

Technical Devices in the novels of
Vikram Seth

University Grants Commission

Minor Research Project

: Principal Investigator:

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Preface

It gives me immense pleasure to submit my research project work to U.G.C. This project was carried out as a part of Minor Research Project under plan-XI.

Indian English fiction has achieved the heights of excellence in the hands of new novelists of India. The first chapter of the project entitled '*Indian English fiction: Its Journey from Beginning to Present*' throws light on the history of Indian English literature in general and Indian English fiction in particular. It discusses various phases of its development as well as major novelists who contributed to the growth and development of Indian English fiction. The second chapter entitled '*Vikram Seth in Indian English fiction*' deals with the life and literary works of Vikram Seth. Considering various aspects of Seth's versatility as a writer, the chapter justifies Seth's place in the canon of Indian English literature. The third chapter entitled, "**Technical Devices in *The Golden Gate***" throws light on the highly acclaimed verse novel *The Golden Gate*. As Seth's familiarity with the life and culture of the bay area San Francisco and his love for poetry has gone in the making of this Californian novel, the chapter discusses the influences on Seth in composing the novel. Chapter IV entitled "**Seth's Craftsmanship in *A Suitable Boy***" deals with the debut novel by Vikram Seth *A Suitable Boy*. The chapter deals with the use of technical devices by Seth to give this Indian rooted novel a touch of pure Indian novel. The last chapter entitled **Technical achievement in *An Equal Music*** discusses Seth as a

novelist in handling the theme of music and interweaving the story of love and longing in the background of western classical music.

Thus, the entire project is devoted to Seth's three major novels and his use of technical and literary devices in the novels located in three different continents. The main objective of this project is to establish the place of Vikram Seth in the canon of Indian as well as International novelists of the time. I acknowledge the support and encouragement from my colleagues, friends and the academicians, scholars who provided me guidance and enlarged my vision of the issue. I hope this project of mine will be useful to scholars and students interested in Indian English fiction.

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Chapter-I

Indian English fiction

Its Journey from Beginning to Present

Indian English Fiction

Its Journey from Beginning to Present

The tradition of storytelling was prevalent in India even in ancient days. Some outstanding examples of prose fiction in Sanskrit are Dandin's *Das Kumar Charita*, Subandhu's *Vasavadutta* and Bana Bhatt's *Kadambari*. Writings of Indians in English were chiefly in the form of letters, memoranda, translations, religious, social, political and cultural tracts. Raja Ram Mohan Roy enriched the Indian English literature by his excellent journalistic prose. Other pioneer writers of Indian Renaissance like Ram Gopal Ghosh, Surendranath Banerjee, G. K. Gokhale also wrote lucid, clear and simple prose concerning the multitudinous social and national problems of the time. These writings paved the way for the growth and development of Indian English Fiction by providing it with two chief components: a prose medium and social concern.

In Indian English Literature the genre fiction as a literary form is a late development. It was purely imported from foreign writers. Indian writers were influenced by the English novelists Fielding, Defoe and Scott and European novelists Tolstoy, Balzac, Dostoevsky, Victor Hugo. In India the novel developed and became popular with the advent of British rule. In various Indian languages; Bengali, Hindi, Kannada, novel became a popular literary form. The regional writers employed this new literary genre in their own tongue. They successfully employed the

European technique of novel and expressed typical Indian ethos and sensibility. Writers like R. C. Dutt, Bankim Chandra, and Tagore Translated their novels into English. The English rendering of novels written in various Indian languages also contributed to the evolution of Indian English fiction in the 19th century.

In this respect Meenakshi Mukherjee rightly remarks

“...the flowering of Indo-Anglican fiction coincided with the novels’ coming of age in the regional languages of India.”

In the course of time

The reciprocal influence between the novel in English and the novel in the languages has been rather more intimate and purposive than such influence in the fields of poetry or drama (K.R.S.Iyenger)

Earlier novelists of Indian English were highly influenced by English writers, hence their works were highly imitative and derivative of English models. Even in the matter of language, they copied it from English Romantics and Victorians. They imitated writers like Defoe, Fielding and Scott. In spite of all such imitative tendency of Indian English fiction, two striking feature of it were its social concern i.e. realism and its unfailing interest in man. All great novelists right from Bankimchandra to Salman Rushdie have presented the social concern and humanism in their novels. Ralph Fox also talks about this fundamental rule of novel writing:

The novel is not merely a fictional prose, it is the prose of man’s life, the first art to attempt to take the whole man and give him expression.....the great feature which distinguish the novel from other art is that it makes the secret life visible.

The origin of Indian English fiction dates back to the publication of *A Journal of 48 Hour of the Year 1945* by Klyash Chandra Dutt in the *Calcutta Literary Gazette* on June 1835. From the viewpoint of technique and craftsmanship, it is an utter failure. Many other writers also attempted to write novels, but all these works were immature and to some extent artless. These early attempts are noticeable for synthesizing the old forms with new technical apparatus. They also attempted to represent the cultural life of Indians.

The publication of Bankimchandra Chatterjee's '*Rajmohan's Wife*' in 1864 gave Indian English Novel a maturity and recognition to some extent. The novel is remarkable for the narrative used by Bankimchandra, he uses the devices of suspense, crime and accident. The novel has an organized plot, it has good characterization and incidents. The novel is set in an East Bengal village of the late eighteenth century. The author uses Indian words and creates local colours. There is a note of delightful humor. The novel, though lacking some of the best qualities as architectonic development of plot and characters, contains the promise and qualities, which were refined by later novelists. Other important novels of the period are Toru Dutt's *Binaca* or *The Young Spanish Maiden* (1879), a fragment left incomplete due to the premature death of Toru Dutt, Lal Behri Day's *Bengal Peasant Life* (1880), K.Chakravarti's *Sarla and Hingana* (1898), B.R.Rajan Iyer's *Vasudev Shastri* (1896), Raj Laxmi Devi's *The Hindu Wife* (1876). Thus Indian English novels were written covering various genres of novel writing; realistic novel, historical novel, autobiographical novel and romance in the nineteenth century. K.R.Srinivas Iynger in the context of these novels remarks:

These novels, written in English, have for us today no more than an antiquarian or historical interest. (*Indian Writing in English* 315)

The beginning of the 20th century, Indian English novel was marked by a note of national spirit. The novel expressed the spirit of the age. The partition of Bengal, Hindu-Muslim divisions and the ruthless suppression of national feeling attracted the attention of social reformers, thinkers, writers and novelists. The economic backwardness of millions of Indians, feudalism, social disparities and exploitation of the weak formed the theme to the novelists of the period. The national awakening and the rise of political consciousness provided source to the growth and development of Indian English novel. Some notable novels of the period depicting the theme of national and social awakening are S. Jugendra Singh's *Nasrin*(1915), Balkrishna's *The Love of Kusum*(1910), *Love and Life Behind the Purdah* and *Sun Babies*(1910) and *Between the Twilight*(1908) by Sorabji. The novel of the period was highly influenced by English models. The novelists imitated the technique and pattern of the early Victorian novelists. From the view point of subjects these novels are remarkable as the novelists tried a variety of social, historical and romantic subjects. Indian novels of the period were blend of English techniques and Indian subjects.

Rabindranath Tagore's novels also contributed to the growth and development of the Indian English Novel. His novels were originally written in Bengali. Three of his novels- *the Wreck*(1921), *Gora*(1923) and *The Home and The World* were rendered into English. Tagore started a new era in Indian fiction. P.P.Mehta says;

If Romesh Chandra Dutt brought realism and reform to the novel, if Bankimchandra invested the novel with a romantic halo, Tagore revealed the inmost currents of man's mind in his novels- he brought psychological delineation to the novel. He added depth and significance to the novel- a great leap forward in the development of the novel.(*Indo-Anglican Fiction: An Assessment* P 28)

As Tagore was greatly influenced by *Upanishadas* and the great humanist thinkers of the world, his novels present a synthetic vision of mankind. His love for the poor and the exploited found expression into the varied manifestations of many social and religious evils in his works. His novels are marked by a strong humanistic note, which provide them universality. *The Wreck* is a social novel depicting the problem of marriage. *Gora* is a political novel, discussing the role of an individual in renascent India. *The Home and The World* is an allegorical novel, taking us into nationalistic movements of India. Tagore's novels are remarkable for humanism, socialism, stark realism and psychological portrayal of characters.

With the arrival of Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and R.K.Narayan on the scene, Indian English fiction started its journey. In the hands of these three novelists the plant of Indian English fiction blossomed and branched off in various directions. They are the founders of true Indian English novel. They were preoccupied with the depiction of village life and social and political impacts of the freedom movement. They were influenced by Gandhian philosophy. The ideology of Mahatma Gandhi was the moving force of the nation. Meenakshi Mukherjee writes:

The most potent force behind the whole movement, the Mahatma is a recurring presence in these novels, and he is used in different ways to suit the design of each writer. He has been treated variously as an idea, a myth, a symbol, a tangible reality and a benevolent human being. In a few novels he appears in person, in most others his is an invisible presence. (*The twice born fiction* p 61).

