International Journal of Arts Humanities and Social Sciences Studies
Volume 11 Issue 1 ǁ January 2026
ISSN: 2582-1601
www.ijahss.com

The Utopian Quest: Reconciliation And Hybridity In Arundati Roy's The God Of Small Things, Rohinton Mistry's A Fine Balance, Bessie Head's A Question Of Power And J.M. Coetzee's Disgrace.

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Abstract: This article undertakes an examination of the utopian visions conjured by four literary luminaries: Arundhati Roy in *The God of Small Things*, Rohinton Mistry in *A Fine Balance*, Bessie Head in *A Question of Power*, and J.M. Coetzee in *Disgrace.* Through the postcolonial critical lens, this analysis delves into these writers' conceptualisations of a utopian postcolonial world, teasing out the symbolic threads that weave together the tapestry of their utopian vision. By foregrounding hybridity as a crucible for forging not only South African and Indian societies but also postcolonial societies, this article examines the complex dynamics of cultural fusion and exchange. It demonstrates how hybridity and reconciliation serve as redemptive strategies capable of revitalising utopian postcoloniality, fostering a more harmonious and inclusive social order. The study also explores the transformative potential of transgressive actions, which empower characters to challenge and subvert entrenched boundaries, reconfiguring human relationships and reinscribing the dominant discourse into a utopian arrangement that prioritises the needs and perspectives of those relegated to the periphery. Through this analysis, this article offers a rich and multifaceted exploration of the utopian visions that underpin these seminal literary works. The article equally aims to demonstrate that, despite the various crises resulting from discrimination and trauma, there is hope for a non-racial, non-discriminatory, and non-traumatic society, indeed a vision of a utopian postcolonial society in the near future, as reflected in the novels studied.

I. INTRODUCTION

In the realm of postcolonial literature, four visionary writers- Arundhati Roy, Rohinton Mistry, Bessie Head, and J.M. Coetzee - conjure powerful utopian visions, imagining a world beyond the shackles of colonialism, patriarchy, and social injustice. Through their seminal works - *The God of Small Things*, *A Fine Balance*, *A Question of Power*, and *Disgrace* - these literary luminaries weave a tapestry of hope, exploring the possibilities of a harmonious and inclusive postcolonial society. This article delves into the heart of these utopian visions, examining how hybridity and transgressive actions serve as catalysts for transformative change, and illuminating the redemptive power of reconciliation in forging a brighter future for all.

Hybridity emerges as a potent force in shaping postcolonial societies, fostering new social formations and cultural exchanges in countries like South Africa and India as reflected in the novels in the study. This article examines how cross-cultural interactions in the novels of Bessie Head, J.M. Coetzee, Arundhati Roy, and Rohinton Mistry promote understanding, tolerance, and harmony among diverse groups. As Ngugi wa Thiong'o notes in "Decolonising the Mind," a democratic society begins with embracing diverse languages, cultures, and histories, radiating outwards to connect with global struggles. The novels in this study echo Ngugi's vision, showcasing characters who navigate complex cultural landscapes and strive for inclusive societies.

In the realm of postcolonial utopia, a world where patriarchal dominance is but a relic of the past, women emerge as powerful agents of change. The novels of Arundhati Roy, Rohinton Mistry, Bessie Head, and J.M. Coetzee in the study portray female characters who defy oppressive norms, rewriting their destinies and transforming their societies. This article explores how these women subvert patriarchal constraints, reclaiming agency and autonomy in a world where diversity is celebrated and tolerated. Through Homi Bhabha's lens of hybridity, we see marginalized voices negotiating and subverting dominant narratives, creating spaces for alternative identities and power structures. As Ashcroft notes, utopia represents a "spirit of hope" (257), inspiring transformative change and social justice.

