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## UNIT 2 BESSIE HEAD, ‘THE COLLECTOR OF TREASURES’

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### 2.0 OBJECTIVES

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In this Unit, we will learn about Bessie Head. We will discuss her position as a significant writer whose attempts to chronicle life in Botswana have yielded powerful creative output.

After reading this Unit, you will be able to:

- Learn about the life and works of Bessie Head
- Investigate the living conditions of women
- Understand the reasons for oppressive masculinity
- Find the redemptive powers of female solidarity
- Locate the story in the tradition of oral literature

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### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

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#### 2.1.1 The Writer’s Bio-brief

Bessie Amelia Emery Head (1937-1986) was a significant voice amidst the notable writers of sub-Saharan Africa. She wrote several novels and short stories. Some of her remarkable works are *When Rain Clouds Gather* (1968), *Maru* (1971), *A Question of Power* (1973) and an anthology of short stories; *Collector of Treasures* (1977). Bessie Head was born of mixed parentage in South Africa. It is important to note, dear student, that under Apartheid (South African policy of racial segregation), a mixed-race marriage was considered illegal in South Africa at the time of her birth. Her mother, Bessie Amelia Emery, was a white woman and her father, a black groom employed by her family. Their alliance was not welcomed by the society. Her mother was admitted to a mental asylum because of her liaison with a black man and she subsequently gave birth to Bessie Head

there. Due to apartheid, it was illegal for people of mixed races to marry each other. Her mother was admitted to a mental asylum during her pregnancy and as a result, Bessie Head was born there. She was sent to a foster family who rejected her when they realized that she was coloured. Children of mixed parentage were considered coloured children and they found no solidarity from either the white supremacists or the subjugated black population. She was raised in an orphanage and later tried her hands at teaching and journalism. Dear student, it is of utmost importance to understand that being a coloured person, Bessie Head struggled with acceptance and it shaped her writings as well. When she felt alienated by South African milieu, she sought refuge in Botswana and that's where she found her literary voice. She lived in rural Botswana and observed the lives of poor and disenfranchised women. She learned that the black women are doubly marginalized; as black subjects suffering under colonial rule as well as women suffering from deep rooted patriarchy. This theme found prominence in Head's literary output. Alice Walker regenerated interest in Head's writings by hailing her as one of her "favourite uncelebrated foreign writers...whose work deserves more attention in this country."

### 1.1.2. Story of *The Collector of Treasures*

The story begins in media res (in the middle of events) where we see a woman being driven to a prison far away from her home. As she looks wistfully at the passing landscape, she realizes that she will not be able to see the mundane things like cattle grazing in the fields, bushes, and forest from her jail cell. As the woman is ushered into the jailhouse, late in the evening, her crime is revealed. The guards talk to each other and introduce her as the husband killer of Puleng village.

It is revealed that her name is Dikeledi Mokopi and the wardress wryly tells her that she will be in good company since her cell mates include four women who have been convicted of killing their respective husbands. The wardress calls it a fashionable amongst women to kill their husbands these days. Her tone suggests lack of empathy and understanding of the social or domestic reasons for these women to murder their spouses.

In her conversation with her cellmates, we learn that Dikeledi literally means tears. Her very birth was associated with tragedy, as her father expired when she was born. She was named after her mother's tears. The name can be seen as a metaphor for her life. Her childhood and her married life were both sorrowful. She recalls it as she learns the life stories of her companions. Each of her cellmates had killed her husband. Dikeledi had castrated the private parts of her husband and her new cellmate, Kebonye had done the same to her respective husband. Kebonye's story had been a harrowing one too. She lived with an abusive husband who often subjected her to sexual violence. He was an education officer at a school. There was rampant sexual abuse of schoolgirls by their male teachers. He was himself guilty of abusing these young girls. When he impregnated one of the young students and Kebonye found out about it, she killed him to finally put the abuse at rest. The short and matter of fact discussion between the cellmates sheds light upon a few things. Firstly, nobody is surprised that sexual abuse of young girls is routine at the hands of teachers and other personnel in authoritative roles. Secondly, Kebonye as well as Dikeledi suffer in silence for a prolonged duration before gathering enough strength to kill their respective husbands.