Under the influence of Mahatma Gandhi Indian writers turned from romanticism to realism. The realistic novel appeared with a purpose, it brought new techniques, new inspiration and new vision to Indian English fiction. The novelists dealt with variegated themes such as poverty,

exploitations of the poor and the weak section of the society, hunger and diseases, vivid social evils and tensions, exploration of hybrid culture of the educated Indian middle class, conflict of the educated mass in a tradition ridden society, the east-west conflicts and so on. The foundation of the Progressive Writers' Association in 1935 gave vigour to the movement of realism in fiction.

The novel of commitment and propaganda was also due to the realistic novel. Mulk Raj Anand was an ardent believer of the ideology, he was writing about. He wrote as a social reformer. Raja Rao's commitment is also reflected in his novels. R.K. Narayan is detached and impersonal. The rise of rural novel also took place in this period. The entire thinking of the realistic novelists was socialistic. Their main intention was to highlight the progressive forces of the time and underline the tension born out of the Western contact. East-west encounter and search for identity is another realistic theme in the novels of the period. The Indian English novelists of the period have overcome the difficulty of language and style. Novelists like Anand, Raja Rao and R. K. Narayan experimented with English language and gave it a peculiar Indian tone and colour. They have used Indian imagery in their novels and have successfully captured the Indian rhythm in English. K.R.S Iyenger remarks that hands of these novelists the novel became "a living and evolving genre,...., a fusion of form, substance and expression that is recognizably Indian, yet also bearing the marks of universality."(322)

The novels of the period reveal a remarkable advance over the novels before 1920. Indian society witnessed a period of transition from the old to the new and novelists captured the traumatic experiences of the disintegration of the old values and the instability of the new ones very aptly in their works. The rise of realism and humanism, the development of fictional techniques and the evolution of various fictional genres are some major characteristic features of the novel of the

time. Every aspect of India's variegated and multitudinous life was treated by the novelists of the period. Different forms of fiction writings were employed by the novelists. Writers like Sardar Jogindar Singh, A. S. P. Ayar, Kumar Guru, Lal Behari Dey, Mulk Raj Anand popularized social novel. Novelists like S.M. Mitra(*Hindupore, A Peep Behind the Indian Unrest*), S. K. Ghose (*The Prime of Destiny*) K.A. Abbas(*Tomorrow Is Ours*) Amir Ali (*Conflict*) and Raja Rao (*Kanthapura*) dealt with the political novel.

Apart from these variety in theme and form, the novelists used diverse techniques and methods. Various narrative techniques and devices to the purpose were employed by the writers. The device of 'Editorial Omniscience' in which the author frequently makes generalizations about the manner, moral and life is used by Lal Behari Dey in *Bengal Peasant Life*, S.K. Ghose in *The Prince Of Destiny*, S. M. Mitra in *Hindupore* and B. R.Rajam Iyer in *Vasudev Sastri*. An artistic narrative mode of novel writing can be noticed in the novels of Mulk Raj Anand and R.K.Narayan. They use devices of dramatization and objectification in treatment of the theme and express their thoughts and ideas through the depiction of scenes. Mulk Raj Anand in his novels, *Coolie*, *The Village Trilogy* and *Untouchable* and R.K.Narayan in his *Swami and Friends*, *The Bachelor of Arts* and *The English Teacher* unfold the action through the vision and gesture of the main character. The autobiographical narrative device is employed by A. Madhaviah in *Thillai Govindan* and D. F. Karaka's *There Lay the City*. M. M. Banaji in *Sublime Though Blind*, Dhan Gopal Mukharjee in *My Brother's Face* and Raja Rao in *Kanthapura* employ the device of witness narrator.

The novelist after independence introduced a new sensibility, reflecting the hopes and aspiration of an independent nation which has suffered long under the British Raj. The novelists also

presented the melancholy and frustration of the people when they felt that their dreams of free nation is being discarded by the bureaucrats and politicians. K. R. S. Iyengar observes;

After the advent of independence, the more serious novelist has shown how the joy of freedom has been more than neutralized by tragedy of partition, how in spite of freedom there is continuing corruption, inefficiency, poverty and cumulative misery; how after all mere the replacement of the white sahib can not affect the radical cure for the besetting sins of India. When the independence came, the serious novelist in a sense found his occupation gone, for the traditional villain of the piece- foreign rule- was no more in the picture. Making a new start as it were, the novelist shifted his lantern this side and that made his probes, and found little to satisfy him.(319-20)

The novelists after independence have portrayed a realistic picture of Indian society after independence with all its corruptions and evils with a reformatory zeal. Literature is the mirror of the age in which it is written, it can never remain aloof from the society and nationality. Indian novelists have drawn their substances and themes from the cultural heritage of the nation. The deep attachment with the ancient culture of India has imparted a sense of seriousness and philosophical musing to some of the novels. Novelists like Raja Rao and Anita Desai deal with theme of detachment and renunciation in their novels. Thus the novels even after independence presented the glorious past of the nation and depicted the social reality and spirit of nationalism.

From the view point of technique, style and language post-independence novel has shown maturity. The novelists were no longer under the influence of mere English masters, American and European models also became the source of their inspiration. Iyengar says;

Before 1947, the English models were the major outside influence on the Indian novel. After Independence, however, novelists in Indian have shown themselves susceptible to the influence of American and European (especially) Russian models, and also models from oriental countries. (319)

The novelists present a remarkable advance in the matter of technique and style. In the hands of these modern novelists, Indian English fiction reached the peak of excellence. Their innovative theme and technique imparted a distinct place to Indian English fiction at international level. The great novelists- Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao have artistically presented their point of view with the help of variegated techniques. Their characters, plot, narration and style served as tools to present their point of view.

Mulk Raj Anand 's prime aim in all his novels is to reveal an ideal humanistic vision of life. He uses various technique to communicate his idealistic vision of life. His technique varies from fiction to fiction. He does not confine his art to one particular technique. He employs the form as per the demand of his theme and subject; the dramatic, the epistolary, the picaresque and even the epical form for his novels. In the use of language also, his stylistic devices are quite noticeable. Through his novels he seems to convey the message that Indians can speak and write English only as Indians. He has very skillfully nativized English to suit his humanitarian purpose.

R. K. Narayan (1906-2001) is an artist of rare excellence. He has selected an imaginary village, Malgudi as the locale of his novels. His style reflects his vision of life in an extraordinary simple language. He has a remarkable command over the language and he uses the language in a simple, lucid and natural manner. His characters speak English as if English were their own language.

He tries to inject the spirit and tempo of Indianess by using certain Tamil and Sanskrit words freely. R. K. Narayan, thus provided the Indian English fiction, the true color and firm ground in his simple and yet suggestive style.

Raja Rao very skillfully and artistically weaves Indian sensibility and Indian myths, religion and tradition in his novels. He has the credit of raising Indian fiction to a high status by presenting Indian sensibility to the Western world. He has provided a metaphysical rigour and philosophical depth to Indian English novel. A reading of his novels gives the vision of the influence of both the Western masters; Joyce, Conrad and Eastern masters; Valmiki and Ved Vyas. His craft of plot construction and narration are remarkable. His debut novel *Kanthapura* weaves three strands- the political, the social and the religious- together in a natural and effortless manner. *The Serpent and the Rope* knits two structures- physical and psychological. *The Cat and Shakespeare* contains sound philosophical foundation. Raja Rao has made experiments at both the level; technique as well as language. he has nativized English language by using various technical and narrative devices and made it a suitable medium to express Indian ethos.

All these three masters imparted a strong and firm ground to Indian English fiction by using variegated narrative and stylistic devices in their works. They introduced a large variety of themes also. Their humanistic, comic, satirical, ironical and philosophical vision gave Indian English fiction a new height and status.

Apart from these three masters, novelists like G. V. Desani, Bhabhani Bhattacharya, Khushwant Singh, Chaman Nahal, Manohar Malgonkar, and women novelists like Kamala Markandaya, Nayan Tara Sahgal, Ruth P. Jhabvala, Attia Hossain and Anita Desai has also enriched Indian English fiction with their innovative thematic and technical experiments. In their hands Indian English fiction reached a new height. The new publishing houses of Macmillan, Orient Longman

Ltd, Orient Paperbacks, O.U.P. and other big publishing houses started publishing the books of Indian authors and this provided them a greater opportunity to prove their mastery and skill. Western readers also started reading Indian novels with understanding and sympathy. They had now wider choice of subjects and they were now read with respect.