II. Hybridity and Social Transformation

The writers in the study project the concept of hybridity as a driving force in shaping new social formations, particularly in postcolonial contexts such as South Africa and India, as reflected in the novels in the study. By examining cross-cultural interactions, we highlight how these exchanges can foster greater

understanding, tolerance, and harmony among diverse racial and cultural groups. This is in accordance with Ngugi in *Decolonising the Mind* in chapter three entitled "The Quest for Relevance" when he states that: "To get a correct national perspective, democracy where a whole range of opinions, views and voices ran freely to raise its absolute minimum. For them, the starting point is a democratic Kenya. The Kenya of peasants and workers of all nationalities, with their heritage of language, cultures, glorious histories, of struggle, vast natural and human resources. From this starting point, they can radiate outwards to link with heritage and struggles of other peoples in Africa, the third world people, Europe, and the Americas; with the struggle of the people the world over" (103). Ngugi's ideologies can be applicable to Southern Africa and Indian societies in particular and to the postcolonial countries in general, as visible in the novels in the study. According to Ngugi, the starting point of democracy is when people from different nationalities and socio-cultural backgrounds accept their differences and work together for a common goal. The novels of Head, Coetzee, Roy and Mistry under study make a similar appraisal to Ngugi's ideas, which will be elaborated in this article.

In *A Question of Power*, just as in the other novels, Head depicts the idea of hybridity as a stepping stone to the recreation of a utopian postcolonial society, which is characterised by unity and equality among different races and ethnic groups. The fact that the novels have different cultures perfectly woven together is a key to building a unified and strong utopian nation identified through cultural acceptance. In the novels in the study, we see people from different socio-cultural and religious backgrounds, such as the Egyptians, Christians, non-Christians, Blacks, Whites, city dwellers, villagers, upper-castes and lower-castes working together for a common goal. The novels showcase the intricate dynamics of cultural interaction, where individuals from disparate backgrounds navigate shared spaces. This portrayal underscores the significance of hybridity in fostering acceptance, tolerance, and ultimately, social cohesion, as diverse cultural practices intersect and influence one another.

Talking about Head's writing, Huma notes that, "One particular and constant feature of Head's writing, which is a reference to contemporary debates in cultural and gender studies, is Head's questioning of the intersection of race and gender" (56). In this spectrum, her fictional works offer a prime example of what Spivak has described as ontological difficulties facing the subaltern, that is, the colonised female who has no language to "know and speak itself" ("Can the Subaltern Speak" 285). What seems obvious in Head's novels is the quest for a language of difference based on symbolic forms that can allow the cultural/gender "other" to emerge from textual and representational invisibility. One of the ways through which *A Question of Power* achieves this aim is through the use of a complex symbolic system of representation revolving around images and metaphors of transplantation and hybrid growth, all of which are glaring in the garden at Motabeng.

In this respect, Elizabeth's garden in Motabeng just as Dina's flat in *A Fine Balance*, Petrus's Party in *Disgrace* and the History House in *The God of Small Things* is close to what the postcolonial critic, Homi Bhabha, has theorized as the hybrid and "interstitial", or "in-between", space, which offers a counterpoint to hegemonic discourses and systems of representation (*The Location of Culture* 2). Head uses the garden and its symbolic ramifications as a way of exploring certain discursive practices behind our understanding of identity and belonging. The unity that is reflected in Head's garden can resonate with the strong bond in the tailoring family in Dina's household in *A Fine Balance*, the strong bond between Velutha and Ammu in *The God of Small Things* and the bond between the blacks and whites in Petrus's party in *Disgrace*.

In *Disgrace*, Lucy recognizes that to survive, she must forgo her former independence and integrate into Petrus's emerging community structure, accepting his "patronage and protection" as a form of reparation for past colonial injustices. Her decision is a personal attempt at survival and integration, which her father struggles to understand, highlighting the chasm between their respective worlds. Petrus's actions are driven by a strong sense of loyalty and obligation to his "family, my people". This is evident when he shields Pollux, one of the perpetrators of the attack on Lucy, from David Lurie's accusations and the criminal justice system. He prioritises the welfare and protection of his community over abstract notions of universal justice, which he may view as an extension of the old white legal order. Coetzee uses Petrus's party to show how a new, functional, but often harsh, social order is being forged along lines of kinship, race, and practical power in the post-apartheid landscape, often at the expense of white characters who find themselves without a cohesive support system. This unity portrays Coetzee's utopian vision of the post-apartheid era and underscores the significance of hybridity in fostering acceptance, tolerance, and ultimately, social cohesion, as diverse cultural practices intersect and influence one another.

