

Chapter One

When Rain Clouds Gather

When Rain Clouds Gather is Bessie Head's first novel. Primarily focusing on the issues of racialism and sexual biases, the novel contains the germs of many ideas that Head was to develop later. It is perhaps the simplest of all the novels written by Head. It grew out of her experiences in Botswana as a South African refugee. Head herself described the novel as a "most amateur effort, harmless and amateur."¹ While Head might have called it an amateur effort on her part, it is certainly not lacking in depth and value. The novel gives a vivid account of the vast human potential to surmount obstacles and gain economic and political liberation, thus leading to the empowerment of the oppressed and the marginalized, a vital point dealt with in all the major works of Head. ✓

As pointed out in the previous chapter, it has been very easy to perpetuate the myth of the independent, free-spirited African women whose problems were a result of colonization rather than their own cultural ethos and heritage. Full credit goes to writers like Head who took up the cudgels for one half of humanity to deconstruct this myth and protest vehemently against social inequities in precolonial as well as postcolonial Africa. ✓ Head's novels deal with the theme of power politics, prevalent in every sphere of life – be it in the realm of man-

woman relationship (gender conflict) or in the manner in which one community relates to another (racial conflict).

When Rain Clouds Gather is set in Botswana in the mid-1960s. Bessie Head migrated to Botswana in 1964 where she began her career as a fiction writer. Although Botswana is located north of South Africa, it had been only slightly colonized. It achieved independence in 1966. The novel was published in 1968 and reflects Head's own experience as a refugee and a settler. It essentially deals with themes of political exile, refugeeism, political corruption, racial hatred, gender equation and the struggle between modernism and tribalism. All these issues are however centred around the theme of double colonization.

The political context of the novel is very significant. It is set in the period when the apartheid system was rampant in South Africa. The word 'apartheid' means separateness in the Afrikaans language and can be described as a massive system of legalized segregation, repression and domination by the white minority. Apartheid was a political policy for South Africa from 1948 until the early 1990s. Apartheid laws classified people according to three major racial groups – Bantu (Black Africans), Whites, and Coloured (people of mixed descent). Later, Asians (Indians and Pakistanis) were added as a fourth category. With the enactment of apartheid laws in 1948, racial discrimination was institutionalized and these laws affected every aspect of social life, even to the extent of prohibiting marriage between non-whites and whites. These laws also dealt with segregation in public

and private facilities and physical separation resulting from the birth of “racially homogeneous residential ghettos within multi-racial urban areas.”²

It is almost impossible to think of South Africa without thinking about its politics. “The power of Apartheid as a racist policy and as a hegemonic distortion of society is equalled by its power as a symbol both of what a man has done to a man, and of a world sub-divided and classified by surface distinctions.”³ The knowledge of power play in Africa is essential for an understanding of African literature. It has structured the thought process of the writers and sublimated in the form of their literary output. Lewis Nkosi has described this very aptly:

...with very few exceptions the literature of Southern Africa is wholly concerned with the theme of struggle and conflict... In particular, if South African literature seems unable to contemplate any kind of human action without first attempting to locate it within a precise social framework of racial conflict, it is merely because very often colour differences provide the ultimate symbols which stand for those larger antagonisms which Southern African writers have always considered it their proper business to explain...⁴

Nkosi, however, finds Bessie Head wanting in this respect. He finds her “politically ignorant”⁵, more concerned with “the problems of belonging, of close

interpersonal relationships, of love, value and humanity.”⁶ Another eminent critic agrees with Nkosi’s description of Head as a non-political writer. She states that it is only in her last three works that Head offers her “statement on social and political commitment.”⁷

However, for Head the matter of politics is not as simple as it appears to Nkosi and Eilersen. If political activity simply implies an active participation in the dismantling of apartheid then Head definitely falls short. She steers clear of a narrow definition of political activity. Yet, her novels are a political statement because they poignantly highlight the predicament of the politically and socially marginalized groups.

James M. Garret agrees with both Nkosi and Eilersen about their view of Head as a writer concerned with the personal and interpersonal realms of human experience. “Where they err”, according to him, “is in the automatic assumption that to focus on the personal is to ignore the political, that turning inward necessitates a turning away from that which is outside.”⁸ The perspective offered by Garret is very relevant and apt because what chiefly concerns Head “is the overall bankruptcy of movements, political or personal, because they tend to exclude rather than include humanity.”⁹ Head’s preoccupation with humanity leads her to highlight the disparities in society. The fact that she invariably denounces racism and seeks to expose any form of bigotry is a clear indication of her political commitment. Her personal commitments and concerns make the

motif of double colonization an integral part of her first major work *When Rain Clouds Gather*.

