



This book is a collection of select critical essays which throw much attention on diasporic elements in literatures in English. It contains well researched articles which examine and re-examine the nature of diaspora and how it had been used in literature in English. The question of diaspora is deciphered by the scholars who took it as a challenge to question the perennial issues like alienation, exile and rootlessness. This book also provides a platform for fresh thinking and critical analysis.

**Virudhunagar Hindu Nadars'
Senthikumara Nadar College (Autonomous)
Virudhunagar – 626 001
Tamil Nadu, India**

ISBN 978-93-81723-44-9



9 789381 723449

- J. Sangeetha
- 57 The Position of Women in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* 304
- M. Santhosh
- 58 Solidarity and Cultural Diversity: Aditi and Sarah In Anita Desai's *Bye-Bye Blackbird* 309
- R. Sathiya Priya
- 59 Aboriginal Aesthetic of Healing : A Study of The Select Poems of Rita Joe 315
- P.T. Selvi Kohila
- 60 Family with Cultural Bond Evolved in Amit Chaudhuri's *A Strange and Sublime Address* 321
- R. Senitha
- 61 Colonialism: A Critical Analysis of Jeannette Armstrong's *Slash* 326
- S. Shanmuga Priya
S. Uma Devi
- 62 Dialectics and Self-affirmation in Tagore's *Binodini* 332
- S. Subha
- 63 Post-Colonialism in The Selected Novels of Chinua Achebe 338
- B. Sucharita
- 64 Quest for Love in Kamala Das's *A Doll for the Child Prostitute & My Story* 342
- Sumathy
- 65 Diasporic Dimensions in *The Mistress of Spices* 349
- N. Suyamariyathai
- 66 Women as Disabled Unheard Voices from the North East Region 355
- V. Thayumanavan
- 67 Search for Identity in Shashi Deshpande's Novels 360
- R. Thilagavathy
- 68 Chetan Bhagat's *Five Point Someone* What not to do at it- A Fascinating Novel of Friendship and Creativity 366
- Vasanth Kumar.K
- 69 A Thematic Analysis of Bessie Head's Novel *Maru* 369
- G. Vijayalekshmi

A THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF BESSIE HEAD'S NOVEL *MARU*

G.VIJAYALEKSHMI

Bessie Emery Head, Botswana's most important writer, was born on 6th July, 1937, of racially mixed parentage when interracial relationships were illegal in South Africa. Her mother, a wealthy white South African woman wedded to a black servant, was sent under the pretext of some mental illness to a quiet location where she could beget Bessie without the neighbours knowing. However, the exact circumstances, often considered as straight autobiography, are disputed in the works of Bessie Head.

In the 1950s and '60s she became a teacher and then a journalist for "Drum". In 1964 she moved to Botswana as a refugee, obtained Botswana citizenship after 15 years in 1979 and settled in serowe, the largest of Botswana's villages. Most of her important works, especially the three novels "when rain clouds gather," "Maru", and "A Question of power" are set in serowe which was famous both for its historical importance as capital of the Bamangwato tribe, and for the experimental swaneng school of Patrick van Rensburg. Head's chief concern is the value of ordinary life and humble people. Since most of her writings were produced while she was in exile in Botswana, her central themes are exile and oppression that she projects in her works.

Bessie Head, throughout her career, emphasized the need for Africans to abandon power struggles. She worked for substantial change in customs, envisioning equality for citizens of Africa. She herself has acknowledged her outlook as a universal one. She refused to be called an African writer, a black writer, a feminist writer or a revolutionary writer. She wrote for all the people, everywhere. To take sides with ordinary people against people with power is one of her distinctive attitudes both in life and writing.

Bessie Head's well-written and revered novel "Maru", set in a rural village of Dilepe, is chiefly concerned with themes of love and prejudice. The story, moving in a circular sequence, begins at the end of the novel where the main characters Maru (who the novel is named after) and Margaret, his new wife are introduced to the readers. Thereafter the story moves back in time examining all the past events that have led up to this point.

Maru, one of the chiefs in his African village of Dilepe, is the title character of the novel "Maru", but it is Margaret Cadmore, a member of the Bushman tribe and so an untouchable in his society, who changes the personal history of both Maru and her tribe when she comes to teach the children in the village Dilepe. Just because Margaret

happens to be a Bushman or a Masarwa, she is looked down upon as a stray dog of the village, with tin cans tied to its tail as a form of torment by the cruel boys of the village.

"Maru" sets about exploring the capacity of the people to love others in spite of their palpable differences. When we are first exposed to the true plight of the Masarwa people, it is quite heartrending to note the harsh prejudices of the Botswana tribe against the Masarwa people, when no Botswana man wishes to bury the dead Masarwa woman found along with her live baby. Only the English Missionaries, who are called upon later, perform the task. When Margaret Cadmore arrives there she is terribly disgusted by the discriminative attitudes of the Botswana nurses who, but for the compulsion, deny to help prepare the body for burial. Margaret Cadmore is very much moved by the pathetic plight of the Masarwa people and decides to adopt the baby and name her after herself, Margaret Cadmore. Believing that a privileged upbringing and the gift of education offered to this child will help her defy the prejudiced Botswana people. But, on the contrary, the child leads a withdrawn and troubled life of ridicule and rejection. So the disillusioned Margaret Cadmore returns to England leaving her young and newly graduated daughter behind, encouraging her to stay there and help her own people.

