African Literature for its ameliorative effect on alienated characters who eventually emerge to rediscover themselves and their social milieu contributing their own quota towards the social aspirations of mankind.⁷

In as much as we agree that Bessie Head depicts alienation, we must also admit that it was temporary and not permanent for the protagonist portrayed as an alienated character, grew out of it in due course through experience and conscious effort. Even at her periods of alienation, she is not an outright stranger, outsider, wanderer or even loner. She made friends and mixed up with people in the society. With her insanity, she was still part of the society of Motabeng, participating in cooperative farming going on there. Kenosi and Tom visit her constantly and exchange ideas with her in love and respect of one another. In the same way, the outrage portrayed at the early part of the novel was temporary because towards the end of the book, the environment changes. The evil characters disappear one by one and both decency and sanity return not only to the protagonist but also to the society. The crater of excreta, filth, perversion and sexual promiscuity give way to beautiful gardens of flowers, crop, and vegetables and the Cape Gooseberry resounds in the novel as symbolizing Bessie Head taking roots in Botswana where she has naturalized. She dramatizes this placing her hand on the ground to claim it as its rightful owner.

A few years after the death of Bessie Head, apartheid system collapsed in South Africa and the blacks and whites became integrated into a life of "Brotherhood" and love as envisaged and advocated by Bessie Head⁸. This was made possible as a result of large-scale international interest and desire in the world for oneness through international cooperation. Moreover, serious interest in political, social, economic and military conditions of individual countries all over the world became manifested in many different forms. The apartheid system of South Africa became followed up with hues and cries of condemnation, demonstration and

sanctions internationally to change the evil system. The mass media, international public and private organizations vehemently condemned the obnoxious system and it came to an end. Bessie Head became vindicated. Her vision of a world where all are brothers has been enfolding since then with the world turning into a global village escalated by the new technologies in communication and information.

Workers can go on strike and people demonstrate in the streets over wicked acts in foreign countries because they feel involved as they see humanity as one. Refugees are assisted and made to feel at home in their new places of abode. Poverty alleviation programmes are established to cater for the poor and the underprivileged. Underdeveloped countries are supported and given assistance by developed countries of the world to uplift them to a higher standard of living. Health hazards have taken international dimension with countries of the world donating huge sums of money to help patients wherever they may be to fight terminal diseases such as HIV Aids and Cancer and seek for a lasting cure of the terrible diseases. Volunteers from developed countries help in far away less developed countries of the world like the peace-corper, Tom, in the novel. I am saying here that Bessie Head's vision for the world in *A Question of Power*, in spite of its alienation agrees with the international cooperation and global outlook of the world of the twenty-first century.

Commitment is to Bessie Head the most potent antidote to alienation. While she breaks down commitment to love, she describes love as "Two people mutually feeding each other". In all her works, she tries to depict the power, the discovery, and the achievement of love. We are presented in *A Question of Power*, a protagonist who moves from an isolated and alienated disposition towards another person or persons for the fulfillment of love. This love becomes universalized at the end embracing the whole human race. The protagonist's movement from alienation towards commitment is rather rare in African Literature. Whereas novels such as Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and *No Longer at Ease*; Ngugi Wa Thiongo's *A Grain of Wheat* and *Petals of Blood* and Ayi Kwei Armah's *Why Are we so Blest* all depict alienation in their different degrees, they do not portray commitment as its end-result, but, Bessie Head depicts commitment as the end-result of alienation in the measure of individuals based on the amount of work they accomplish while sharing with their fellow men their labor and dreams in their common struggle for survival. Her significant statement, " Neighbours are the center of the universe to each other" (collector: 93) is very relevant to her vision.

As a female African writer, Bessie Head has made immense contributions towards the achievement of the social aspirations of women and the formulation of the ideals of a feminine literary tradition in Africa. She has once more highlighted the positive aspects of alienation thereby praising rather than condemning it.

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