Finally, none of the women entertain the idea of approaching civic authorities or police to help them out, implying that taking recourse to institutional law and justice is not a possibility. Women's position in society is shockingly marginalized and their human rights are abused with impunity by chauvinistic men.

The prison where Dikeledi was lodged was a rehabilitation centre where the inmates were encouraged to perform small acts of labour to earn some money and to keep their prison sentence constructive. Men would build bricks, shoes, cultivate vegetables and women would knit, sew, weave baskets etc. It was soon revealed that Dikeledi was a talented woman. She knit intricate designs on a sweater in a few hours earning everyone's admiration. She told Kebonye that she took pride in hard work. In absence of a supportive husband, she sustained her family by thatching people's roofs, knitting, sewing, weaving baskets etc. She earned money and respect from her fellow villagers. At the end of her first day in prison, Dikeledi remarks to herself that although her life is sad, she has found a treasure in friendship and solidarity of Kebonye and other inmates. Having a sordid life, these moments of compassion are her only treasures that she collects and holds close to her heart.

The writer goes on to discuss men in her society and states that there are two kinds of men. The first kind is at the same psychological level as animals such as dogs, bulls and donkeys. He is predatory, cruel and selfish in nature. He dominates women and sexually abuses them with no regard to creating a family life. He takes no responsibility for the children he produces. With violence and a tendency to cater to his own sexual appetite, he causes women to abort some time. Unfortunately, these kinds of men are in the majority, according to the writer. She then follows up with an analysis about these men. She presents a division of history to understand men, patriarchy, and their behaviour. She says in pre-colonial days, the elders of the tribes laid out conventions and taboos for everyone to follow. The rules were patriarchal in nature. They put men in a superior position and women in a subordinate one. The unruly men were kept somewhat in check due to the rigid societal norms. These norms were, however, very general and did not take into account specific problems.

Second phase is identified as that of colonialism. The colonial powers ensured that most of the men spent their lives toiling in mines in distant lands. They were cut off from family, community, and societal values. They worked for a pittance and suffered greatly for it. The moral framework ensured by society eroded as a result of this.

The final phase, i.e. the independence of the nation didn't help these men either. Freedom from colonial rule saw its own complexities. Salaries and purchasing power grew exponentially. But the newfound financial independence came with reckless power for these men. Now they had no societal rules or colonial rules to discipline themselves with. They became dizzy with power and cared for none except themselves. Dikeledi's husband, Garesego Mokopi was an example of this kind of man. He now had enough money and resources to womanize. He moved from one extra-marital affair to the next without providing for his wife and three sons.

The second kind of man used financial and constitutional freedom to reinvent himself. He was a caring family man who used his time, money and emotions to sustain life around him. He lived a life of happy domesticity by nurturing people

who came into his contact. One such man was Paul Thebolo, Dikeledi's neighbour. He was a kind husband and an upright member of the community. He laughed easily, took good care of his family and contributed to the community by lending a helping hand to anyone who needed it. Most importantly, he treated his wife as an equal partner in their marriage. He loved and respected her. It is evident from Dikeledi's discussions with his wife Kenalepe. When Kenalepe learns that Garesego was brutish in his relationship with Dikeledi, she offers to share her husband with her. In a very unconventional measure, she tells Dikeledi that she must learn for herself how fulfilling sexual relationships could be between two individuals who respected each other. Although Dikeledi never redeems this offer, it depicts the depth of female friendship that is shared between the two women. Dikeledi keeps this offering as a treasure in her heart.