G.V. Desani's penned a masterpiece of remarkable artistry as *All About H.Hatterr*(1948). This novel can be viewed as a formal experimentation in English language by an Indian author. The novel is in dazzling, puzzling prose. The novel makes the reader feel the Indianness of the language. Desani's highly evocative narrative technique and the language are real assets of the novel. Structurally the novel is patterned in the style of Panchtantra, where the device of chain story is used and at the same two devices employed by Desani: the device of autobiographical narrative and surrealistic technique to describe seven sages are typically western. Thus the novel presents a balanced synthesis of Eastern and Western narrative techniques.

Indian fiction after independence shifted its focus from social, political and national spheres to personal and private lives of the individuals. The quest for self and identity issues dominates the novel after 1950. The novelists delineate the issue of the individual's quest for meaning in life and his inner self in various different forms in their novels. Such existential mode of Indian English fiction changed the entire makeup of Indian fiction. Novelists like Anita Desai, Arun Joshi and Nayantara Sahgal provided the seeds of future development in their works. Anita Desai in most of her novels deals with the inner climate of her characters. She presents the psychological dilemma in the minds of her characters. She has given a new height to Indian

English fiction. Arun Joshi employs various narrative techniques in his novels and his experimentation with narrative techniques is a noteworthy feature of his fiction.

The novelists after 1950s keep on bringing out noteworthy novels from time to time. The contribution of the novelists like Kamala Markandya, Manohar Malgonkar, Ruth Pawar Jhabwala, Bhabhani Bhattacharya, Khushwant Singh and many others have been noticed in and outside India.

Bhabhani Bhattacharya, in his novels explores the sensibilities of the people of India in a period of transition from the old to the new. His novel reveals his mastery of narrative mode and vivid characterization. Khushwant Singh's contribution to the growth and development of Indian English fiction is also noteworthy. "He comes nearer to Desani in his flashes of sardonic humour and zestful earthiness, but unlike Desani, Singh is a totally realistic novelist". (K R S). Ruth Pawar Jhabwala is known for remarkable comedies of North Indian Urban middle class life. She provides a freshness to the world of Indian English fiction by introducing the element of humour in a poignant style. Kamala Markandya presents the rustic and urban realism in her novels. Nayantara Sahgal presents a very charming and touchy way of storytelling in her novel *Rich Like Us* (1985). Thus women novelists have contributed to the development of Indian novels by providing authenticity and freshness.

The availability of a variety of material as well as philosophical developments marks a major shift in the nature of Indian English fiction. Consequently, Indian English fictional scene has become variegated, complex and thematically richer. The writers settled abroad and the ones who divide their time between India and abroad have contributed much to this rapidly

developing sub-genre of English literature. Now Indian English literature no longer remains limited to the writings necessarily of the sons of the soil. It has broadened the scope of fictional concerns of these writers from purely Indian to the global and transnational.

The contemporary novelists like Salman Rushdie, Vikram Seth, Amitav Ghosh, Upmanyu Chatterjee, Shashi Tharoor, Arundhati Roy, Kiran Desai, Jhumpa Lahiri are the makers of new tradition and pattern. They have enriched the Indian English fiction by their innovative experiments in both the spheres; thematic and technical. They have been awarded with prestigious prizes of world literature. There was a time when Indian writers were treated as sympathy seekers of the west. Now the innovative experiments of the new writers have changed the whole scenario. They are not the sympathy seekers but they are read and counted as prominent writers among the world writers. They have secured a place of prominence by their skill and talent. They sometime deal with the darker side of Indian culture, but it does not mean that they present a negative picture of India to please the Western readers. They in fact deal with the social realities of the nation. They have stunned the international literary works by their mastery as novelists. They focus on various social problems of India like poverty, class discrimination, social dogmas, rigid religious traditions etc, at the same they also deal with issues of the post colonial world, economic disorder, social malaise, nation repression, multiculturalism and transnational identity in the globalized world. These writers of the new generation do not find English an alien tongue, they experiment with the language and thus contributed in the enrichment of English language by coining new words and idiomatic expressions in English.

Apart from this, yet another reason for which Indian writers are also recognized is their innovative experiments in the genre. These writers, who have created a new form, have been

handsomely rewarded. It can be a narrative innovation or linguistic experimentation. Such writers have native-like proficiency of the English language; they know how to handle English creatively. So for them form and style are equally important in their story. Often we find autobiographical elements in their works. These writers have reached the height from where they can tell their own tale in the language suitable for their native set. Such writers are often awarded for their linguistic experimentation and genuine tale.

Salman Rushdie, the most remarkable writer of the time has contributed much in opening the gates of Western readability and marketability. The publication of most debut novel *Midnight's Children* in 1981 jolted the very foundation of Indian English fiction. The tradition bound Indian novelists might have been shocked by the stylistic as well as linguistic innovations of the novelist. Rushdie develops the story of his protagonist along with the national story of India. His novel *Shame* (1983) presents the picture of a degenerated post-colonial nation, where women are denied freedom and justice. His novel *Satanic Verses* (1988) created a great furor all over the world, as it contains some passages and description which hurt the feelings of the people following Islam. The novel has been banned in a number of countries including India. Iran Government issued a fatwa calling for his death sentence in 1989. Rushdie spent nine years living in secrecy under the protection of British government. Even in such critical years of his life, he continued to write. When Iranian government lifted up the fatwa in 1998, he eventually settled in New York.

His novel *Midnight's Children* is associated with several literary categories such as magical realism, postcolonial fiction, postmodern fiction. Rushdie incorporates the mythical and fantastical elements into his fiction very skillfully, at the same his mastery in handling the

language with a totally Indian perspective is equally superb. He uses familiar English words and phrases in new, unusual and typically Indian style. He draws his inspiration from the both the ancient and the modern Indian culture.

Amitav Ghosh has also been influenced by the political and cultural milieus of post-independence India. In 1986 his first book 'The Circle of Reason' was published and with the publication of this novel Ghosh won recognition as a writer extraordinary. This novel *Sea of Poppies* was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize in 2009. The novel was followed by *The Shadow Lines*(1988), *The Calcutta Chromosome*(1995), *The Glass Palace*(2000), *The Hungry Tides*(2004), *The Sea of Poppies*(2008), the first volume of The Ibis trilogy and *River of Smoke*(2011), the second volume of the trilogy.

The first novel *The Circle Of Reason* is set in India and Africa. Here Ghosh addresses the issues of post colonial migration, alienation and rootlessness in this novel. The novel also throws light on the insecure life that the migrants live in the gulf countries. In his *The Shadow Lines* Ghosh introduces the fictional narrator and tells a non linear tale. The novel revolves round the theme of theme of nationalism in a globalized world. Though the story takes place in Kolkata, Dhaka and London, it seems to echo the sentiments of the whole South-east Asia. In 'The Calcutta Chromosome' Ghosh rewrites the Western medical history and exposes the fact that the foundation of scientific knowledge in the West is the result of the intuitive wisdom of a few marginalised illiterates from the East. *The Glass Palace* is set primarily in Burma and India and catalogues the evolving history of those regions before and during the Second World War and India's independence struggle. *The Hungry Tide* is set in the Sunderban islands in the Bay of Bengal. His *Sea of Poppies* and *River of Smoke* are sequential works revolving round the theme

of Opium Wars. Ghosh has also made some stylistic innovations and linguistic experiments in his novels. Polyglossia, diglossia, heteroglossia and code-switching are some of the unique devices that enables him to re-inscribe the cultural discreteness of postcolonial societies. Cinematic techniques like collage, montage, crosscut, jumpcut are some of the tools that have been employed by Ghosh in his fictions.

Arundhati Roy's masterpiece *The God of Small Things* reveals one more shade of the development of Indian English fiction. The novel has earned much critical attention at international level with its winning the prestigious Booker prize in 1997. The novel has been continuously critically examined by scholars, critics and reviewers for its artistic beauty. The novel is deeply rooted in Indian culture and soil, comprising all its beauty as well as ugliness. The novelist deals with Indian values, Indian culture and Indian society. She raises her voice against the prevalent class system and gender discrimination also. Roy's experiment with English language makes it more flexible and pliable to express the feelings of the characters in a multi-cultural Indian social set up.

Equally noteworthy is Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*, which also fetched Booker Prize in 2006. Kiran Desai, daughter of Anita Desai, is a young and vibrant Indian English novelist with artistic talents. Having emerged on the Indian English scene in late 1990s, she has created a distinct place for herself in the galaxy of Indian women novelists in English. Her debut novel "*Hullabaloo In The Guava Orchard*"(1998) artistically presents human foibles and eccentricities in a satirical tone. Her novel "*The Inheritance of Loss*" on the one hand deals with social, political, and economic problems of the people of contemporary society in India and on the other the social and psychological problems faced by Indian immigrant in America and England. It is

significant that westernised Indian culture finds most fruitful expression in Desai's "*The Inheritance of Loss*".

Vikram Seth attained a dizzy height of success with *The Golden Gate* (1986), a novel in verse and *A Suitable Boy* (1993). He stunned the literary world with his novel *A Suitable Boy*. The novel is often compared with Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace*.