When Rain Clouds Gather is the story of Makhaya Maseko, a political refugee from South Africa, who escapes to Botswana after serving a prison term for sabotage. He is taken to the village Golema Mimidi (which means, “to grow crops”) by Dinorego, a village elder. In the village, Makhaya meets people who like him are seeking to make new and better lives for themselves in the harsh, drought-stricken land. It is here that he meets a British expatriate, Gilbert Balfour, an agriculturist who is trying to develop the skills of the inhabitants of Golema Mimidi. Gilbert sees in Makhaya an ally for helping the villagers to achieve greater self-sufficiency and recruits him to teach the women to grow tobacco as a cash crop. Dinorego, his daughter Maria, Mma-Millipede and the young widow, Paulina Sebeso, all share Gilbert’s hopes for a better future and readily accept Makhaya into their community.

The efforts of Makhaya and Gilbert to revive the poverty-stricken village of Golema Mimidi by introducing modern techniques face heavy opposition from a local chief, Matenge, who wants to preserve the old system. Towards the end, Paulina’s son dies of tuberculosis on a distant cattle outpost during a drought. Her suffering is aggravated by Matenge’s attempts to punish her, holding her responsible for her child’s death. The villagers finally join hands challenging Matenge and his tyranny over them for the first time.

This novel initiates some of the major concerns of Head's fiction, namely class, racial and gender tensions within African society. Head brings into focus culturally complex situations, depicted through two major relationships – between Makhaya and Paulina and between Gilbert and Maria. The fact that Paulina is from northern Botswana while Gilbert and Maria belong to different races and cultures fosters tension and biases in their association. The cross-cultural identity of these relationships has wide ramifications bringing to the fore the issues of oppression and marginalization on the basis of race as well as gender. The novel also introduces us to characters like Matenge, the village chief, his brother Sekoto, who is a paramount chief, and his friend, Joas Tsepe. Through these characters Head highlights the political environment in Botswana, the role of chiefs and the Black tribalism ingrained in the African culture.

When Rain Clouds Gather is a very straightforward novel. The story follows a strict chronological order with very few digressions which have only been used to relate certain events that occur prior to the narrative time frame. The narrative quite realistically portrays the day-to-day occurrences in the lives of the simple village folk. This is clubbed with the naturalistic descriptions of the African terrain and the agricultural techniques employed by the villagers.

Head portrays the exploitative patriarchal set-up in African society through Maria's marital relationship with Gilbert and Paulina's relationship with Makhaya. Their relationships reflect, to a great extent, the established attitudes

and institutions that have systematically stifled the individual voices of protest in the social milieu of Africa. A feeling of mutual respect, shared togetherness, love, tenderness and above all basic equality, endearingly mark these relationships. At the same time they are not completely untouched by conventions defining sexual roles in a traditional social set-up.

The women – Maria and Paulina – are strong, fiercely assertive and self-reliant while the men – Gilbert and Makhaya – are progressive, sensitive and enlightened. They live together in harmony, but there are times when they too surrender to the tradition-bound roles of “female docility and male mastery.”¹⁰ The men and women have clearly well-defined roles in the social set-up and no one ever questions them. Head writes:

The women were the traditional tillers of the earth, not the men. The women were the backbone of agriculture while the men on the whole were cattle drovers. But when it came to programmes for improved techniques in agriculture... the lecture rooms were open to men only.¹¹

This clearly indicates the demarcation of gender roles in the social space where any entry by the women was looked upon with suspicion and contempt. Yet, such societies did succeed in throwing up some faces capable of change. The main protagonists in Head's first novel appear to be the harbingers of such a

change.

