

Bessie Head (1937 – 1986)

THE ORDER OF IKHAMANGA IN GOLD (POSTHUMOUS)



**AWARDED TO
BESSIE HEAD
FOR EXCEPTIONAL
CONTRIBUTION TO
LITERATURE AND THE
STRUGGLE FOR SOCIAL
CHANGE, FREEDOM
AND PEACE**

Bessie Head was born in Pietermaritzburg in 1937, the daughter of a mixed-race relationship between her Scottish mother and an African man. She was raised by foster parents and later placed in an orphanage.

Exhibiting an early intelligence, she overcame her difficult childhood to train as a primary school teacher. After four years as a teacher, she took up work as a journalist for *Golden City Post*.

She left for Botswana after a failed marriage. There she lived for many years in deep poverty. She spent 15 years in a refugee community before she was awarded citizenship. Her three novels and numerous other works were all written in Botswana where she died in 1986 at the young age of 49.

Drawing on her experience as a racially-mixed person growing up without a family in South Africa, Head's writing often dealt with poor and abused black women and their experiences of racism and sexism. Although Head claimed to be non-political in her writing, she portrayed the struggles and hardships of life in post-colonial Africa and the injustices and oppression of people. Inherent in her writings was the hope for social change and peace.

Bessie Head is one of Africa's most prominent writers. In her short life, she left an important literary legacy to Africa and the world.