She makes peace with her austere life marked by hard work and good friends. The tranquility of her frugal life is ruptured when she needs 20 rupees for her eldest son's school fees. She requests her husband Garesego, who accuses her of having an extra-marital affair with Paul and refuses to pay her. He believes that men only help women who sleep with them and conversely, women only do household chores for men they're sleeping with. His own perverted mindset prevents him from seeing selflessness in others' good deeds. His chauvinism is reinforced when Paul Thebolo comes to accost him. He starts the rumour that his wife is Paul's concubine to degrade Paul's social standing in the village. The base men in the village relish the gossip because it reduces a good man like Paul to their level.

To assert his dominance over his first wife and to spite Paul Thebolo, Garesego decides to pay for his son's school fees. He sends a message to Dikeledi that he will visit her, and she should keep a hot meal and bath ready for him. Dikeledi understands that he wants a sexual favour in return for the payment. She feeds him and when he goes to sleep, she castrates him. She asks her son to call the police and surrenders herself peacefully. She is assured by Paul that he will take care of her children. The story ends with this assurance.

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## 2.2 CHARACTERS

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Now that we have undertaken a brief analysis of the story, it behooves us to familiarize ourselves with the main characters. It will assist us in understanding their motives, strengths and flaws, among other aspects.

Dikeledi - Dikeledi is a tragic figure who is literally named after her mother's tears. She is married to an abusive husband who abandoned her and their three children. She uses ingenuity and industry to eke out a respectable living for her small family. Her kindness and willingness to help others wins her the friendship and regard of many people. Amidst wretched penury, she forges strong bonds with her friends. Her husband demands sexual submission from her in return for a small sum of money she needs for her son's school fees. Unwilling to bow down in the face of her sexual, social, and financial humiliation, she kills her husband by chopping off his genitals. Even prison cannot diminish her spirit as she goes on to make friends, gathering their loyalty and love as treasures of life. She has a harrowing life, but she still manages to find beauty in it.

Garesego - Garesego is a chauvinistic man who feels entitled to his wife's complete sexual submission without providing her with any real sense of home,

love, and security. He believes in male supremacy and abuses his wife constantly before leaving her and moving on to greener pastures. He keeps several concubines without committing to any of them. He is driven by a false sense of superior ego and doesn't think twice before abusing or physically assaulting his wife. His new job enables him to spend freely but not once does he reconcile his financial abundance to his own responsibilities as a parent and a husband. He is described as a 'female prostitute' by the narrator for his propensity to seek attention and to parade his sexual conquests.

Paul Thebolo- Paul is described as a 'poem of tenderness'. He is in a symbiotic relationship not only with his wife but also with the rest of the village. Paul is an icon of the evolved man that the narrator refers to when she talks about the binary of the kinds of African men. You may refer to later units to learn more about this. He is presented as a foil to Garesego's character. Unlike Garesego, he loves and cherishes his wife and family. When he notices the good in people, he acknowledges it. His honest compliments and generous provisions to his less privileged neighbours are indicative of his character as a pillar of the community. At the same time, his refusal to copulate with Dikeledi is indicative of his character as a man of integrity. He becomes the epicentre of the village community as uneducated men come to him seeking help with their forms and correspondence and, educated men come up to him to discuss contemporary politics. He confronts Garesego when the latter indulges in malicious speculation about his relationship with Dikeledi. Although Garesego and many villagers indulge in denigrating him, he doesn't stop caring and providing for her household. He proves that he is a virtuous man when he promises to send Banabotho to school and provide for Dikeledi's children while she suffers her prison sentence.

Kenalepe- Kenalepe is Dikeledi's bosom friend and Paul's wife. Her arrival in Dikeledi's life marks the only time of bliss in Dikeledi's otherwise tragic life. She was beautiful and vivacious and liberally shared her good fortune with her friend. They became keepers of each other's intimate secrets. She offers to loan her husband to Dikeledi so her friend can experience a rewarding sexual experience. She is utterly confident that neither Paul nor Dikeledi will misuse this proposition. She is a little naive since the constant bliss of her life doesn't provide her with depth of thought. She was blessed with fawning parents and a loving husband who adores her thoroughly. Her soulful friendship with Kenalepe is one of the few joys in the latter's life.