As exhorted by her mother, Margaret nervously travels to Dilepe and takes up a teaching profession of Leseding school, where she befriends the beautiful and confident Dikeledi, another teacher. When Margaret is very frank and open minded to state that she is a Masarwa woman, Dikeledi is really astonished and with the help of her lover and a tribal superior, Moleka she arranges accommodation for Margaret. Initially Margaret is a bit frightened at the sight of this Moleka but later when he expresses his kindness towards her she feels comfortable with him and Moleka too believes that he may love her despite her origins. But the school Administration is however, racially prejudiced against Margaret and conspires to send her out. Again it is the kindhearted Dikeledi who protects her by thwarting their plan. Dikeledi's brother, Maru, on his return from a business trip learns from his spy, Ranko that Moleka, his great friend and rival is fascinated towards Margaret, the Masarwa woman. At once he decides to make Margaret his own by plotting Moleka's marriage with his sister Dikeledi who is unaware of Moleka's love for Margaret.

However, in course of time the love between Moleka and Margaret is secretly nourished. Maru believes that Margaret would be deeply impressed by his vision for a world of freedom and equality and plans to marry her himself. He also adapts some stealthy measures to succeed in his plan. He cleverly fools Moleka by pretending to protest

measure Margaret has been accepted. But we can't claim that Margaret successfully represents the san cluture. The novel fails to account for the san heritage that Margaret is said to have sought in adolescence.

In the novel Bushmen are seen less than human. The narrator tells the reader that Bushmen and Zebras are more alike in the eyes of non-Bushmen than are Bushmen and humans. It's generalized that any group who looks different can become monsters to another, but the distinction goes beyond appearance.

It is a general truth that behavior which contributes to the perception of a group is culturally defined. The wild jigging dance, living in the bush, and eating Mealie pap are the (a kind of boiled corn meal paste) three concerns that decide the behavior of the children at the mission school. The dance may mean the healing dance, accompanied by singing and clapping where the bushmen begin to tremble violently but it has got the cultural relevance in uniting the community and releasing their tension. This kind of trance dance may seem to be uncouth but the healing touch derived from it declares its refinement.

The bush location where they live is also despised as uncivilized but in fact, many san have been brought in from the bush to live as slaves in Dilepe which is apparently a better life for them. And Mealie pap, the food of the Bushmen may be considered substandard food but it is far from a badge of inhumanity as this meal was served even to Nelson Mandela when he was a prisoner, which is known to the school children too. A critic called Binyavanga Wainaina says that mealie pap should actually be considered Africa's fast food, the equivalent of chips, without the grease. There are at least 100 million people in Africa who eat a version of pap for supper every day. This food of the Bushmen is not at all dehumanizing. Each of these distinctions is cultural rather than racial and bears a mark of ridicule from the mission children. But none of these characteristics is displayed by Margaret in the course of the novel.

Margaret's missionary training strips her of her cultural heritage and leaves her with only the appearance, the physical trappings of a Bushman. As Margaret's adoptive mother believes that heredity is nothing she raises this out cast baby in a manner similar to the rearing Nora Helmer receives in Henrik Ibsen's "A Doll's House", where her father calls her his doll-child and plays with her just as she plays with her dolls. She is satisfied with the academic success of the child but in reality the child's brilliance is based on social isolation and lack of communication with others except through books. Hence the Englishness in which the mother steeps her adopted daughter Margaret renders the child out of touch with the Masarwa and her own culture.

But neither Maru nor Margaret herself has understood the bi-cultural confusion within Margaret.

Her final condition in the novel is more objectified than even Nora Helmer's Position at Ibsen's play. For in a foul mood, Maru tells her that he married her only because she was the only woman who did not want to be important. But she was not important to him as he used to say sometimes. Here her identity as a Bushman is only partially implied and her individual autonomy is brutally negated.

In this more personal novel "Maru", Bessie Head examines sources of evil and potential goodness. It's clear that if the political institutions which decree and regulate the lives of the society are reformed or abolished, a better or new society can be established. Moreover the novel ends on a triumphal note where Maru and Margaret become the harbingers of a new world of true racial equality through the union of their souls. Above all Bessie Head, with all her South African experience, has achieved her ambition in an astonishing way by writing "Maru", an enduring novel on the hideousness of racial prejudice. She also deserves more acclaim than any other black African novelist writing in English, as one of the pioneers of Brown Literature, a literature that includes everybody.

REFERENCES:

- Awoonor, Kofi. *The Breast of the Earth : A Study of the cultures and literature of Africa*. New York : Double day, 1971.
- Conton, William. *The African*. London : Heinemann Educational Books, 1971.
- Davidson, Basil. *The Africans : An Entry to cultural History*. Harmondsworth : Penguin Books, 1973.
- Finnegan, Ruth. *Oral Literature in Africa*. Oxford Library of African Literature. London : Oxford University Press, 1970.
- Legum, Colin, ed. *Africa Handbook*. Harmondsworth : Penguin Books, 1969.