In *A Fine Balance*, the untouchables have a sense of belonging when they come in contact with Dina. They experience solidarity with one another. Dina is like a mother, cooking and serving tea, and commanding the scene until Om also begins to do some of the cooking. Although in the beginning the untouchables from the country eat outside, they gradually move toward a casteless society, as they begin to eat inside with Dina and Maneck in an egalitarian way, which reflects utopian values. Their eating together also counters gender and ethnic separation codes of behaviour. Their solidarity and love amplify Mistry's utopian vision for the

postcolonial world, where mutual love and acceptance of people of different caste backgrounds are tolerated and celebrated.

In *A Question of Power*, just as in the other novels, Head depicts the idea of hybridity as a stepping stone to the creation of a utopian society, which is characterised by unity and equality among different races and ethnic groups. Just as Lucy in *Disgrace,* Elizabeth owns land, and she equally produces crops, hence she belongs to that society (204). In the novel, the garden emerges as a potent symbol of hybridity, echoing the transformative space of Dina's flat in *A Fine Balance.* As Elizabeth navigates her mental illness, she finds solace in the garden, a realm where cultural boundaries blur. By embracing the garden project, she reconciles with Botswana's realities, forging deep connections with local women like Kenosi and Thoko. These cross-cultural bonds catalyse her journey towards psychological balance, contrasting starkly with apartheid's divisive ideologies. Head masterfully juxtaposes the garden's hybrid harmony against oppressive segregation, illustrating gardening as a metaphor for transcending cultural binaries. This resonates strongly with the postcolonial concept of hybridity, highlighting spaces where identities intersect and heal.

The writers in this study resonate with Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity. Talking about Bhabha's notion of hybridity, John Beverly notes in "Subalternity and Representation" that, Bhabha argues that hybridity is a central concept in postcolonial studies, and sees it as a space where colonial or subaltern subjects can 'translate' and 'undo' the binaries imposed by the colonial project (16). Head masterfully creates this space in Mbamagwato's garden, where diverse individuals unite for a common goal. This garden embodies a utopian postcolonial space, fostering cross-cultural connections and reunifying Elizabeth's fragmented self. Through her relationships with the international team, Elizabeth finds a collective project, illustrating gardening as a metaphor for hybrid spaces. Head's views align with Ashcroft, Tiffen, and Griffiths, who state: "The post-colonial world is one in which destructive cultural encounter is changing to acceptance of differences on equal terms... recognising cross-centrality as the basis on which the post-colonial world can be creatively stabilised" (*The Post Colonial Studies Reader*. 31). This underscores hybridity's potential to address social crises like racism.

In the novel *A Question of Power*, Elizabeth finds solace in the garden, a microcosm of diverse individuals united beyond cultural or ethnic boundaries. The volunteers, including Mrs Jones, Tom, Birgette, and Kenosi, challenge official structures, exemplifying sustainable development through self-help and community support. Tom's interactions with locals, particularly his care for Elizabeth's son, embody hybridity, echoing Bhabha's notion of "in-between" spaces. As Bo Peterson notes, these spaces enable "elaborating strategies of selfhood... that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration and contestation" (1-2). Hybridity dismantles colonial binaries, fostering a utopian space where differences converge. Head's garden illustrates this, contrasting sterile ideologies like racism and victimisation. It's a space of "inventive genius" and collective experimentation (*A Question of Power* 162), projecting a future of multicultural collaboration and growth. This aligns with utopian ideals, envisioning a society where individuals transcend imposed boundaries.