Kebonye - Kebonye is Dikeledi's cellmate in the prison. She is guilty of the same crime as Dikeledi. Tired of her husband's abusive ways, she castrates him with a razor. She shares her own harrowing tale in a straightforward manner. Her account adds to Dikeledi's own testimony as a woman who has suffered from a brutish man. He kicks her in her private parts when he wants to sleep with her. He also rapes and abuses his young students and impregnates them. Kebonye is finally exhausted from his abuse and castrates him. Her story is aligned with Dikeledi's to underscore the plight of disenfranchised women caught in unequal marriages. They don't have any legal or social escape from brutal husbands. The only option left to them is either to suffer throughout their lives or to kill their husbands and end the abuse.

Banabotho - Banabotho is the eldest of Dikeledi's three sons. He passed his school exam with Grade 'A'. To Dikeledi's joy and pride he is qualified to have a secondary education. However, his school fees proves to be a struggle for her

and works as a catalyst for the events to come. In the absence of a sturdy father figure, he could have become a wastrel, but he sees his mother struggle to afford a good education for him and his brothers. So he puts his heart and soul into his studies.

Wardess- The wardess of the prison in which Dikeledi is lodged represents the public attitude towards female criminals. Instead of attempting to understand the context and reasons behind Dikeledi's crime, she treats her with wry sarcasm. She tells her that there are other women who have committed the same crime so she'll be in good company. She casually reduces the crime to a new fad amongst women. Her indifference and callous disregard to her inmates shows the systemic apathy towards women.

Sundry villagers - Bessie Head portrays the simple joys and stark prejudices of rural life with equal ease. Most of the villagers lead lives of poverty and although they share the joys and sorrows of each other's lives but they are also quick to slander Paul and Dikeledi's relationship. They delight in cruel gossip especially about Paul Thebolo since they are envious of his superior moral standards.

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### **2.3 HISTORICAL CLASSIFICATION OF MEN**

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Bessie Head undertakes a socio-historical classification of men in the African society. She says that there are two types of men. The first kind is a selfish, cruel, irresponsible male who acts without any consideration to others. He sexually subjugates women and does not fulfill any responsibilities towards his progeny. He is reduced to the level of base animals who copulate with the females of their species without any regard to her consent and who don't nurture their young. She uses the imagery of animals like dogs, bulls, and donkeys to illustrate her argument. She further analyses historical treatment meted out to such men in three-time spans. In ancient tribal societies, before colonialism, elders of the community created social mores, taboos, and moral guidelines which influenced people's attitudes and behaviours. The moral framework was broadly created for the entire community and was extremely male centric. Women were considered secondary and therefore their needs, aspirations, and rights were neglected.

The colonial invasion did no favours to this category of men. The imperialist policies dictated the African men to work in perilous conditions in South African mines, often away from their families and children. The racial policies and discriminatory taxation ensured that African men were reduced to migrant labourers who led isolated lives for long durations of time. This led to the breakdown of family life and traditional community in their original tribes. The ancient stronghold of tribal morals and customs saw deep erosion as a direct result of this male exodus.

Independence from colonial rule, presented a unique opportunity to rediscover and recreate the nation and the community. However, a long postcolonial degradation had robbed these men of any moral integrity. They found new forms of employment and financial excesses, but they were free from any social or systemic obligations. Instead of finding an opportunity to alter their lives and rebuild their communities, they used the money and freedom for reckless decadence. Garesego is presented as an example of such men. He used his money and influence to indulge in sensual pleasures while neglecting his wife and children.

Garesego can be contrasted with the second category of men. The second kind of man, according to Head, can be exemplified by Paul Thebolo. He was enlightened enough to create and nurture his family as well as his community. He is kind and generous towards his family and his neighbours. His house becomes the epicentre of political discussions, evening gatherings, and general bon-homie amongst the villagers.