Maria and Gilbert are two different individuals belonging to different cultures and races. Maria is a "... busy, preoccupied, self-absorbed woman" (p. 28), who exudes a rare self-confidence alien to her community. Gilbert and Maria share a warm friendship and even a kind of camaraderie that might exist between the members of the same sex. Gilbert, being a broad-minded Englishman, is open to the idea of forming an alliance with a strong woman. The fact that Maria has "a life of her own" (p. 32) makes her even more attractive to him. He accepts her as she is – a woman who has a mind of her own. He tells Makhaya, "She makes all these little rules and you can't budge her from them" (p. 33). Maria, however, turns down Gilbert's proposal of marriage knowing that a man of his intellect could not be happy with an uneducated woman like her. But much later when Gilbert is determined to marry Maria after a wait of eight years, it is an assertive man who goes to Dinorego's house to ask him for his daughter's hand in marriage. The marriage between the two, however, changes their premarital equation and leads to the adoption of conventional roles. When Maria rejects Gilbert's proposal of living with him in his mother country, his reaction is so aggressive that it causes Maria to beat a hasty retreat.

"You're not Dinorego's daughter anymore", he said to Maria, in a quite threatening voice. "You're my wife now and you have to do as I say. If I go back to England, you go there too."

The woman of common sense retreated rapidly before the threat, and the other woman softly contradicted her, "I did not say I won't obey you, Gilbert. I only wanted to find out what was on your mind. (p. 103)

Gilbert suddenly adopts a conservative attitude towards marital life: "... it was the man who was the boss and who laid down the rules" (p. 103). He now wants his wife to adhere to the traditional patriarchal norms that require a married woman to meekly follow her husband.

Something similar occurs in the Paulina-Makhya relationship. Paulina Seboso is a free-thinking, self-assured woman who "had a decisive way of walking as though she always knew where she was going and what she wanted." She is a "passionate and impetuous woman with a warm heart" (p. 77). Married at eighteen, Paulina lived a very comfortable life in northern Botswana with her husband and two children. Her world comes crashing down when her husband, accused of embezzling two thousand pounds, commits suicide. The superiors and the company look at his suicide as an admission of guilt on his part and dispossess Paulina of all her material acquisitions.

Head's narration of Paulina's past serves as a means to indict the capitalist society (symbolized by the colonizers) that places greater emphasis on maintaining petty office records rather than caring for an individual's life. "Her

story replays the classic scenario of the seduction and the betrayal of the bourgeoisie by both the very capitalistic system that created bourgeoisie and the avariciousness that sustains the system itself.”¹² Head once again reveals the interplay of power struggle between the capitalists and the bourgeoisie, the haves and the have-nots, the oppressor and the oppressed, the colonizer and the colonized.

Paulina does not take long to recover from the tragedy in her life and is ready to start afresh in Golema Mimidi. She is even keen on finding herself a new man. To that extent, she does not fit into the stereotype of a mourning widow. Ready to break the set moulds and to approach the man who interests her, she willingly draws everyone’s attention in her “gaudy-hued skirts with strong colours like orange and yellow and red, and the bigger and brighter the splashes of colour, the more she liked them” (p. 77). Her dress sense reflects her bold, assertive personality. She approaches Makhaya risking rejection and humiliation. Makhaya is an individual known for his catholicity of ideas. This is evident in his approach towards women of Golema Mimidi who are initially surprised by his chivalry and broad-mindedness:

The small group of women, including Paulina, at first felt a little inhibited. They were unaccustomed to a man speaking to them as an equal. They stood back a while, with uneasy expressions, but once it struck them that he paid no attention to them as women, they also

forgot he was a man and became absorbed in following his explanations. (p. 106)

Yet, Makhaya also carries a male ego and derives satisfaction from the fact that he is a “whole foot taller than Paulina” (p. 110).

The same contradiction is to be found in Paulina as well. She has been conditioned to believe that there are certain “jobs aside for women and certain jobs for men. Men and women are unlike mentally” (p. 139). Hence her reaction to Makhaya’s offer to make himself a cup of tea hinges upon the old gender roles.

“Goodness!” she said in alarm, holding on to the thick wooden stick. “Don’t touch the fire. It’s a woman’s work.” Makhaya narrowed his eyes, that amused magical smile on his face. “Goodness!” he said, imitating her speech. “It’s time you learned that men live on this earth too. If I want to make tea, I’ll make it, and if I want to sweep the floor, I’ll sweep it.” (p. 139)

Later in the novel, when Paulina confesses her love for Makhaya, it is with a fear of being termed a cheap woman. Her apprehensions are reminiscent of society’s hypocritical attitude where all the matters of heart are thought to be a man’s prerogative. Towards the end of the novel, Makhaya reverts once again to his self-proclaimed role of a possessive and protective lover when Paulina expresses

her desire to see the body of her dead son. He prevents her from doing so telling her, "...can't you see I am here to bear all your burdens?"(p. 162)•This only serves to reinforce the primordial image of woman as a tender being with the sole task of nourishing and nurturing, which brings out the inherent desire in man to protect her.