Mistry's just like the other authors in the study, in *A Fine Balance* also showcases the "integrative power" (62) of human solidarity and intercultural understanding, constructing a utopian society. Characters like Rajaram and Beggarmaster display solidarity, and Dina, Om, Maneck, and Ishvar form a strong bond, transcending religious and caste backgrounds. Their friendship mirrors the garden project in *A Question of Power*, exemplifying hybridity and Mistry's postcolonial utopian vision. The friendship is likened to a quilt, with "lives joined together" (491), and a "well-cut dress" (388), symbolising harmony and mutual understanding. Initially, Dina's reservations about the tailors reflect ingrained fears and biases, but her affection ultimately breaks barriers. The relationship blossoms into a family-like bond, providing Dina with a new source of meaning. As the narrator notes, "She had, during these last few months, known what a family was?" (50), highlighting the transformative power of human connection.

In *A Fine Balance,* the four main characters form a harmonious bond, learning from each other and shedding their biases. Ishvar and Dina exchange tooth-brushing habits (386), while Om reinvents himself through Maneck's influence (474). This microcosm of Dina's flat renders prior hierarchies and prejudices irrelevant. As Bo Peter notes, hybridity creates "in-between" spaces where cultural differences are articulated, and new identities are forged. Dina's flat becomes a utopian symbol, fostering cross-cultural connections, much like Elizabeth's garden in *A Question of Power* and the History House in *The God of Small Things*. The carnival in Dina's kitchen, with its shared food, laughter, and jokes, strips away the mundane façade, creating a liberating space for subaltern others. The History House in *The God of Small Things* similarly serves as a hybrid space, connecting Ammu and Velutha across caste lines. These spaces exemplify hybridity's power to redefine identities and challenge dominant narratives.

Petrus's party in Disgrace, Dina's kitchen in *A Fine Balance*, Elizabeth's garden in *A Question of Power,* and Ammu-Velutha's connection in *The God of Small Things* exemplify alternative discursive spaces,

carved out within limiting circumstances. These liminal spaces allow marginalised individuals to reaffirm their sense of self and place. As Ashcroft notes, this practice of habitation enables "a process of inhabiting power" (*Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies* 174), promoting appropriation, interpolation, and transformation of power. This freedom sphere within patriarchal structures becomes a subversive metaphor for mutual understanding and tolerance. Ashcroft et al highlight that in postcolonial writing, utopia often represents "an image of possibility in place" ("Introduction: Spaces of Utopia" 3), a metaphoric site of freedom. In these novels, utopia embodies this concept, serving as a space where individuals can transcend oppressive boundaries and forge new meanings. Hybridity plays a crucial role in creating these utopian spaces, blurring borders and fostering cross-cultural connections.

Food plays a pivotal role in bridging cultural divides in *A Fine Balance*, fostering a sense of community and equality. Dina, Ishvar, Om, and Maneck share meals, creating a space where differences dissolve. As the narrator notes, "Eating together lies at the heart of social relations; at meals we create family and friendships by sharing food, tastes, values, and ourselves" (67). This shared experience is rooted in hybridity, where cultural boundaries blur, and new connections emerge. The act of cooking and dining together exemplifies Mistry's utopian vision, where individuals transcend ethnic and social divides. The symbol of the flag, "sailing under one flag" (399), represents unity and sameness, echoing Ashcroft's notion of "in-between" spaces where identities are redefined. This utopian space is characterised by mutual respect, understanding, and a sense of belonging, reflecting Mistry's hope for a harmonious postcolonial world.

Dina's transformation from a strict supervisor to a nurturing caregiver marks a significant shift in her relationships with Om and Ishvar. As they overcome their differences, they create a space for mutual support and solidarity. Dina's household becomes a utopian space where boundaries blur, and individuals connect on an equal footing. The act of eating together, initially segregated, evolves into a shared experience, countering gender and ethnic separation codes. Ashcroft argues that postcolonial utopia is not a physical place, but a spirit of hope and desire for a better world (257). This hope is crucial, as Ernst Bloch notes, "utopias are pipe dreams, and without utopianism, however, we cannot live" (*The Principle of Hope* 5). Ashcroft relates utopianism to future hope, emphasising its necessity despite past failures (5). In this context, Dina's household embodies a utopian vision, where individuals from diverse backgrounds come together, fostering a sense of community and shared humanity.