Indian English novel has gone through a lot of transformation from its initial days to the present time and has attained a whole new intensity in terms of concept, marketing, presentation, business and impact on the Indian Culture.

The writers of the Indian origin like Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy, Kiran Desai, Vikram Seth and Arvind Adiga have one thing common in their writings – they are not traditional Indian English writers. All of them are at ease with the English language, rather English is their first language. So medium is not at all a problem for them. They can use English as naturally as they breathe. And what is more important is that these writers have lived abroad for major part of their life, so they have imbibed and assimilated the Western trends and it lends them the distance to have an objective view on India and Indians. These writers have come across many varieties of English and showed the world their English.

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Chapter-II

Vikram Seth in Indian English Fiction

Vikram Seth

Indian English fiction in fact achieved a new height of its excellence at international level with two important events; the publication of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* in 1989 and the publication of Vikram Seth's *The Golden Gate* in 1986. The arrival of these two books opened the gates of western readability and marketability of Indian fiction. It heralded a new era in Indian fiction. Rushdie uses English in a playful and live manner, mixing it up with other Indian languages, whereas Seth continues the old tradition of Indian English writing with his use of 'Standard English'.

Vikram Seth's biography is an interesting one. Seth was born in Calcutta in 1952 and the earlier years of his childhood were spent in London. He returned to India in 1957 and completed his school education at the well known Doon Public School, Dehradun. For his higher education he returned to England and joined Tonbridge school. He later went to Corpus Chirst College, Oxford where he studied philosophy, politics and economics in 1975, where he developed an interest in poetry and learned Chinese. After that Seth moved to the USA for his master degree in economics at Stanford University. He spent about ten years at San Franscisco, while pursuing his Ph.D at Stanford University, California. As he was working on the economic demographics

of Chinese village for his doctoral degree, he visited the People's Republic of China in 1980 and spent two years in China. Because of his inclination towards poetry and writing, he could not complete his research. He then moved back to India in 1987.

Seth has travelled widely and lived in different geographical areas. His experience has provided him an opportunity to get familiar with the life and culture of Britain, California, India and China. His first novel, *The Golden Gate* (1986) narrates the experiences of a group of friends with diverse cultural background living in California. His acclaimed epic of Indian life, *A Suitable Boy* (1983) is set in India of the early 1950s.

Seth's interest in poetry made the publication of two volumes of poetry *Mappings* in 1981 and *From Heaven Lake* in 1983 possible. His first volume of poetry *Mappings* did not receive much critical attention, his travelogue *From Heaven Lake* describes experiences of his journey through Tibet, China and Nepal that won the Thomas Cook Travel Book Award. He also published three more volume *The Humble Administrator's Garden* (1985), *All You Who Sleep Tonight* (1990) and *Beastly Tales From Here and There* (1992). The poetic craft of *The Humble Administrator's Garden* (1985), which won the Commonwealth Poetry Prize (Asia), may be considered as his preparation for the masterpiece *The Golden Gate* (1986). *Beastly Tales From Here and There* (1992) is a collection of ten stories about animals told in verse. A collection of poems entitled *The Poems, 1981-1994* was published in 1995.

He turned back to prose and published the acclaimed epic of Indian life *A Suitable Boy* in 1993, depicting the relationships between four Indian families. The compelling narrative and the length of the novel invited great critical attention and comparison of the novel to *War and Peace*. The

novel won the WH Smith Literary Award and the Commonwealth Writers Prize(Overall Winner) He also wrote a libretto, *Arion and the Dolphin*, which was performed at the English National Opera in 1994. His next novel, *An Equal Music* (1999), is a love story set in the world of professional musicians. The novel won EMMA (BT Ethnic and Multimedia Award) for best novel in 2001. His book *Two Lives* (2005) is a memoir of the marriage life of his great uncle and aunt. Seth has confirmed in an interview in 2007 July that he is writing a contemporary novel with some characters of *A Suitable Boy* as a jump sequel to the novel titled *A Suitable Girl* to be published in 2013, with Lata searching a suitable girl for her grandson. Seth was also awarded Pravasi Bhartiya Samman in 2005 and Padma Shri in Literature and Education in 2007. His novel in verse is adapted for an opera in two acts with music by Conard Cummings by the composer” is developed by Lively Works and American Opera Projects in 2010 and it has received a staged workshop production at the Rose Studio at Lincoln Centre in New York City in January 2010.

Vikram Seth and Salman Rushdie are inarguably two literary celebrities of Indian English fiction. Though India has produced many great writers in earlier decades, they were not very well known to the western reading public. The publication of Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* (1981) and Vikram Seth’s *The Golden Gate* (1986) opened up Indian Writing in English to western readers and proved that Indian writing in English could reach the international level also. Rushdie uses English in a playful and creative manner, mixing it up with other Indian languages, whereas Seth continues the old tradition of Indian English writing by his use of ‘Standard English’. Yet from the viewpoint of theme and locale, his works can not be easily seen as the continuation of that old tradition.

Seth is an experimentalist. He marks a departure from other Indian writers in several ways. Every new book of Seth creates a fresh departure in form as well as in content. He has dealt with variegated genres of literature; poetry, travelogue, libretto, novel, biographic memoir etc. Each book is set in different cultural landscape and breaks the ground in terms of form and genre. However, whatever form he uses, with whatever locales he deals with he finds himself at ease. He wrote some excellent poetry in perfect meter and rhyme, he was the first Indian writer to write a verse novel, he wrote a classically realistic novel set in India of 1950s and finally he dealt with a modernist love story of a musician, setting the whole story in the musical world of Baath and Beethoven in England.'

GJV Prasad in his *Vikram Seth : An Anthology Of Recent Criticism* (2004) finds difficult to place such a talented and promising writer "in the fast forming canons of Indian English Fiction or the Third World Novel or the English Novel or even in the contemporary Novel (from around the World)."

The study of literary works in modern times is conditioned on the concept of national categorization. National boundaries are understood as the base to categorize a writer. But in today's time literature grounded in international migration cut across the familiar geographical boundaries. Such literature challenges the basic assumption of category of a writer. The literary works of migrating authors between the East (Asia, Africa and Oceania) and the West (Europe, America) poses the major issue of placing them in the literary canons. Europe's former colonies became independence and it became common to refer them as 'Third World' countries. With rise of the notion of 'globalization', the migratory flow increased and this rise gave birth to some new categories of literary writers. However, in placing all such migrated writers their 'homeland' plays an important role.

In the case of a writer like Seth there is a constant shift in his 'literary citizenship'. He has radically changed the game genre and milieu with every book he has written. It is this shift that makes him a literary puzzle. He moves with ease from medieval Chinese poetry in 'From Heaven Lake' to Californian poetry in *The Golden Gate* and from a typical Indian story teller in *A Suitable Boy* to the European narrator of *An Equal Music*. Though he has been awarded Thomas Cook Travel Book Award (1983), Commonwealth Poetry Prize (1985), Sahitya Academy Award (1986), Commonwealth Writers Prize and WH Smith Literary Award (1994). Ethnic and Multicultural Media Award (2001), it is not surprising that there is no canon or category which could accommodate him satisfactorily.

However Seth himself defies any type of categorization. Perhaps that is why his work does not give a structured picture. He has always rejected any attempt to theorize his unique position. In his introduction to *The Collected Poems* (1995), he argues that, 'while it is useful to categorize a writer in order to analyze him, it is not something that a writer necessarily subscribes to or enjoys. These imaginative categories are fascinating but in the final analysis irrelevant.'" In a television interview with Meenakshi Mukharjee also he insisted the same by saying that, "he was just a writer, not an Indian or a commonwealth or any kind of writer.'" Thus as a writer Seth asserts his creative freedom. His is the voice of a Humanist. His concerns are common human beings. His works do not deal with any issues of cultural conflicts or identity crisis. His liberal humanism can be noticed in his espousal of nuclear disarmament movement and the issue of homosexuality in *The Golden Gate* and Nehruvian political perspective in *A Suitable Boy*. What interests him most is an individual. He sees,

"All men

Were brothers within enclosing seas.”

(Humble Administrator's Garden)

He goes back to unfashionably traditional forms such as the realistic novel. At the same he deals with the quotidian and the ordinary. He asserts his independence in his choice of form and theme. His thematic concerns are many. Thus, a blend of conservations (traditional) and independence at a time, experimentation and orthodoxy in modes of form, makes it difficult to place him in any particular category.

His name was indexed under the category of ‘North American Indian Writings’ by Tapping in ‘Reading Literature of the Asian Americans’. His inclusion in this category is due to his only novel, *The Golden Gate*, wholly set in California. Tapping while discussing the thematic preoccupations of North American Asian writers, mentions that these writers generally the trauma of transportation into an alien context, the process of reformation, anxiety over the loss of homeland and protest against racial marginalization. However Seth does not deal with any of these themes in his work. In his earlier poems, *Mappings*, he presents a desire to record history before entering in the West. In neither of his two novels, *The Golden Gate* and *An Equal Music* he does not deal with any kind of dilemma of rootlessness. Nor does he present any issue of cultural conflict.