Head's delineation of the female characters is very important in the context of empowerment of women in African society traditionally plagued with gender inequality and bias. She writes:

...It is strong, dominating personalities who play a decisive role when things are changing. Somehow they always manage to speak with a voice of authority, and their innate strength of character drives them to take the lead in almost any situation. (p. 75)

Paulina Sebeso has a tough persona. She plays a decisive role in the development of the cooperative in the village and also ensures the cooperation and support of the other women. "This pioneering energy is complemented by the fact that as a refugee she shares with other newcomers the image of rebelliousness against the status quo...her rebellion has specific sexual implications that touch upon her identity as a woman."¹³ Paulina too is a newcomer to the village who has fled there to "escape the tragedies of life" (p. 22). She is down and beaten but not defeated. She represents the new, forward-looking, liberal women. Her

enterprising spirit and sense of adventure, which really are offshoots of her leadership qualities, put her on the pedestal reserved for the male sex. She might be jealous of Maria for the latter's good fortune but she is a woman of integrity who refuses to indulge in any gossip in Maria's absence.

On balance, Paulina is not "free-spirited" in the true sense of the word. There are certain ambiguities inherent in her mental make-up and she emerges as a curious blend of traditionalism and modernism. The indelible mark of female subjugation is stamped on her. As a result of this she is happy to relegate herself to the background in Makhaya's presence and rely on his "superior" judgement. Similar ambiguities characterize Maria as well, who combines a soft, gentle side with a ruthlessly pragmatic nature that does at times revolt against the stifling gender roles.

These ambiguities can be seen in the male characters as well. "Maria's split consciousness as a woman is matched by Gilbert's male duality."¹⁴ Gilbert is highly contemptuous of the class and gender bias in England and hates any form of subordination. But the moment he sees Maria showing signs of self-assertion, he effortlessly steps into the garb of a patronizing, demanding, assertive man, lecturing on male prerogatives. In Makhaya, this duality of character is more pronounced for the reason that he generally opposes any form of suppression and refuses to become a slave to his sexual preferences. When an old woman offers him her granddaughter, he is strongly repulsed by the idea of using a woman only

for sexual gratification. He hates the “clinging, ancestral, tribal belief that a man was nothing more than a groveling sex organ”(p. 15).

There are contradictions in Makhaya's mental make-up. He loathes the submissive, clinging, dependent female as she dismally fails to whet his appetite for intellectual stimulation. He goes to the extent of lauding a prostitute because “[she] established her own kind of equality with men... Not so the dead thing most men married...” (pp. 125-26). There is, however, a sinister ambiguity in the way Makhaya refuses to fathom the malignant powers that subjugate women, according them the status of “dead things.”

Makhaya finally meets his match in Paulina as her condemnation of the aggressive masculinity is matched by his own disenchantment with the weak, spineless women. Their union, therefore, “not only celebrates the individual maturity into which they are both growing, it also represents the kind of broader social harmony that their relationship promises for the future society.”¹⁵ However, like other major characters, Makhaya too has not been able to completely sever his ties with the conventional roots. At times, his loyalty to the conservative limiting values ignites in him a need to satiate his male ego. This is evident in the relief he experiences on discovering that he is a foot taller than Paulina and also in his desire to shield Paulina from any unpleasant burdens and thoughts. This paradox regarding the gender roles is a reflection of the ambiguities that plague the gradually evolving African society which is

struggling to find answers to the numerous gender and class-related questions. Head deals with these issues in right earnest making the theme of double colonization very central to the novel.

Makhaya's relationship with Paulina, which is based on mutual respect and equality, becomes symbolic of the regeneration and advancement of a village. Thus it implies a freedom from any form of exploitation and recognition of individual strength. This can be seen in the manner in which the villagers rally against Matenge to fight for Paulina. As the novel ends, Makhaya is finally ready to propose to Paulina.