Just as Ammu's cruel experience as a divorcee, Dina's harsh experience as a widow and subsequent years of loneliness and hardship shape her into a cautious woman. The arrival of Maneck, Ishvar, and Om at her flat underlines her strong sense of self-preservation and mistrust of strangers, especially the low caste tailors. However, Dina comes to develop a strong network of social ties with her tailors, which transcends religious and class divisions, and they survive the onslaught of economic exploitation, political crackdown, and forced sterilisation. Their human relationship develops into a structure of social practice and experience, which makes it possible to appropriate their marginal position as a political survival strategy. Such relations explain why her eviction by her profit-driven landlord and her return to the family house occupied by her chauvinist brother do not lead to the collapse of her utopian community.

Ashcroft's notion of utopia as a fantasy rather than a reality highlights its importance as a catalyst for hope and change. By imagining a different world, literature and culture can inspire transformative possibilities. As Levitas notes, "it is the desire for a better way of living expressed in the description of a different kind of society that makes possible that alternative way of life" (181). This aligns with Bhabha's concept of hybridity, where cultural boundaries blur, and new possibilities emerge. Utopian thinking fosters a sense of possibility, allowing individuals to envision and work towards a better future. The writers in this study echo these ideologies, using their novels to imagine alternative societies and futures. By exploring hybrid spaces and utopian visions, these authors challenge dominant narratives and inspire readers to rethink their assumptions about identity, culture, and society.

The novelists in this study masterfully weave hybridity as a stepping stone to a utopian postcolonial society, characterised by unity and equality among diverse races and ethnic groups. By blurring cultural boundaries, hybridity redefines identities and fosters collaboration. The novels showcase a multicultural society, where individuals from varied socio-cultural and religious backgrounds converge, highlighting the importance of tolerance and acceptance. As Ashcroft notes, utopia represents a "spirit of hope" (257), and these novels embody this hope, envisioning a society where differences are celebrated and equality reigns. Through hybridity, the novelists create a utopian vision where cultural acceptance paves the way for a harmonious and strong nation. This aligns with Edward Said's idea that cultures are interconnected and influence one another, fostering a sense of shared humanity.

III. Crossing Boundaries and Cracking Patriarchy

This section explores how female characters in the novels in the study subvert patriarchal norms, transforming their subjected positions and overcoming limiting stereotypes. Through transgressive actions, they challenge gendered codes of feminine passivity, reclaiming agency and autonomy. The female body, once relegated to docility and domesticity, becomes a site of empowerment and resistance. As Bhabha notes, "hybridity enables marginalised voices to negotiate and subvert dominant narratives, creating spaces for alternative identities and power structures" (5). The novels in this study illustrate this process, showcasing female characters who redefine human relations and reinscribe dominant discourse. By challenging patriarchal norms, they negotiate a better world where diversity is tolerated and celebrated, envisioning a utopian society where women and men coexist in equality and mutual respect. This aligns with Ashcroft's notion of utopia as a "spirit of hope" (257), inspiring transformative change and social justice.

In the utopian world we envision, both men and women thrive in perfect harmony, free from the shackles of patriarchal dominance and stereotypes. The authors in the novels in the study portray women's experiences not as mere victimhood, but as challenges to be courageously tackled and overcome. While some female characters may initially appear limited by their male counterparts, they also exhibit remarkable resilience and determination, interrogating, resisting, and subverting the constraints of oppressive laws and hegemonic discourse. As these remarkable women challenge the boundaries set by dominant ideologies, they empower themselves and others to redefine the fabric of society. The female body, once relegated to docility and domesticity, becomes a symbol of strength, resilience, and transformation. Through transgressive actions, women reclaim their agency, rewriting the dominant discourse to create a more just and equitable world where both sexes can thrive together in perfect harmony.