The fact is that on whatever theme Seth writes, at whatever the place may be he completely gets immersed in it. His involvement with the situation is not confined to that particular time only; it extends its way to understand the whole structure by relating it to its past. Thus he deals with the subject or situation in its totality. Such a talented writer may seem ‘Euro-centric’ while he writes a novel wholly set in Europe. When he takes India as the setting of his classical realistic novel

“A Suitable Boy”, no one can challenge his Indian sensibility. The peculiarity of his writing is due to the fact that he feels at home in every land. In today’s world the cross-continental mobility has become easier. Seth has lived in three continents – Asia, America and Europe and traveled a lot. For such a traveler, the concept of home is quite different from that of the old one. Thus Seth has won recognition as a versatile writer. It is indeed a difficult task to label a polymath writer like Seth. He has lived in three continents and written in a variety of genres. Seth’s *The Golden Gate* made him the first writer of Indian Diaspora to enter the field of international writers and to leave an unforgettable mark in the global literary panorama.

Namita Gokhale rightly opines that “Today’s identities are no longer about passports and birth certificates. In a world without barriers, you belong to where you are.”Rushdie asserts the right of creative freedom of a writer by saying that; ‘literature has nothing to do with a writer’s passport. ‘Edward Said in his *Culture and Imperialism* approves ‘roaming intellectualism’ by mentioning;

The person who finds his homeland sweet is still a tender beginner, he to whom every soil is as his native one is already strong; but he is perfect to whom the entire world is a foreign place. The tender soul has fixed his love on one spot in the world; the strong person has extended his love to all places; the perfect man has extinguished his.

In this context Seth could be seen as an international traveler, who started his journey from the local culture of India and experienced the cultures of England, China, and America and in the course of his journey across cultures he made the entire globe his home. He treated these

multicultures with love and compassion of a humanist. As commenting on his first novel, *The Golden Gate*, he says;

It is not my detachment but rather my love for California that was the most valuable to me in writing the book. One cannot come with a cold and objective eye from outside and then write with affection about a place. One must have lived years in that place and just observed for years. (Leslie)

In this era of globalization and cross-cultural identity, many of our traditional concepts do not seem convincing. In fact concepts are always in a state of flux. Whatever applicable in the earlier time need not necessarily be equally suitable for all the time. In today's world the sense of belongingness is not restricted to geographical boundaries. One cannot hold close and write about a place without attachment. Seth's writings reveal his connection for all land he deals with. A writer like Seth who has experienced diverse cultures can feel at home in different spaces at the same time. To insist a creative writer to write with a pressure to retain his homeland seems to take away his freedom. His works on other cultures help readers to understand and enjoy more distinct cultures. The writer can celebrate his experiences of other cultures. In Seth's writings one can notice this pleasure of having enjoyed multi-cultural experiences. His traveling has given him the wider exposure of life and culture. He deals with four different cultural locales-India, China, America and English. His work exhibit a sense of understanding and respect towards all the four cultures.

Vikram Seth's first novel *The Golden Gate* appeared in 1986 and its publication heralded a new phase of Indian English fiction. The novel is written in verse and the setting, the plot, the language, the characters, the style everything is purely Californian. It was a bold experiment to

compose an entire novel in sonnet. Seth did it successfully. The novel has been highly praised by critics all over the world. Seth depicts the Californian life style with ease and lucidity of a native writer. His characters are people of different descent and different cultural background. John Brown is an American, Janet Hawaya is of Japanese descent, Liz Dorati is an Italian immigrant and Phil is a Jew. The story of the novel centers round John's search for a mate. The novel is remarkable in its details and vivid descriptions. It deals with seemingly trivial to more serious social issues. Seth focuses on some serious social and political issues like world peace, nuclear weapons, homosexuality and the capitalist culture etc.

His second novel 'A Suitable Boy' is an epic of Indian panorama. The novel has a monumental length of 1,349 pages. It is structured into 19 well-crafted sub sections. The novel centers round Mrs. Mehra's search for a suitable boy for her second daughter Lata but thematic preoccupations of Seth in the novel are multi-fold. The narration moves around the story of four families- the Mehras, the Chatterjees, the Kapoors and the Khan family. The novel presents the panorama of India after independence. Seth very skillfully and artistically manages to interweave all the larger themes -is of political, social and even religious conflict. He offers a huge, thick and multi-layered slice of Indian life in its veracity. The technique of narration employed in the novel is third person narration. At the time of modernist and post-modernist writings, Vikram Seth has preferred the traditional mode of novel writing. The realism presented in the novel is social realism, A Suitable Boy is a classic and is considered an important landmark in the hierarchy of Indian English fiction.

His third novel An Equal Music is based on the love story of an opera musician, Michel and his lost lover Julia. The locale of this novel is Europe and Seth has successfully inter weaved the love story with the world of western music. Here Seth has adopted the first person narrative.

His first novel, *The Golden Gate*, published in 1986 was a bold project. The novel has been highly praised by critics all over the world. Seth depicts the Californian life style with ease and lucidity of a native writer. His characters are people of different descent and different cultural background. John Brown is an American, Janet Hawaya is of Japanese descent, Liz Dorati is an Italian immigrant and Phil is a Jew. The story of the novel centers round John's search for a mate. The novel is remarkable for its details and vivid descriptions. It deals with seemingly trivial to more serious social issues. Seth focuses on some serious social and political issues like world peace, nuclear weapons, homosexuality and the capitalist culture etc. also. In an interview Seth was asked about his expectations from the readers in India about *The Golden Gate*, he replied; " I think that since people are looking for love and meaning in life and having known both happiness and tragedy, it might appeal simply to a general sense of common humanity."

His novel, *A Suitable Boy*, is an epic of Indian panorama. The novel has a monumental length of 1,349 pages. It is structured into 19 well-crafted sub sections. The novel is both comprehensive and compact. The novel centers round Mrs. Mehra's search for a suitable boy for her second daughter Lata but thematic preoccupations of Seth in the novel are multi-fold. The novel presents an account of many forces that have gone in to the making of India. The novel presents the panorama of India after independence. Seth very skillfully and artistically manages to interweave all the larger themes of political, social and even religious conflict. He offers a huge, thick and multi-layered slice of Indian life in its veracity. The technique of narration employed in the novel is third person narration. At the time of modernist and post-modernist writings, Vikram Seth has preferred the traditional mode of novel writing. The realism presented in the novel is social realism. *A Suitable Boy* is a classic and is considered as an important landmark in the hierarchy of Indian English fiction.

Seth has acknowledged the works of R. K. Narayan as having had a significant influence on his growth as a writer. It's true that as an admirer of Narayan Seth too makes use of 'Standard English' and is a perfectionist in his use of language. But if Indian critics expect the same Indian sensibility from Seth, where is the artistic freedom? Vikram Chandra in his article "Where the mind is without fear" (The Hindu) resents such expectation "to be more like their elder regional brothers and sisters" and opines that the dichotomy between the 'regional' and Anglo-Indian' writers is problematic one. The Anglo-Indian writers in a sense are from nowhere and who write in a non-language. They belong to nowhere and everywhere at a time. Such writers will "inevitably be attacked by some critics for being not Indian enough, for being too Indian, too westernized, too eroticized, too rich, for being a foreigner."

Seth too asserts the right of a creative writer through the voice of Amit Chatterji in *A Suitable Boy*. When he was asked why he does not write in Bengali, Amit replies that his Bengali was not good enough for him to express himself in the manner he could in English. He adds;

"Besides we are all accidents of history and must do what are best at without fretting too much about it. Even Sanskrit came to India from outside."

In the novel, *An Equal Music*, too Seth follows his inspiration and writes about the transcending and universal power and beauty of music, without fretting much about the critics. It is a love story of an opera musician, Michel and his lost lover Julia. The locale of this novel is Europe and Seth has successfully interwoven the love story with the world of western music. Here Seth has adopted the first person narrative. It is a memorable tale of love, lost and regained excellently interweaving the theme of loss, longing and power of music in the dramatic setting of

contemporary London, Vienna and Venice. This novel combines a love story and the love of music as part of the narrative.

Such a writer who has treated the entire globe as his 'homeland' can be studied and understood in the context of more wider and applicable terms. He deserves a different category. He is an international traveler and explored many cultures. His journey across cultures has given him an opportunity to co-habit many cultures simultaneously. What interests him is the world and its affairs. He is cosmopolitan in his views and he enjoys specific features of the culture he is in, without any prejudice and bias. He is not a writer of only India deeply rooted in his Indian identity. Our country which is known all around the world for its cultural diversity and its openness for accepting other cultures only could produce a writer like Vikram Seth. He is in a sense a citizen of the world. Our cultural dictum, 'the entire world is one family', belief in the universality of man (*Vasudhaiv Kutumbam*) finds its best expression in the works of Vikram Seth.