Head, time and again, gives us a peep into the cultural ethos of Africa and the secondary position women have been relegated to in spite of the fact that:

No men ever worked harder than Botswana women, for the whole burden of providing food for big families rested with them. It was their sticks that thrashed the corn at harvesting time and their winnowing baskets that filled the air for miles and miles around with the dust of husks, and they often... took over the tasks of the men and also ploughed the land with oxen. (pp. 104-5)

The other women characters introduced by Head are even more hapless figures that appear to be living on the periphery of a social set-up. In the beginning of

When Rain Clouds Gather we are introduced to an old lady who has no hesitation in sending her young granddaughter to Makhaya simply to make a few extra bucks. The fact that any such attempts on her part are spurned by Makhaya is reason enough for her to call Makhaya a “mad man” (p. 15) for she has not yet come across a man who does not regard women as saleable commodities. This is indeed a very sad comment on the male-dominated society. It is precisely for this reason that Paulina is wary of totally committing herself to a man when “there were so many women freely available. And even all the excessive lovemaking was purposeless, aimless, just like trapping everything into an awful cess-pit where no one really cared to take a second look” (p. 111). Paulina refuses to confine herself to this cess-pit not because of its antagonism to the moralistic values preached by society but simply because of her desire for a man who wasn’t a “free-for-all” (p. 111).

Mma-Millipede’s distressing situation also highlights the plight of women in a traditional set-up. She was forced into marriage with the chief’s son, Ramogodi, not because the latter was in love with her but merely because he had a need to satisfy his misplaced ego as Mma-Millipede had unconsciously challenged the pride of a vain man. The marriage was a disaster as the man soon got bored with Mma-Millipede and her religious ways. This leads her to believe that there were two kinds of relationships:

The one was a purely physical relationship. It caused no mental breakdown and was free and casual, each woman having six or seven lovers, including a husband as well. The other was more serious and more rare. It could lead to mental breakdown and suicide on the part of the woman, because, on the one hand, it assumed that the man was worthy of adoration, while in reality he was full of shocks and disappointments; and on the other, this adoration assumed the proportions of a daily diet of a most dangerous nature. (p. 98)

Mma-Millipede's story becomes a criticism of the traditional tribal social order that defines its own norms of racial and sexual oppression. It is unfortunate that Mma-Millipede could not be united with Dinorego, the man she wanted to marry. She had the misfortune of attracting the attention of "a drunken and dissipated boaster" (p. 68) like Ramogodi. The families of Mma-Millipede and Dinorego are terrorized into submission by the chief's family. Her marriage to an adulterous, unscrupulous man finally ends in a divorce and she seeks shelter in Dinorego's house.

The story of Mma-Millipede shows the ugly face of tribal royalty terrorizing and oppressing the common man. This is different from the rule of the white man only in the sense that here Head portrays "the rule of the illiterate man" (p. 45). Head's handling of the theme of intra-racial prejudices makes *When Rain Clouds Gather* a classic indictment of the very phenomenon of double colonization,

represented in the novel by the domestic power structure in the form of the black tribal chief and the repressive patriarchal norms.

When Rain Clouds Gather also becomes a platform for Head to voice her fears about the eroding family values in African society which had made it a “country of fatherless children” (p. 119). Patriarchy sometimes defies the traditional norms to accord abominable status to women. Head is particularly concerned about the fact that here women are mere commodities used by men to gratify their physical desires. On their part, men could father their children but shied away from being fathers to them. These casual flings force women to inhabit a world of perpetual loneliness, heartache and disgrace. To fend for themselves these deserted women “thought nothing of sending a small boy out to a lonely cattle post to herd cattle to add to the family income” (p. 119). At times these extreme steps have disastrous consequences for the individuals involved. Paulina’s loss of her son is only one such instance. Most of Head’s comments on the plight of village women are unequivocally critical of the male attitude.