In *The God of Small Things,* Ammu's transgressive love for Velutha subverts the patriarchal and caste-based norms governing Syrian Christian society. This female-led rebellion challenges the binary oppositions of master/slave, self/other, and centre/margin, exemplifying Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity. By crossing caste lines, Ammu and Velutha create a liminal space, blurring boundaries and challenging hegemonic scrutiny. The act of crossing the river, therefore, has multiple and significant connotations. For Ammu, it means transcending the world of patriarchal norms to a utopian world untainted by caste regulations and a world that gives free play to basic physical and emotional instincts. To Velutha, it means the flouting of class and caste hierarchies, challenging the feudal order and thereby overturning all social and cultural observance. Crossing the river symbolises Ammu's transcendence of patriarchal norms, entering a utopian world untainted by caste regulations. This act embodies Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity, where boundaries are blurred, and new possibilities emerge.

What initially plays out in Ammu is the conflict between woman as mother and daughter, regulated by social norms, and woman as a subject of desire, accommodating her own desires. The hegemonic discourse of norms is an obstacle to the reconciliation with her carnal desires. She has to choose whether to satisfy the needs of her family and society or to satisfy her own needs. The narrator explains, "this is an unmixable mix. The infinite tenderness of motherhood and the reckless rage of a suicide bomber" (*The God of Small Things* 44). In the end, however, she refuses to be confined to her gender role and decides to have an affair with Velutha, the Untouchable. Her refusal to give up on her sexual desire enables her to transgress and reinscribe the rules and norms that perpetuate the vicious cycle of domination and submission in her society.

Dina, in *A Fine Balance,* just like Ammu, suffers under her brother's guardianship and becomes obsessed with the idea of personal freedom. In the Prologue of *A Fine Balance,* it becomes evident that she holds independence in high esteem. Talking about her tailoring business, which eventually allows her to quit seeing her brother for money, she says, "No need now to visit her brother and beg for next month's rent. She took a deep breath. Once again, her fragile independence was preserved" (11). For Dina, there is a close connection between one's material conditions and the question of meaning in a person's life: Having to rely on Nusswan's money means losing her freedom; giving in to her brother's rule equals giving up her independence (49). Dina, like Ammu in *The God of Small Things,* emerges out to be a new woman, a modern woman, with all the demands of independence, individuality, and sovereignty. She resists oppression and keeps holding her head high in the face of all forces: social, familial, and political. She becomes other in the eyes of her brother as she refuses to follow the mythical norms of society; she tries to carve her own niche in life. She fights for her right, she asserts her will by remaining unmarried, and she chooses her independence and refuses to live with the autocratic brother who cares more for public opinion than family. She cannot agree with his views ever and decides to live alone in her rented flat.

Indeed, human Solidarity in Mistry's *A Fine Balance* also foregrounds the oppressive traditions and structural constraints that women have to battle. As Bharucha argues, "although Parsi women have not been rigorously subjected to the regimen of the veiling, they also suffered in the limited and restrictive world like their Hindu and Muslim sisters in India, Parsi women are allowed to remarry and are not to be victims of sati" (141). This is evident in the text when Nusswan insists on Dina's remarrying: "Do you know how fortunate you

are in our community. Among the unenlightened, widows are thrown away like garbage. If you were a Hindu, in the old days, you would have had to be a good little sati and leap onto your husband's funeral pyre, be roasted with him." (*A Fine Balance* 52). Hence, the majority of Parsi women received little education and are subjected to the taboos and oppressions of patriarchy. Dina is denied the right to education by her brother after their father's death. Of course, no proper education means being denied a position of enunciation in a male-dominated world. She laments, "Look how I have to slave now because I was denied an education" (*A Fine Balance* 427). Nevertheless, she fights hard to carve out an alternative utopian space within the governing patriarchy of Nusswan and the dominant structure of capitalism represented by her landlord.