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Chapter-III

Technical Devices

In

The Golden Gate

The Devices employed in *The Golden Gate*

Vikram Seth's debut novel *The Golden Gate* covers some very important aspects of modern life like the value of friendship, the merit of nuclear disarmament, and the value of individual 'self-realization'. The novel centers around the story of young professionals in San Francisco and their quests and queries to find and then to deal with love in their lives. The synopsis on the back cover of the novel describes it as "at once a bittersweet love story, a wickedly funny novel of manners, and an unsentimental meditation on mortality and the nuclear abyss."

Seth has used the poetic form in the novel. He was inspired to write a novel in verse after reading the translation of Alexander Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin* (1977) by Charles Johnston. *Eugene Onegin* is one of the classics of Russian literature and its hero served as a model for number of Russian literary heroes. The first complete edition of *Eugene Onegin* was published in 1833. Seth's novel comprises of 594 sonnets, all written in iambic tetrameters. Seth follows the fourteen line stanza pattern of *Eugene Onegin*. His meter appears to be more syllabic and his rhyming scheme matches that of Pushkin. His rhyme scheme differs from the traditional sonnet form. The traditional sonnets were written in pentameter and the rhyme scheme employed were abba abba cdecde (Petrarchan) or ababbcbc cdcdee (Spenserian) or ababcdcd efefgg(Shakespearean). Seth's rhyme scheme is very much unlike these. He uses ababcdcd in the octave and effegg in the sestet. The novel has a carefully structured plot. There are thirteen

chapters with an average of forty-five sonnets. Seth maintains a rapid pace in the development of the story. The novel commences in September and ends around November the following year. The time motif has been taken care of by Seth as he uses present tense in the narrative. The entire span of the story covers a period of just a little more than a year. Seth describes the passing of seasons in delicate word paintings.

The Setting

Seth has used the locale of San Francisco as the setting of the novel. His familiarity with the life in the bay area of San Francisco equipped him to portray the life of people in detail. He successfully enlivens the life of Yuppies and urban officials, artists and ordinary people. He has vividly captured the people and places of the bay area. The beautiful and graphic descriptions of the city of San Francisco makes to regard the novel as ‘ a truly Californian novel’.

Seth remarks that “ ... it was not his detachment but rather his love for California that was the most valuable to him in writing the book ... One can’t come with a cold and objective eye from outside and then write with affection about a place. One must have lived in that place and not just observed for years” (Leslie 1986:4)

San Francisco has often been a magnet for America’s counterculture. During the 1960s San Francisco was the centre of hippie culture. Thousands of young people poured into the Haight Ashbury district of the city during 1960s. In the arena of rock music, San Francisco sound achieved international fame and name with such acts as ‘Jefferson Airplane’ and the ‘Grateful Dead.’ During the 1980s and 1990s San Francisco became a major focal point in North America. After his early education in India, Seth went to Oxford and then Stanford. “I thought, oh my God, thick-headed beach boys and no intellectual conversations. But then I met people who were

both very intelligent and interested in things of the mind, and also who would think nothing about teaching you to swim butterfly. For me it was like a revelation in a wonderful way. That's why *The Golden Gate*, in a way, for all its tragedy, it's a happy book."(Knorr, 1999)

Seth takes into account the minute detail of the life in San Francisco. He gives the touch of Californian life and culture in the true sense. He depicts the socializing activities like house making parties and wine making picnics, their relationships with the pets, their past time activities etc. Seth includes all culture specific activities of the people in bay area to make it a purely Californian novel. Amid all these culture specific details he presents the raptures and cracks within the social fabric of the so called comfortable life of the professional class.

Seth portrays the life of the group of young professionals in the city of San Francisco in its manifold charm. He presents the A to Z of life in San Francisco. Even most trivial detail like the bumper stickers and billboard slogans seen while driving does not escape his notice. He takes into account the most contemporary disputes on moral standard also. His narration includes the issue of friendship, love, work, play, and sexuality, the nuclear age, single parent child relation, death, art, relationship with the pet etc. There are wonderful descriptions of the past time activities of scrabble and chess playing, symphonies and art critics, interesting party scene and personal resolution through personal dating advertisements. An anonymous reviewer from the Silicon Valley, California observes; "It is a total, unparalleled pleasure to wallow in the seductive cadences of Seth's poetic novel, and then marvel at the no doubt obsessive and somewhat twisted brain which has come up with the words, rhymes and humor in this book. In the style of long, long ago, this book is the only one that I have ever read which brings poetry totally and absolutely to life. It is poetry which details and narrates, talks about punk rock bands, and watches love come and go. This is a great experience."

Characters

John Brown, the central character of the novel is a computer programmer in the high-tech computer and electronics industry. He is twenty six and is a graduate of Berkley. Though he is a workaholic man, spending most of his time in working on nuclear research feels terribly lonely. His work is his god as Seth narrates; Kneels bareheaded and unshod / Before the chip' a jealous God (1.9). His speeches are also suitable with his job as a computer programmer. He follows conservative politics and is open about his opposition to the anti-nuclear war peace campaigner. He feels that

what.

He chooses to ignore can't hurt him

Some things are his concern, some not.

His politics have strongly, slowly,

Rigidified."(2.14)

Seth makes attempt to give the readers an insight into the psyche of John by giving an account of his childhood. Seth presents "compressed insights" (Hill: 89) into John's childhood. His present state of mind does not

Wholly Stem from his tenure in Defence.

It's a reflection, in a sense.

Of a rigidity deeper-seat

A bit of an emotional waif

Since, a small boy, he used to cheer

Against the fate that he'd been meted,

The mother's love he'd never had.

He'd clung to the "standards," good or bad. (2.14)

Seth adapts the traditional literary approach of storytelling in the novel. He presents John, the hero of the novel seeking love in the world. He gives a psychological insight into his life and thus creates an empathetic attitude in the mind of the reader. At the same time he also makes use of jokes and puns, high and low humor and thus follows closely the tradition of his literary forbears. Not only this, Seth describes a series of related adventures and thus takes this opportunity to modernize the theme of the novel. It is a story of a man who fails to sustain love and companionship in his life and ends up the same way he begins- a lonely and depressed human being. However, at the end we realize that John, though failed in sustaining a relationship, has achieved a maturity and the depression and loneliness that he feels is quite different from that of the initial stage. His life has come full circle and bitter and sweet experiences have made him a mature and better person. So in short it is the story of a modern man's quest for love and companionship.

The next important character in the novel is Janet Hawakaya. She is a Japanese girl and an artist by profession. She is also a drummer in the punk band *Liquid Sheep*. She is John's ex-girlfriend and now his confidant. She helps John in his search for a proper companion. She plays an important role in the narrative as the story moves further by her initiatives to assist John. As the

story advances she once again becomes John's companion. John also finds in her a true adviser, as he seeks someone to help him to guide properly in solving this loneliness.

John stands besides his phone, recalling

Janet's warm beauty, smiling calm,

Her dark eyes, high-boned features, falling

Black ponytail, her vagrant charm.

He thinks, "I guess I'll be the wiser

For talking to a sound adviser.(1.18)

She advises him to place a personal advertisement in the newspaper and drafts one for John and it is to the text drafted by her the Liz Dorati responds. As the idea of advertisement struck to her, she responds saying; "Your sufferings are at the end." This western allusion of seeking the companion by the mean of an advertisement is a comical and twisting way of finding the mate. Seth explores the polyphony of personal ad word usage to both high and low comic effect. Jan often help John in reconditioning his narrow perspectives. John's demeaning sexist remarks on women and gays makes her angry and she reacts;

"Johnny Boy, your mind needs cleaning

Of the debris of prejudice" (1.33).

Liz Dorati belongs to an Italian immigrant family. She is a 27 year old, high-powered ex-Stanford Law School Attorney. She responds to the personal advertisement of John in her own writings. John is impressed by her hand written reply and invites her to meet. They share a short

passionate relationship. Their relationship proves to be a short-lived attraction as they both have personal prejudices and differences of opinions. She has a pet cat named Charlemagne and the cat is her constant companion. She was invited at a protest meeting by anti-nuclear demonstrations, she arrives at the gathering with her cat. She speaks eloquently against the Lungless Lab and nuclear bombs. Her cat is also causing trouble to John in continuing the relationship with her, as at the party when John discovers that the cat has pissed on his leg, he calls Liz,

Excuse me. . . ." Liz goes over. "Hi!"