When Rain Clouds Gather grew out of Head’s experiences as a refugee in Botswana. Refugees basically flooded into Botswana from three places – S.W.Africa (Nambia), Rhodesia (modern day Zimbabwe), and South Africa. Head was officially registered as a South African refugee in 1967. As observed earlier, *When Rain Clouds Gather* originated from this experience as a refugee. “It was a fearfully demoralizing way of life, of unemployment and hand-outs

from the world Council of Churches.”¹⁶ Head terms her first novel as a truly South African work reflecting a “black South African viewpoint.”¹⁷ Perhaps, it could not have been so poignant but for Head’s close association with the characters she creates:

My first novel is important to me in a personal way. It is my only truly South African work, reflecting a black South African viewpoint. The central character in the novel, a black South African refugee, is almost insipid, a guileless, simple-hearted simpleton. But that is a true reflection of the Black South African personality. We are an oppressed people who have been stripped bare of every human right. We do not know what it is like to have our ambitions aroused, nor do we really see liberation on an immediate horizon.¹⁸

The novel is as much about racial bigotry as about marginalization of women. It portrays colonization in all its ugly forms where whites are not the only recognized enemies of blacks but within the African set-up, blacks also have to face tribal and class antagonism. Thus “the rise of nationalism and positive racial self awareness in black Africa is simply equated with South African apartheid or with the tribal feudalism of Chief Matenge.”¹⁹ The novel thus deals with the familiar themes of racial hatred, corrupting power, political exile and tyrannical rule.

Head draws upon her personal experiences in delineating the anguish and unrest of her male protagonist, Makhaya. As a victim of racial bigotry in South Africa, Makhaya becomes a representative of the marginalized beings in a discriminatory social set-up. The situation in the novel becomes all the more distressing when a woman becomes the target of such a discrimination due to her status as a doubly colonized being.

As stated earlier, the novel has been set in Golema Mimidi, an experimental agricultural community comprising exiles and outcasts from both African and European cultures. Makhaya, Paulina and Gilbert are all outsiders. It is from their point of view that Head criticizes the corrupt, inefficient, racist, traditional chiefdom, the oppressive traditions of which are so deeply entrenched in the local ethos that even a benign man like the Paramount Chief is not very open to Gilbert's plans of setting up cooperatives in the village for the betterment of the poor. The chief has "lived off the slave labour of the poor. His lands were ploughed free of charge by the poor, and he was washed, bathed, and fed by the poor, in return for which he handed out old clothes and maize rations" (p. 24). Feudalism thus emerges to be as repressive as any other form of exploitation. Head's novel very significantly brings out the issues of class and tribal exploitation which is yet another face of colonization.

Chief Matenge becomes a symbol of prejudices present within the African society. He lives in a world of mansions, slaves and Chevrolet and for him the

world consists of two classes – “royalty and commoner.” Matenge understands tribalism and sees it essentially as the rule of the illiterate man who fears and despises anything that is not a part of the abysmal darkness in which he lives. Matenge is the epitome of this darkness with his long, melancholy, suspicious face and his ceaseless intrigues, bitter jealousy and hatred. All this is tribalism and a way of life to the meek sheep that submits to it. This abhorrent form is supported by whites who feel that this is the only system that can keep the natives in their place. Tribal traditions aggravate the oppression of the downtrodden as a result of the manipulative skills of the shrewd illiterate rulers. Head portrays Africa as a cold society averse to any form of change. In a village like Golema Mimidi, even a scientific discovery like the ability to grow drought-resistant millets cannot compete with the tribal prejudices. The “superior” Botswana tribe does not eat and grow millet as it is the staple diet of the “inferior” Kalahari Bushman.

In this environment, Gilbert is the first person to take a stand against tribalism. His problems with Matenge are described as a battle of Titans, (“either [Gilbert] would be completely destroyed, or he would completely destroy [Matenge]” (p. 24). This becomes a battle between good and evil. Matenge is described as the “troublesome and unpopular younger brother” of chief Sekoto. He is characterized as an avaricious and unpleasant personality driven by “the devil” (p. 23). The evil that Matenge represents is tribalism. The battle between Gilbert and Matenge is really a struggle between good and evil, progress and stagnation,

modernism and conservatism and this interplay of binary oppositions revolves around the theme of colonization. Head also tries to highlight the dangers involved in generalization. A white man can defy the evil his class perpetuates and a black man can perpetuate the evils he himself has been a victim of.

Tribalism also is, to a large extent, responsible for the inferior status of women. In spite of education many women of Mma-Millipede's generation remained "same old tribal selves, docile and inferior" (p. 68). Makhaya introduces some of the first changes at his home in South Africa when he becomes the head of the family on his father's death. He insists that his sisters address him by his first name. He wants to be treated as an equal and not as a superior being by the womenfolk.