We equally observed that Coetzee uses Lucy as a means of reconciling the black and the white races and also to restructure the South African society, where racial discrimination is the talk of the day. Indeed, he uses Lucy to propagate utopian ideologies in the postcolonial context. Lucy truly wants a peaceful transition and does not need a weapon to chase Petrus to accept her proposal, nor does she need a card which will authorise their union. She does not equally need somebody to give her property to Petrus as her bride's wealth. What matters in a relationship is not the dignity that comes from it, but that people are able to understand each other and share their happiness and sorrows. This explains why Lucy says, "the farm is my dowry" (203). Therefore, she wishes to consolidate their union by contributing to the upkeep of the house.

In Coetzee's novel, when Lucy is raped, she tells David that he can never understand what she has been going through, and David feels powerless and humiliated that he is not able to protect his daughter. Lucy prefers to take the law into her hands when she is raped, even though her father forces her to report the rape incident to the police. The question regarding the pain remains: why does Lucy decide not to prosecute her rapists? Why does she not determine to restore justice? And is this the way to go? One could argue that she considers her rape atonement for crimes that have been carried out in the past. David does not support this idea and urges her to stand up for herself; "Lucy, Lucy, I plead with you! You want to make up for the wrongs of the past, but this is not the way to do it. If you fail to stand up for yourself at this moment, you will never be able to hold your head up again" (250). Lucy, like the other protagonists in the study, decides to take the law into her hands. She refuses to succumb to her father's plea, thereby asserting her independence. David represents the old generation, while Lucy forms a bridge to the new South Africa. Her child will be a mixture of white and black, which will be part of the new generation of South Africans.

The extent to which Dina, in *A Fine Balance*, like the other female protagonists in the study, values independence is well reflected in her ending sexual relations with her well-to-do customer, Fredoon. Like Elizabeth in Head's novel, she does not want to give up independence in exchange for the comfort of remarriage, aside from her loving memory of her late husband. Her dogged struggle for economic independence is a reminder of how she survives patriarchal oppression in the family house before she marries Rustom. She refuses to marry one of her brother's friends so that she can break from the family straitjacket. She develops an independent free spirit by spending most of her time outside of her brother's house with the money she skims off from the purchase of groceries. She matures from a headstrong girl into a down-to-earth young woman who chooses to marry the unpretentious Rustom and lives on her own after his death. However, she is forced to accept and implement the discipline of global capitalism disguised as a free market system by working as a purveyor for an export company. After her eyesight deteriorates as a result of needlework and age, she hires Ishvar and Om as tailors and takes on Maneck as a boarder in order to eke out a living. Mrs Gupta, manager of the clothing company, teaches her how to discipline workers and supervise production; "You are the boss, you must make the rules. Never lose control" (*A Fine Balance* 66). Here, Dina is seen at the centre of her own world. Taking Mrs Gupta's instruction, Dina tries to embrace the grueling principle of exploiting labourers, but it turns out that such labour exploitation goes against her values. She does not want to impose the rules which are similar to patriarchy and caste, to which she and her cobbler-turned tailors have refused to subscribe. In this regard, Dina's utopian vision contrasts sharply with those of Mrs Gupta and her brother, who support the predatory economic system and compulsory sterilisation. For Mrs Gupta, "Indiscipline is the mother of chaos, but the fruits of discipline are sweet" (*A Fine Balance* 352).

Elizabeth, in *A Question of Power,* like Ammu in *The God of Small Things,* is the "other" in post-apartheid South Africa. Rather than being the "other", Elizabeth chooses voluntary exile, migrating from South Africa to Botswana. Her self-imposed exile proclaims independence as it forces her to connect her inner struggles with real-life experiences. Edward Said's quoted by Huma, says that: "exile is a natural part of the human experience as it relates to the twentieth century... a severe contemporary political punishment … forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted (12). Elizabeth will never forget the pain she has experienced as a woman in South Africa, but by embracing Botswana, she initiates the difficult process of resisting patriarchy: "as she fell asleep, she placed one soft hand over her land. It was a gesture of belonging" (206). For the first time, Elizabeth experiences community.