Women, however, have been excluded from this categorization as doubly marginalized. Colonialism stripped them of their rights as citizens and they were subjugated as being inferior to men during all three periods of history that Head discusses. Women like Dikeledi weren't benefitted by any socio-political changes accompanied by independence. Their condition as doubly repressed is made amply clear by the women characters of the story. Even women in improved circumstances, like Kenalepe are kept out of important spheres of power such as local politics and world affairs. Paul's marriage with Kenalepe might be blissful but it is by no means egalitarian. In an increasingly unequal society, men and women are both victims of oppression.

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## 2.4 REDEMPTIVE POWERS OF FEMALE SOLIDARITY

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Bessie Head creates a model of female solidarity as can be experienced in the rural world of Dikeledi and Kenalepe. Conventional patriarchy and postcolonialism had collectively rendered women virtually powerless in an uneven world. The lives of women are restricted to domestic quarters. The world of employment, politics, current affairs etc are beyond their means. This exclusion from decision making and financial empowerment worsens the conditions of women. Women like Dikeledi cannot have a dialogue with the systemic patriarchy because they aren't equipped with any tools of negotiation. They lack higher education, important jobs, and are deliberately kept out of local politics. They are heavily dependent on the goodwill of their husbands to sustain their lives. Within this unequal world, they can only turn inwards and to other women to draw comfort and sustenance in an otherwise bleak existence. Dikeledi turns to women like Kenalepe and Kebonye, who understand her suffering and provide solace to her.

When Dikeledi's husband deserts her and their three children, she takes recourse to the cottage industry of sewing, knitting, thatching roofs to financially sustain her family. She has no access to formal education or formal employment. When she hears Paul discuss world politics with other male members of the village community, she realizes that there is a larger world around her and education provides access to it. Unlettered women like herself are excluded from it. She savours these details with her friend as she mentions that 'a completely new world opened up' as she heard these lively political discussions. Women only get conversational scraps about politics and philosophy while men are given the liberty to participate in policy making. Although Kenalepe was born to loving parents and married to a progressive man, her role in life is restricted to the domestic sphere; birthing children, cooking and caring for her family. As far as Dikeledi and her ilk are concerned, male oppression and domination are part and parcel of being women. Women desiring a more detailed political awareness are kept out of the modern knowledge systems and employment.

Dikeledi's circumstances have always been cruel but she finds lightness in the form of female friendship she strikes with Kenalepe and other women, including Kebonye. The poignancy in the story stems from Dikeledi's unfaltering optimism regardless of unmitigated cruelties she is subjected to. Her grit and determination are a testimony to her unflinching belief in basic human kindness. Her willingness to share, and to help others creates the bedrock of her relationship with the people around her. The deep friendship between women is a potent salve against perpetual alienation that women like Dikeledi feel.

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## 2.5 ORAL STORYTELLING

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'In reality, all I simply did was record stories that had happened and had been told to me and described to me. Most of the stories there are based on reality, they are not inventions. They happened, they are changed. They are decorated, they are interpreted. But there's a basis there in fact, in reality.'(Head)

Bessie Head wrote in an exclusively oral tradition of storytelling. Dear student, if you read the story aloud, you will notice it has a different auditive flavour. It will feel like a true story that you have heard from the narrator. Botswana, like many other African countries, had a rich tradition of oral literature that included folktales, songs, proverbs etc. Bessie Head uses real incidents and fictionalizes them for her anthology. *The Collector of Treasures*, itself is based on a real incident that she learned about. The fictional world draws upon the oral history and uses it to provide relevant social commentary. It becomes the voice of the marginalized African women and enables the reader to comprehend their lives without fetishizing their poverty or race. The act of storytelling implies participation. The act is based on sharing. The individual's life experiences must bear lessons for the community. Dikeledi's story is thus, the story of several other women who suffer years of patriarchal abuse and are finally pushed to commit acts of violence.