The crudest form of colonization can be seen in Makhaya's status as an "outsider". His flight from South Africa and quest for a new home in Botswana is symbolic of his rootlessness and his need to identify with a particular social set-up. In his border hideout, Makhaya tells the old man that he wants "to feel what it is like to live in a free country and then maybe some of the evils in [his] life will correct themselves" (p. 10). Makhaya's reasons for leaving South Africa were simple – he could not marry and have children in a country where black man was called "boy" and "dog" and "kaffir". He flees South Africa to find a life of innocence, trust and respect. The barbaric social order of apartheid has generated within him a huge reservoir of hatred, humiliation and anger. The

anger instilled in him finally finds an outlet one night in his conversation with Mma-Millipede. He calls himself a “Black Dog” and goes on to explain:

“[The Black Dog] is a sensation,” he said. “He awakens only thrills in the rest of mankind. He is a child they scold in a shrill voice because they think he will never grow up. They don’t want him to either, because they’ve grown used to his circus and his antics, and they like the way he sat on the chair and shivered in fear while they lashed out with the whip. If Black Dog becomes human, they won’t have anyone to entertain them anymore. Yet all the while they shrieked over his head, he slowly became a mad dog... and this makes them laugh louder than ever.” (pp. 128-29)

These gruesome details about a black man’s life in South Africa can only be provided by someone who has himself borne the anguish of this violence and bestiality. He escapes not only from South Africa but also from a social order working to dehumanize him. He refuses to be a part of society that will not accept him in its mainstream.

Makhaya’s outburst baffles Mma-Millipede. She tries to figure out the reasons for this pent-up rage within Makhaya. However, it is difficult for her to comprehend this form of discrimination because she herself has never had to live “with a twisted perverted mentality which pinned up little notices over a whole

town that said: this town is for white people only... we are God, permanently, perpetually. We are this way because we have white skins, like peaches and cream" (p. 133). Head could not have been more explicit in delineating this dark phase in the history of mankind.

For Makhaya, simply moving away from South Africa does not end his problems. The fact remains that he is constantly subjected to tribal viciousness, which can be equated with South African policy of apartheid. Matenge contemptuously tells him: "You know what a South African swine is? He is a man like you. He always needs to run after his master, the white man" (p. 66).

Once in Golema Mimidi, Makhaya is able to impart some kind of coherence and discipline to his chaotic life. His friendship with Gilbert enables him to see white men in a different light. He is accustomed to reacting in only one way to a white man and that is with a feeling of great unease. But with Gilbert he achieves a harmony that provides him with "one criterion of judging all of mankind – generosity, of soul and of mind"(p. 124). Makhaya comes from the most conservative and custom-bound tribe in the African continent and understands that the oppressed black race only enhances its misery by its blind adherence to the obsolete customs and traditions. Thus Head delineates a dark world of exploitation where the real enemy is not only the white master but also the stifling age-old redundant traditions.

What Makhaya realizes is that no human society is completely sane or normal and that he has to learn how to come to terms with society. He is unable to completely forget his past but he is ready to move on, recognizing that there are new possibilities in the world. There are places where he is not an object of ridicule or a white man's "kaffir" or "boy". He recognizes that there is "always something on this earth man was forced to love and worship by reason of its absence. People in cloudy, misty climate worshipped the sun, and people of semi-desert countries worshipped the rain" (p. 169). This epiphany comes to him amidst the vultures, dead cattle and whitened bones of Isaac Sebeso. He finally decides to face life rather than run away from it.

Makhaya's personal odyssey in the novel is fraught with symbolism. The motif of growth plays a very important role in the novel. Makhaya is transformed from a dejected escapist to a man committed to dynamic action. His involvement in the cooperative becomes symbolic of his concern for the future of Africa in particular and society at large. He is finally able to rise above his personal agony and channelize his energies towards a more progressive and stable cause. The philosophy of work is integral to Head's plots. Gilbert, a foreigner, devotes his energy to wrestle with the dry African land and bring some hope to the helpless, ignorant peasants of the village. His zeal results in the involvement of the women in the cooperatives. Work becomes significant for women as it "is a means of asserting sisterly solidarity and togetherness... it is the most vital factor in the assertion of independence and self-sufficiency."²⁰ Thus work in Golema

