



Class Notes on
“THE COLLECTOR OF THE
TREASURES”

by

Bessie Head

FOR
B A ENGLISH
SEM - VI
ENGL3016

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THIS PPT COVERS...

- ❖ **Bio-note of Bessie Head**
- ❖ **Literary contribution of Bessie Head**
- ❖ **Bessie Head against homogenization**
- ❖ **Characteristics of her Short Stories**
- ❖ **Africa in Three Phases**
- ❖ **Types of Men**

BESSIE HEAD (1937- 1986)



- ❖ Bessie Amelia Emery Head
- ❖ Born on 6 July 1937 to an upper class white woman and a Black labourer in **Pietermaritzburg**, South Africa.
- ❖ White mother (who was placed in a mental asylum during her pregnancy) and black father (who then mysteriously disappeared).
- ❖ She suffered rejection and alienation at an early age.
- ❖ Born and brought up in a deeply segregated and racially polarized South Africa

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- ❖ Such a child was deemed illegitimate in the segregationist South Africa of 1930s.
 - ❖ Moved from foster parents to an orphanage school
 - ❖ Felt an outsider in her own country
 - ❖ Had no sense of belonging
 - ❖ She had an early marriage

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- ❖ Not accepted by both white and coloured communities of Africa
 - ❖ In 1964, she abandoned her homeland, her teaching job, and her husband and took her small son to Botswana, seeking personal asylum and tranquillity in simple village life.

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- ❖ Tried to find place in Anti-Apartheid struggle and was associated with Pan-African Movement and Black Consciousness Movement (1968)
 - ❖ She observed that both the movements were ideologically based on sharpening a racial dialectics opposed to integration of white, black and coloured people.

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- ❖ In Botswana Bessie Head was looked down upon for being an outsider and for not being “black enough”
 - ❖ “Nothing can take away the fact that I have never had a country; not in South Africa or in Botswana where I now live as a stateless person”- Bessie Head.
 - ❖ Died of hepatitis, on 17 April 1986, in Botswana

BESSIE HEAD'S WORKS

- ❖ *When Rain Clouds Gather* (1968),
- ❖ *Maru* (1971),
- ❖ *A Question of Power* (1973)
- ❖ *The Collector of Treasures and Other Botswana Village Tales* (1977)
- ❖ *A Bewitched Crossroad: An African Saga* (1984), is historical, set in 19th-century Botswana

HEAD'S WRITING RESISTS THE HOMOGENIZATION

- ❖ Head in her writings consciously resists the homogenizing and marginalizing rhetoric of anti-apartheid narratives
- ❖ She tries to escape the black and white polarity which characterized the South African writing of the period

CHARACTERISTICS OF HER SHORT STORIES

- ❖ Head was deprived of family, race and nationality
- ❖ She explores several aspects of African life, especially the **position of women**
- ❖ Focus on the tragic human experience of **oppression – native African subject.**
- ❖ How colonialism snatched their dignity and made them powerless in their own land
- ❖ Attempt to foreground the **oppressed and exploited rural woman.**

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- ✘ Breakdown of the family life
 - ✘ Denying the traditional structure of security that the institution of marriage provided to married women
 - ✘ Vulnerable sexual exploitation of married women
 - ✘ Female characters learning to survive the emotional, sexual and psychological violence built into the everydayness of patriarchal society

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- ✘ Depict African woman as a victim of colonialism apartheid and patriarchy
 - ✘ Female protagonists create for themselves ‘a destiny of their own’

“THE COLLECTOR OF THE TREASURES”

- ❖ Head’s short story “The Collector of the Treasures” is already discussed in the class.

CHARACTERS

- ❖ Dikeledi Mokipi – housewife who murders her husband
- ❖ Garesego – Dikeledi's husband
- ❖ Paul Theoblo – Dikeledi's neighbour
- ❖ Kenalepe – Paul's wife
- ❖ Kebonye – Dikeledi's friend in prison

SETTING

- ❖ Puleng
- ❖ Central state prison, Gaborone

AFRICA IN THREE PHASES

- ❖ Through this short story Head looks at Africa through the **Precolonial, Colonial and Postcolonial** lenses
- ❖ She takes note of various positive and negative transformations in Africa

PRECOLONIAL AFRICA

- ❖ In Precolonial Africa the ancestral traditional practices were of utmost importance
- ❖ Africans followed these practices were without questioning them
- ❖ Dominance of African men in the name of culture,
- ❖ Women were victims of this social system in Africa

COLONIAL AFRICA

- ❖ New systems encroached in the Traditional and Cultural life of Africa
- ❖ Breaking down of the institutions, forms of family life in Africa
- ❖ Mining became source of earning livelihood
- ❖ Working for pittance to pay British Tax
- ❖ People's Migration from one place to another
- ❖ Provided space for women

POSTCOLONIAL AFRICA

❖ Vast job opening in Africa



**Paul
Theoblo**

❖ Heavy salary

❖ African men becoming
immoral and corrupt

❖ Women at the receiving end
but started fighting of creating
their space

**Garesego
Mokopi**

TYPES OF MEN IN “THE COLLECTOR OF THE TREASURES”

TWO TYPES OF MEN

**Animalistic,
lusty
Garesego**

**Loving and
caring
Paul Theoblo**

GARESEGO MOKOPI

- ❖ A clerk in district administrative service
- ❖ Heavily paid salary
- ❖ Womanizing and drinking
- ❖ Three sons – Banabothe, Inalame, Motsomi
- ❖ For Garesego his wife, Dikeledi was boring, semi-literate, traditional sort
- ❖ Lot exciting women around Garesego for his money

PAUL THEOBLO

- ❖ His wife Kenalepe and three children
- ❖ Transferred to Puleng as Principal of primary school in 1966
- ❖ Good at managing household
- ❖ Helping nature
- ❖ Loving and friendly husband

YOU CAN READ MORE...

<https://www.encyclopedia.com/people/literature-and-arts/south-african-literature-biographies/bessie-head>

THANK YOU