The oral gossip between Dikeledi and Kenalepe is different from the informed conversation between Paul Thebolo and his friends. However, both are valid forms of oral tradition. Dikeledi's tale of her life with the richness of experience sheds copious amounts of light on the rustic life and women's subordinate position in it. She borrows from an oral culture when she narrativizes her own experiences to characters within the story. As her own introduction, she tells Paul proudly, 'all my friends know that I'm the woman whose thatch doesn't leak.' She repeats it to her new friends in the jail cell. The simple sentence highlights her resourcefulness in the face of a bleak life and her pride in it. The manner of speaking is anecdotal. With 'everyone knows' she establishes the beginning of her story. It lays the ground for the forthcoming veracity of her story as that of a sustained struggle. She doesn't take a new husband or choose to be someone's concubine to survive, she worked hard and gave what little she had generously. Her conversations with Kenalepe are marked with the unbridled joys of sharing each other's lives. While neither has access to books or formal education, their conversations are rife with emotional knowledge and a desire to learn more. Idle gossip or the manipulation of truth is the other side of the story for village life. People speculate about Dikeledi's relationship with her neighbour. They also chastise Garesego for not paying the fees of his own son. However, the reasons are never charitable. The reason is to establish conjugal control on Dikeledi's sexuality.



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## 2.6 DIKELEDI'S CRIME

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According to Craig McKenzie, 'Dikeledi's act should not be perceived as an arbitrary act of retribution but as a socially determined act'. To examine this statement, one must retrace the story as a work of fiction based on real incidents Bessie Head had documented from her life in rural Serowe. Her engagement with real women and their daily struggles garbed in the familiar strains of a short story provide valuable insights in the female domain. *The Collector of Treasures* is a fictionalization of a gruesome incident that actually took place in rural Serowe. Head understands the need to flesh out the story around the incidents in order to provide context to the women who are compelled to commit crimes.

Dikeledi's crime can only be comprehended within the framework of her travails in a lop-sided system where women have no social or political currency. She is housed in the company of four other women who have committed the same type of crime. At this juncture it is of critical importance to note that her cellmate Kebonye killed her husband in similar vein, and for similar reasons. Her husband was a serial rapist. After raping and impregnating several of his charges at the rural school, he was finally killed by a desperate Kebonye. Like Garesego, he was guilty of committing sexual crimes against defenseless women and getting complete exemption from any kind of punishment. Men slip through the biased legal system which does not hold them responsible for crime against women. Women like Dikeledi and Kebonye are emblematic of many disempowered women who suffer for years before acting against their tyrants. In the story called 'Life', from the same collection, the husband gets a prison sentence of merely five years after murdering his wife. Compare the quantum of justice in 'Life' with that of 'The Collector of Treasures' where Dikeledi gets a life term for killing her abusive husband. This highlights the institutionalized bias against women criminals versus male criminals. It also raises doubts on the very definition of the idea of crime.

To the community, sexual crime against young female students by an education officer is not a matter of legal significance. The parents of the raped teenager come to Kebonye's house to complain about her husband instead of reporting the matter to the police. Similarly, Dikeledi doesn't bring the issue of conjugal negligence and marital rape in the judicial purview. Sexual crime committed by men is conveniently out of the sphere of the legal justice system. Women like Dikeledi and Kebonye are expected to suffer in silence. Bessie Head talks about the breakdown of communal conventions of the tribes before colonization. The old tribal structure was corroded by colonialism. Hence, there isn't the tribal hierarchy of elders who, hypothetically, could have dealt with men like Garesego. In the absence of redressal at the community level and at the legal level, vulnerable women such as Dikeledi find themselves forced to commit acts of violence to be freed of oppression. Garesego ruptures the peaceful purity of Dikeledi's life with her children and friendly neighbours. Dikeledi's crime is her act of revolt against the perpetual maltreatment she receives at the hands of her husband.

Bessie Head's story encourages the reader to see Dikeledi's crime as a part of the marginalized women's resistance. In a complex world marred by patriarchy, erosion of traditional tribal value-systems, and postcolonial exploitation, her final act of violence is her refusal to conform to the status quo. Her crime can not be treated as an ordinary crime committed by an individual. Her crime is her statement against misogyny and society's failure to correct it.