Something wrong, dear?" "Yes! Just as I

Was hoping things had gotten stable,

As if to prove that all is flux,

Your squalid cat pissed on my tux." (4.3)

"Poor Charlemagne. He's agitated. (4.4)

The cat was also causing trouble in the relationship. When John says; all is flux, he talks about the universal principle of nature that nothing is constant, not even the relationship. He now needs change to stop in his love with Liz. Seth's humor can also be noticed in the way Liz talks. When she comes, she excuses the cat and not John.

Next is Phil, twenty-eight year old Jewish man. He was a former roommate of John in Berkley. He was a nuclear engineer in Datatronics and a computer wizard. He possesses self accepting psyche and has a moral vision too. He opts to get out of the rat race in which John is caught. He leaves his work as an engineer and devotes himself to the anti-nuke movement as a "peacenik". His wife Claire has left him for another man, leaving a six year old son Paul with him. Phil tries to recover from this traumatic experience of his life and develops a brief homosexual affair with

Liz's brother Ed. What he expects is—"to live/ Without this emptiness-to give/ A little love, to get a little"(9.35). However, he develops affection for Liz and eventually marries her, who has ended her relationship with John.

Ed Dorati, the brother of Liz is twenty three is seen caught in a dilemma between his religious beliefs and his natural homosexual instincts. His homosexual relationship with Phil causes in him a strong feeling of guilt. As he was brought up in a Catholic family, his religious beliefs are equally strong. Seth has portrayed Phil-Ed relationship as a perfect one, with all the warmth and affection of a true relationship. Ed ultimately makes himself free from this relationship. It seems as if Seth is trying to convey his concept of true relationship through the portrayal of this relationship that in true relationship what matters is compatibility and comfortability rather than sex and sexuality.

Narrative technique

Seth uses both the first person and third person narrative technique in a complex rhyme scheme in the novel. The readers meet the author at irregular intervals. The use of I at times indicates that Seth often addresses his readers directly and gives his comment on the structure of narration. This style of narration where the author in third person speaking in his own voice often creates a point of view that is "objective, ironical and detached"(Misra 1990:6). As a result of this the reader judges the character impartially and thus a distance between the reader and the tale is created. Seth uses this narrative device in the style of Pushkin. Anita Desai commenting on the verse form used by Seth in the novel opines; " for all its technical achievement, *The Golden Gate* is essentially light verse closer in spirit to John Benjeman and Odger Nash than to Pushkin's ferocious and satirical wit"(1993:22).

Seth focuses on the dialogue to achieve the effect. The dialogue in the novel includes dialogues between characters, internal dialogue that takes place in the mind of the character and the author's dialogue with the reader. These dialogues take place at various occasions on various places like café, bars, restaurants, at parties and at homes etc. The dialogue on phone also gives a special effect of the context of modern time of the novel. The meanings and directions of the conversions are created by this special device of poetic conversion. The narrative is pushed forward with the device of dialogues. Here Seth uses telephonic conversion as well as recorded voice on the phone. As feeling terribly lonely and sad, John calls his ex-girlfriend and now a good friend Janet to guide him on the path of life.

He dials, to his peeved surprise

An answering machine replies,

Requests his message, name and number.

("Wait fir the beep."). John says, "It's me'

John. 234-4963.

No message." Rather than encumber

The brusque machine with his heart's woes,

He wraps himself in pensive prose (1.18).

The transformation of modern social fabric due to new inventions and technology has given the mankind many innovative machines but at the same has also been responsible for the lack of intimacy and feeling. This lack has created a vacuum in man's life. John's sense of alienation is

heightened after this talk and he is in 'pensive prose'. Thus Seth successfully employs this telephonic dialogue to convey his intended meaning of extreme loneliness. Then there are dialogues between characters which develops the story in the course of time. His use of metrical language in dialogue enables him to convey the feeling and thoughts of the characters more effectively. The authors dialogues with the readers are intended to forward the narrative.

Modern Means

Another important device employed by Seth is that of matrimonial advertisements. Janet drafts an advertisement to find out a suitable companion for John. The advertisement is

Young, handsome, Yuppie 26.

Straightforward, sociable but lonely,

Cannot believe that he is the only

Well-rounded and well-meaning square

Lusting for love, If you, out there,

Are friendly, female under 30,

Impulsive, fit and fun, let's meet.

Be rash. Box..... (2.3)

Janet feels that such an advertisement would help John to solve his intense loneliness. In response to it, Janet receives eighty-two responses from equally lonely persons. The idea of using the device of advertisement occurred to Seth after a conversation with a friend on

advisability of using such advertisements to find romantic partners. (Leslie, 1986:6). The draft is meant for the publication in the Bay Guardian. Here the interaction is established between two individuals, the purpose this may not mean a long lasting relationship as it is in Indian context. This type of direct invitation to initiate an interaction between two individuals is common in western context. The frankness and freedom to express their personal preferences and characters suits the context and background of the novel. Equally notable is Liz Dorati's response:

I am friendly, female, 27.

Well-rounded too, and somewhat square.

I've yet not known romantic heaven.

But harbor hopes of getting there.

I'm fit- at least, I'm not convulsive;

And fun, I hope, though not impulsive

To match the handsomeness you flaunt

Seth uses this device of advertisement to give the novel a true color of the western culture. Californian life style has been portrayed in all possible detail in the novel. Even such 'search for romantic companion' and the modern means to quench the spiritual thirst of love are juxtaposed. As the requirement for companionship is a matter related to the feeling, but the growing materialism has made the man satisfy his need by these modern means, which ultimately proves a failure.

Social gatherings; party scenes

Another important device employed by Seth is creating the scenes of social gathering or party scenes. Seth presents scenes of party to emphasize the dilemma of modern life and some social activities of the time. There are five major party scenes in the novel and each of these scenes has its purpose to serve. The first party is a housewarming party given by Liz and John.

Liz turns back. "Ah, the hostess!" Drinking

His seventh glass of gin and lime,

Professor Pratt, fine-tuned historian...

Roars in her ear as she goes by

And holds her with his bulbous eye (4.2)

Each of the scenes of this party moves the narrative as well as it also makes the reader feel the impossibility of Liz-John relationship. Liz's caring for her pet cat Charlemagne and John's getting irritated by the cat is also presented in light comic tone by Seth. At this juncture, it becomes clear that the relationship with Liz cannot fill the vacuum in John's life. Seth's use of structural twist indicates Liz's loss of affection for John. Liz's behavior with the professor, her cat and her responses to John all make it clear that John's quest for companion may not end with Liz. At the same Seth also takes opportunity to throw light on nuclear disarmament. The party presents typical party culture of professional and intellectual people in California. The party scenes make some references to the future development of the novel.

The second party is hosted by Phil for neighbors and friends. It is a repeating 'potluck' breakfast party. The third party is hosted by Dorati parents at their vineyard estate; Thanksgiving dinner party. The fourth is the wedding reception of Liz and Phil also in vineyard estate. The last is the party

hosted by Jan at her apartment. In this party Jan has made plans for Phil and Liz to make a mid-evening appearance in the party. She wishes John to reconcile with them and renew their friendship. However she is to get a ride from a family and ultimately meets her end.

Thus through the depiction of all these party, Seth brings out some universal truths of human psyche. These party scene also help the story to move further. The relationships between characters, their priorities, their differences, their sociability and their personal feelings are all well focused in these scenes.

The Title

The title of the novel 'The Golden Gate' also used as one of the technical devices by Seth. The majestic Golden Gate Bridge carries its weight with no visible support. It is a marvel in itself, made up of steel. In the novel the bridge functions as a connector between two geographical locations. It provides an opportunity to the characters to connect to their natural surroundings as well as to their friends. Seth describes the bridge;

The surface of the cobalt bay

It flecked with white. The moister, keener

October air has rinsed away

The whispering mists with crisp intensity

And over the opaque immensity

A deliquescent wash of blue

Reveals the bridge, long lost to view

In summer's quilt of fog: the towers,

High-built, red-gold, with their long span

-The most majestic spun by man-

Whose threads of steel through mists and showers,

Wind, spray, and the momentous roar

Of ocean storms, link shore to shore (9.28)

Ed drives across the "tall-spanned bridge" after a fight with Phil. But when he observes the city from the bridge, he realizes and decides to write to Phil. When Phil and Liz drive together on the bridge after Phil's bitter conversation with John, they confide in each other their difficult relationship with Ed and John respectively.

Nature and landscape descriptions

The novel is full of descriptions of natural sceneries of the Californian landscape. The nature and landscape are in tune with the emotional state of the characters. Seth utilizes nature and surrounding beauty to complement the feelings and narrative directions of his characters. At the same such descriptions share the beauty of San Francisco. The emotional drama going on in the mind of the character is often presented in tune with the nature and landscape description. Seth describes the arrival of spring when John and Janet are reviving their relationship.