While Elizabeth is a part of the current patriarchal system, she does not subscribe to the patriarchal ideas of womanhood. She wants women to be recognised as humans, not objects of physical, emotional, and sexual abuse. Over the years, Elizabeth silently experiences the negative effects of discrimination, but now she decides to articulate those inequities at all cost when she says that: "When had she not faced all the sorrows of life alone? There had never been anyone near when she had stood alone on street corners of South Africa and stared forlornly at a life without love" (*A Question of Power* 58). Elizabeth's loneliness and subsequent "madness" are attributed to the treatment she receives as a woman in South Africa. As stated above, her migration to Botswana is vital to her female identity. Further, in addressing subjugation, Elizabeth draws an analogy with the past as a means to underscore subjugation and assumed inferiority. In the above quote, her loneliness symbolises her "outsider" existence in patriarchal society, which suggests her gender contributed to the absence of acceptance.

Elizabeth, like the other female protagonists in the novels in the study, desires freedom from patriarchal laws. Her voluntary exile offers her the opportunity for gender liberation. In a dialogue with Elizabeth, Tom interjects his analysis of her current state of mind when he says that:

Why don't you find a husband, Elizabeth? It would be a defence. You're attacked because you are too alone. It's not a part of my calculations, Tom, she said. I seem to have been born for this experience. I had tremendous stamina. Someone weighed up my soul and set the seal of doom on it. I'm opposing him because I think I ought to live too, like everyone else. I don't care to be shoved out of the scheme of things. I want to live the way I am without anyone dictating to me. Maybe in another life, I'll just be a woman cooking food and having babies. (192).

Men are constructed as protectors; thus, Tom is voicing Elizabeth's need for the male-dominated structure, while Elizabeth's response insinuates a refusal of the male role. Hence, Tom's comments only increase her disdain for the patriarchal system. Elizabeth's goal is to exist in a society free from patriarchal constraints; therefore, consensus would contradict her opposition. Huma argues that *A Question Of Power* explores: "power relationships, as they inform and are informed by exiled identities who seek to subvert the social and individual institutions of the nation" (3). While freedom from subjugation comes as a price, for Elizabeth, it is a price worth paying. According to Gagiano, Elizabeth can emerge from this experience embodying a "female self." Her independence is vital to her pronounced resistance. Although Tom's sentiments are sincere, he is a proponent of the patriarchal system and so does not fully comprehend the passion she demonstrates for her objective. Through Elizabeth Head's utopian vision of a world untainted by patriarchal oppression and victimisation is glaring.

Prior to meeting Kenosi, Elizabeth does not associate with other women in her village. Kenosi's poised demeanour and her independence attract Elizabeth to her; for this reason, their relationship is a lesson in the importance of female unanimity. Their working together in the garden is also significant in this discussion of female solidarity because it validates the power of women. Elizabeth belongs to the land of Botswana, and she has personally prepared it for new growth. Botswana is where Elizabeth embarks on the path to achieving wholeness; the friendships of Tom and Kenosi are the impetus to her becoming a model of hope and progress.

In a nutshell, the writers in the study are out to expose the vices of their societies in order to lobby for a better society where human beings from different racial and cultural backgrounds can interact with each other without any prejudice. They long for a change and the construction of a better world that will not only expose the chaos, lawlessness, anarchy and barbarianism of the postcolonial society but will negotiate a comfortable environment that can accommodate both black and white races, both female and male, and both upper castes and the untouchables. In *Disgrace*, just as in *A Question of Power, A Fine Balance* and *The God of Small Things,* we see how people from different sexual, racial and caste backgrounds have buried their differences and have chosen the path of harmony, which greatly ties with the concept of hybridity and equally amplifies the utopian visions of the writers.

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