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## 2.7 ANIMAL IMAGERY IN THE STORY

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Head borrows motifs from the world of animals to comment upon the social behaviour of male characters. Dikeledi and the women of rural Botswana are constantly imperiled by the barbaric behaviour of the patriarchal men. Emboldened by newly found economic abundance, misogynistic men like Garesego believe that they can prey upon defenseless women. The declining power of the tribal customs and traditions enables predatory men such as Garesego to reject any sense of responsibility and to lead a selfish hedonistic life. The narrator uses animal imagery to underscore the bestial nature of such men. Head categorizes him with animals like bulls, donkeys, and dogs, since he doesn't assume any responsibility for his progeny and he has no respect for women. She furthers the imagery by suggesting that sexual intimacy has no relevance for such men. Like animals, they fornicate to satisfy their own sexual urges and then leave the female to fend for herself. Threatened by Dikeledi's humble prosperity, he baits Paul to confront him. He goes to Dikeledi's house to 'mark his territory' like an animal. On the other hand evolved men such as Paul symbolize empathy and compassion and therefore, have become a poem. Essentially, Head's usage of animals like bulls, dogs, cocks etc. is to establish the lack of societal principles of dignity in marriage and family which form the base of the community in Serowe.

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## 2.8 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (QUESTION WITH ANSWER KEYS)

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- i) Is Dikeledi's crime unique or representative?

One needs to situate Dikeledi's crime in the widespread domestic violence and abuse faced by African women. Within the context of the story, we see how there are at least five women in Dikeledi's cell who are sentenced for committing similar crimes. Discuss the implications of a growing number of women who have chosen to refuse sexual manipulation and violence at the hands of their husbands. Since there is no viable scope of justice in the formal legal system, and the traditional system of tribal justice has been weaned, the only recourse left for the cornered women is to take their husband's lives.

- ii) Examine the potential of female solidarity in 'The Collector of Treasures'. Inclusive feminist consciousness permeates the works of Bessie Head. In times of severe distress, Dikeledi is supported by her kind neighbours in a symbiotic relationship. True friendship is forged between Dikeledi and Kenalepe. Locate the tangent of their relationship as it starts with neighbourly reciprocity and evolves into love and respect for one another. Explore the mutual accord among fellow prisoners lodged in the same cell as Dikeledi. Their misfortune and empathy for each other binds them in a reassuring relationship.

- iii) How does Bessie Head classify the types of men in the society?

Head engages in a socio-historical classification of men into two categories across three distinct periods of time, pre-colonial, colonial, and post-independence. Read the relevant unit to analyse the male characters in the

story according to this categorization. Evaluate the life choices made by Garesego in the wider context of men's position in the village community. Also, look at the rampant sexual crime committed by men in the position of power. Men like Kebonye's husband and Garesego hold important public offices and yet they abuse their positions to exploit women.

- iv) Examine the male chauvinism prevalent in the African society in light of the story,

**'The Collector of Treasures'.**

Bessie Head's 'The Collector of Treasures' is peopled with chauvinistic men who have sexual exploits with complete impunity. Garesego is the stereotype of such men. He marries a much younger woman and leaves her and their children to fend for themselves. Explore the idea of his toxic masculinity and how it harms him as well as people around him. Revisit the relevant section to understand how male oppression is not an isolated phenomenon. It is a byproduct of socio-political changes and postcolonial restructuring of the society in men's favour.

- v) Critically comment on the title of the story, 'The Collector of Treasures'. 'The Collector of Treasures' refers to the central protagonist of the story; Dikeledi. Remember, she is optimistic in the face of astute poverty, husband's abuse and abandonment, and skewed gender dynamics. However, she remains optimistic and cherishes whatever little tokens of kindness and friendship life offers her. She lays more emphasis on these moments of syncretic harmony rather than myriad oppressions she is subject to.

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## 2.9 SELECT READING LIST

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