Mimidi tends to draw people closer together. For Makhaya it becomes a means of “self-resuscitation.”²¹ He turns “to agriculture for his salvation” (p. 81). It helps to restore his faith in the basic human goodness and realize the importance of human interdependence. A detribalized Makhaya, an African and a detribalized Gilbert, a European, come together in harmony for the betterment of an African community. This “recognition of the inter-dependence of members at the two opposing ends of the colour bar line in South Africa is one of the author’s major standpoints.”²²

Head presents work as an antidote to the prevalent racial and sexual biases in the village. Work becomes a means of bringing together people belonging to different races and sexes. She shows that black people, particularly women, can work earnestly for their own well-being. In the face of a disaster, the Golema Mimidi farmers form cooperatives to ensure the well-being of their community and they do so with a complete disregard for the selfish motives of Matenge, their chief. The villagers even unite against the chief and thwart all his attempts to destroy Paulina who has suffered immensely due to the burden of double colonization. Head’s depiction of the cooperatives, the involvement of the women and the work culture in Golema Mimidi, is a condemnation of the white minority rule in South Africa where privileged whites live off the misery and distress of poor blacks.

Myths, symbols and linguistic patterns carry overtones of the mores and biases

intrinsic to a culture. As pointed out earlier, the motif of “black” plays a very important role in the novel evoking feelings of bitterness and contempt at the same time. Makhaya’s agony is compounded when he is frequently addressed in a highly contemptuous and abusive language. He is bitter and hurt as he has had to live his whole life with the name “Black dog”. It is a society where ‘Black dog’ becomes synonymous with “mad dog”. As Lloyd W. Brown points out, “It is an example of traditional (Western) symbolism... the white man’s reference to blacks as ‘kaffirs’, ‘boys’, and ‘dogs’.”²³

Symbols play an important part in *When Rain Clouds Gather*. The numerous symbols and images found in the novel point to a world that is harsh and rugged just like the terrain it features. Head is at her best when she describes the arid land:

It was just as though everything was about to die...here and there, faint patches of green clung to the topmost branches of tall thorn trees, but not a green thing survived near the sun-baked earth... In this desolation the vultures reigned supreme. (p. 168)

The stark images of decay and death become symbolic of the moral malaise that has invaded society at large. Thus the external landscape blends beautifully with the “moral landscape” of the novel. It is a landscape characterized by blatant and violent misuse of power and division of mankind into several ghettos. The

barbed wire fence through which Makhaya crosses into Botswana is a symbol of racial separation. The poverty of human spirit is represented in Matenge's callous attitude towards the end. His decision to punish Paulina after the death of her son is really a final and desperate attempt on his part to thwart a free spirit. Such tribalism has been denounced by Head over and over again. The cooperatives become symbolic of the triumph of human endeavour and also herald a new dawn. Gilbert is an emissary of the new dawn. He "represents the best of scientific rationalism in the white west, the kind of rationalism that is aimed at improvement rather than brutalisation of human beings, and in the cooperative this rationalism merges with the African emphasis on people."²⁴

The motif of double colonization in the novel serves to bring out the perpetual struggle between good and evil. In Head's world, to a black and a coloured South African, evil is exemplified by the oppressive laws of Apartheid, framed and practised by the white minority in the country. Garret perceptively observes, "Concepts of good and evil are not so much metaphysical as they are ethical, and as Nietzsche pointed out, evil is simply otherness, that which is radically different from one's self."²⁵ This "Otherness" is what Head deals with in the personal and the social spheres. Nkosi is right in asserting that Head is concerned about "close interpersonal relationship of love, value and humanity."²⁶ Viewing close interpersonal relationships as the only means of escaping the trauma and hatred due to apartheid, she insists on the importance of human efforts for the betterment of general humanity. The bond one builds in close relationships is the

only means of destroying barriers of prejudices.

When Rain Clouds Gather undoubtedly indicts the sick social order that seeks to relegate people to a subhuman level on the basis of their colour, class and gender. But although Head refuses to offer any easy solutions, she sees a possibility of a better, regenerated world. It is this aspect that infuses an element of hope into an otherwise dismal scenario. This optimism has remained the most vital and influential aspect of Head's fiction. It has not only shaped her moral idealism but also her pragmatic perception of reality.

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