



Racial Science and the Effects of Culture Discrimination in Bessie Head's *Maru*

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Abstract

Bessie Emery Head is an African writer who has written in response to the sufferings, discriminations and cravings of the African people. She not only attempts to express the racial values of the society but also criticized the same if there is an immoral touch. In her novel, *Maru*, she resists and protests against all forms of discriminations, which are in the form of a society oppressing and alienating an individual, one gender suppressing the other, or a group denying the basic human rights to another group. *Maru* registers the discriminations experienced by a group of people who are estranged and brutalized only on the basis of differences in appearance, the Botswana people towards Masarwa people. The novelist aims at resisting the dehumanization of the Masarwa through the female protagonist, Margaret. This paper seeks to examine Bessie Head's *Maru* in an offer to expose the unfair treatment meted out to the Masarwa people because of ethnic discriminations. It is also an assessment of the contemporary African society, where the people are in the fetters the ethnic, communal, political, racial and gender discriminations.

Key Words: Discrimination, Dehumanization, Ethnic,

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Bessie Emery Head is an African writer who has written in response to the sufferings, discriminations and cravings of the African people. She was born on July 6, 1937, in Africa. She was born of an illegal union between her white mother and black father. She suffered rejection and alienation at an early age because of the loss of her mother and her abandoned father. She was with her foster parents and got married soon. She abandoned her homeland, her teaching job and her husband and took her small son to Botswana, seeking personal asylum and tranquility in simple village life.

Bessie Head wrote novels, short fiction and autobiographical works that are infused with spiritual questioning and self-reflection. Most of Bessie Head's important works are set in Serowe. The three novels *When Rain Clouds Gather*, *Maru* and *A Question of Power* all have some autobiographical elements. She has also published a number of short stories, including the collection *The Collector of Treasures*. She published a book on the history of Serowe, the village she settled in, called *Serowe: Village of the Rainwind*. Her novel, *A Bewitched Crossroad*, is historical, set in 19th-century Botswana. Most of her writing took place while she was in exile in Botswana. An exception is the novel *The Cardinals* (published posthumously), set in South Africa.

Bessie Head not only attempts to express the racial values of the society but also criticized the same if there is an immoral touch. In her novel, *Maru*, she resists and protests against all forms of discriminations, which are in the form of a society oppressing and alienating an individual, one gender suppressing the other, or a group denying the basic human rights to another group. *Maru* registers the discriminations experienced by a group of people who are estranged and brutalized only on the basis of differences in appearance, the Botswana people towards Masarwa people. The novelist aims at resisting the dehumanization of the Masarwa through the female protagonist, Margaret.

This paper seeks to examine Bessie Head's *Maru* in an offer to expose the unfair treatment meted out to the Masarwa people because of ethnic discriminations. It is also an assessment of the contemporary African society, where the people are in the fetters the ethnic, communal, political, racial and gender discriminations. Ethnic discrimination differentiates individuals on the basis of perceived racial and cultural differences and leads to various forms of the oppressions. Discriminatory policies towards ethnic minorities include the race-based discrimination against native Africans among themselves out of colonial intrusion is widely discussed here.

Maru is a major attempt to portray the discriminations glamorously. It is an effort to explore the social norms created because of colonial intrusion and has been existing in the African society. Head, through her writings, deals not only with the conventional image of Whites oppressing Blacks but also exhibits the Blacks oppressing their own Blacks. This novel, *Maru*, portrays the condition of the people from black society who are longing for power in order to subjugate their own people.

The plot of *Maru* revolves around the treatment meted out to a Masarwa woman, Margaret, who has been raised by a White Missionary. The term Masarwa in the Tswana language refers to the people who live in the dry and arid regions of the Kalahari. Masarwa are the outcast people of the society who are used as slaves by the others. They are considered as the lowest form of human being and the other black people spit on them, pinch them and oppress them in the way they like. They are not even considered as human beings. Such a Masarwa is Margaret, the central character of this novel.

Maru portrays Margaret's effort to become a part of the black society of Dilepe, a rural village in Botswana. Here in Dilepe too, these Masarwas were treated as slaves. Margaret being a Masarwa thus becomes a pariah (outsider) in Dilepe. Her education has, however, made her intellectually superior to the other Masarwas and she has earned for herself the job of a teacher. The novel then goes on to describe the battle between the two community leaders, Maru and Moleka, to win her love.

Margaret's foster mother is a white missionary, teacher and the artist. She has given her own name to her adopted child. As a woman of the African society Margaret does not have an identity of her own. She lives behind the identity of her foster mother Margaret Cadmore. As a woman of mixed race, she lives as a white until she is with her foster mother. But when she becomes independent, she loves to reveal her identity as Masarwa. She feels proud of saying her as Masarwa because she is the one who has education among her community. So she plans to create an identity for her community after being strong with her strong educational record. It is identified that there is always a struggle for identity among the natives themselves.

The suffering that Margaret experiences due to racial and gender discrimination at Dilepe School portrays multiple forms of oppression to which Margaret is subjected to. At the beginning, she attracts the attention of the school principal, Pete. But soon Pete realizes that coloured people are not to be trusted, as they identify themselves with their white roots rather than the African background. But once Margaret reveals her Masarwa status, he shows his real oppressive face and creates a cruel offences against the new teacher. Margaret is subjected to harmful treatment and is looked upon as nothing by the people around her. Pete fails in his crooked ideas because Margaret has perfect credentials.

Through this novel, *Maru*, Head alleviates (strengthens) the life of Masarwas by presenting the characters like Maru, Moleka and Dikeledi. They are the prominent figures of Dilepe. Maru, the chief of Dilepe, and his friend Moleka fall in love with the Masarwa girl, Margaret. They are keeping Masarwas as slaves in their houses. Because of their affair they themselves take the initiative to restore the identity of the Masarwas. Margaret on the, other hand wins the heart of the Maru's sister, Dikeledi. She is too helpful for Margaret in the matter of school and village life. Using this circumstances, Maru marries the Masarwa even in the midst of problems. His chief hood has confiscated from him so he moves to another place to live a happy life with the unwanted Masarwa, Margaret. He tries to signify his marriage as a matter of equality in gender and racial level. He fails in his community but sowing a seed against this ethnic discrimination.

Thus, *Maru* is a genuine account of racial and communal conflicts that intimidated the African society in all its developments. Through this novel Bessie Head indexes the discriminations experienced by an oppressed society who are alienated and dehumanized on the basis of ethnic difference, the Botswana people towards Masarwa people. As a novelist, she aims at resisting the dehumanization of the Masarwa through the female protagonist, Margaret. Finally, through her assessment of the contemporary African society, it is identified that the people of Africa are continued to be in the fetters the ethnic, communal, political, racial and gender discriminations.

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