It's spring! Meticulous and fragrant

Pear blossoms bloom and blanch the trees,

While pink and ravishing and flagrant

Quince bursts in shameless colonies

On woody bushes, and the slender
Yellow oxalis, brief and tender,
Brilliant as mustard, sheets the ground,
And blue jays croak, and all around
Iris and daffodils are sprouting. (12.5)

In the beginning of the novel John has been described as a byproduct of modern conservatism leading an apparently successful life. In close parallel to the artificiality of John's life are lines which describe the natural beauty available all around him. Seth here employs extended metaphors to explain John's predicament.

"The Dow-Jones of my heart's depressed.

The sunflower of my youth is wilting.

The tower of my dreams is tilting.

The zoom lens of my zest is blurred.

The drama of my life's absurd.

What is the root of my neurosis?

I jog, eat brewer's yeast each day,

And yet I feel life slip away.

I die! I faint! I fail! I sink!" (1.23)

Seth's choice of the words is appreciable for both as literary metaphors and as modern commercial references. The reference to the stock market's health, the flower of youth, tower of dreams and camera lens serve both the purposes well.

Seth uses bird metaphor to elucidate the character of Ed. When Phil and Ed both discuss their concerns and their personal feelings about their homosexual relationship, Ed confesses the

dilemma in the mind of Ed between his own physical desires and his religious beliefs and his continuous requests for no sex leads Phil to dampen his sexuality. Phil teases Ed for confessing that he doesn't care for women sexually and uses the simile of a starving pigeon to describe Ed's sexual preference.:

"Phil laughs. "You're like a starving pigeon

Who just can't bring himself to eat

Barley or rice, yet thinks the wheat

He likes is poisoned. Your religion

Doesn't square too well with your lust

I wonder which first bites the dust". (5.36)

Seth utilizes nature to complement the feelings and narrative directions of his characters, as well as to share the beauty of the San Francisco Bay area. The incident in which Jan, travelling toward her own party by a car and an accident occurs on the highway is symbolic. When we last see Jan, she is looking up toward the starry sky, in Sonnet 12.31. The sonnet opens with the commotion of the LaMont family in their car, travelling north, full of staccato pauses and familial jokes.

"Slowly,

Dusk turns to dark, and from the car

Jan sees how, star by star by star,

The sky now constellated wholly,

Domes over the fluid freeway, bright

With red and silver lanes of light." (12.31)

She is gazing stars when we last see her in the novel. The indirect idea is that she is looking towards heaven at the time of her death. Such an idea is absolutely lyrical. Within the broader

work, we find ourselves, too, figuratively riding between heaven and earth, acutely aware of the broader questions of our existence.

Relationships with the pets

To heighten the sense of isolation and disaffection, the common phenomenon of the modern professionals and intellectual yuppies in the Silicon Valley, Seth employs the device of humor. The descriptions of the character's relationships with pets are filled up with examples of light humor. Ed's relation with his pet iguana Schwarzenegger, Liz's with her cat Charlemagne and Janet's cats Cuff and Link are presented to portray some parallel and contrast in the story. For example, Charlemagne, Liz's Siamese cat is as insecure as John is. The cat was with Liz and John's arrival in Liz's life has threatened his existence;

How does John dare, the loathed intruder,

To breach the bounds of his domain

Usurp his realm, or, to be cruder,

To rape his solitary reign-

Inviolate since when as a kitten

-Lost, ear-torn, orphan-he had smitten

Liz's soft schoolgirl heart with love? (6.18)

The Device of Public Speech

Seth has also successfully dealt with the issues of the nuclear age very artistically and skillfully. He employs the device of speech to elucidate anti-nuclear theme of the novel. The central part of the novel Part- Seven, entitled, "Arrests occur. A speech is made" is devoted entirely to the demonstration against Lungless Labs. The speech by a Catholic priest, Father O'Hare is presented to project the dangers of nuclear bombs as well as to remind the humanitarian call of

mankind. The speech involves almost nineteen sonnets and is remarkable for the oratory power of the priest. The speech is presented in the manner of traditional sermon delivery by a priest. At the same the speech reveals him as a caring person convincing the people in a humble personal style as he sometimes fumbles for the proper word. The speech has a poetic context and yet it is intended to deliver a straightforward message: how can we permit this danger to dwell among us? Father O'Hare also asks the employees of the company how they can ignore the terrible potential consequences of creating nuclear bombs and he also warns them of the practical and potential dangers in the development and maintenance of nuclear weapons. This issue of nuclear disarmament was one of the most controversial and complicated issue of political and social importance, which captured the attention of many intellectuals in the 1980s.

Father O'Hare's speech is mixed up with notes of secular and religious interest also, which allows Seth to use variety of words and phrases. The priest delivers his speech in such a humble and humanitarian way that it enables him to gain the sympathetic attention of the both; the crowd gathered and the reader. He states, "killing means dying." He also reminds them that no one would have a victory and all would be destroyed by making a reference to Russia's losses of lives in World War II. The regular cues of the presence of his listeners make the speech more remarkable. The speech seems to convey the sense of 'coming together' as the Father speaks in a moderate way.

Thus Seth successfully employs each of these devices to give the novel a touch of artistic excellence. His choice of words and phrases, his use of terms from variegated spheres and his handling of the various technical and literary devices make the novel a masterpiece. He has covered almost all possible areas of modern life ranging from the quest for a proper mate, relationships with the pets, nuclear weapons, homosexuality, the beauty of the Bay area, the

pastime activities of the yuppies, their social gatherings, religious beliefs modern advertisements and hoarding etc. The influence of Pushkin can also be noticed in the way he presents the social fabric, the individual characters and their interactions. He presents the picture as an insider of the society. He is often critical, but does not pass his judgment on it; he merely works as a mere commentator. R. K. Narayan's comment on the novel and its artistic presentation can aptly conclude the chapter.

It is a novel in verse form' three hundred and odd pages, written by a young Indian, and it seems to me no small achievement... it is an extraordinary work. I have never come across any other modern writer who has ventured almost recklessly to narrate a story in verse. ..weeks later, the author, Vikram Seth, appeared in a TV interview and I realized, here was a genius writer with the right values, gift and outlook, not writing in order to blow off steam or to reform society but a genuine artist who takes pleasure in writing (1999).

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Chapter-IV

Technical Craftsmanship in *A Suitable Boy*.

Technical Craftsmanship in *A Suitable Boy*.

The publication of Vikram Seth's prose novel *A Suitable Boy* in 1993 aroused much critical attention and interest for two reasons, its length of 1,349 pages and the huge amount of two hundred and fifty million pounds that Seth received as an advance from Orion. The novel was released within a few days of one another in India, Britain and the United States. The novel on the basis of its length is regarded as the longest novel published in England since Richardson's *Clarissa* and longer than Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. The pre release publicity of the novel had also acclaimed critical attention as this had never ever happened to any Indian writer. Seth regards the Indian edition of *A Suitable Boy* with pride, as marking "a watershed in Indian efforts to be part of mainstream of world publishing."

Traditional mode of narration

The novel *A Suitable Boy* is also remarkable for its traditional mode of both the theme and its treatment. By turning back to the traditional mode of writing as Vikram Seth himself has confessed in his interview that he just wanted to tell the story, the novel has heralded a return to the traditional way of writing. After the publication and success of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight Children* in 1986, his experiments with the post-modernist technique of fiction writing achieved immense popularity and his style is often regarded as a touchstone of comparison for other Indian English fictions. *A Suitable Boy* is often evaluated on the basis of its un-Rushdie like techniques. Seth has been often criticized for his "rejection of multiple forms of post-modernism, and accompanying complexities of utterance, for a coherent, straight-forward and linear

narrative”. In reply to this Seth makes his intention clear by expressing his desire to “strip fiction of ideas and style that only get in the way of a reader’s enjoyment”. He says;

I admire the Victorian and the clear writers in general, those who try to portray the lives of other people rather than those who try to emphasis technique and their own particular finesse in the use of language. That seems to be like using a stained glass window to look out to see a particular view. I’d much rather have a clear window (Paranjape, 1993:23).

Pico Iyer in his article ‘India Day by Day’ distinguishes between two major strands of Indian fiction writing that emerged in the 1980s as that of ‘compassionate realism, as in the novels of Seth and Rohinton Mistry and that of ‘pin-wheeling intention’ as in the works of Rushdie and Shashi Tharoor. He reads *A Suitable Boy* as a ‘a counter-Rushdie epic’. Seth in the tradition of Victorian writers has dealt with the theme of traditional marriage. It was written with the clarity and leisureliness, the almost Victorian confidence of a Victorian novel. It is story of love with little love and no sex.

The novel is written in the omniscient mode, the reader is taken to view the story through windows into the family relationships and the mental and emotional states of the characters. There is no narrator in the story except the author himself. The omniscient mode of the novel allows Seth to put in excellence descriptions of objects and the landscape. This mode helps both the writer and the reader to enter into the private lives of the characters without the need for any particular consciousness. For example, there is no internalizing of Meenakshi’s character, but after discovering her ongoing affair with Billy, the reader hears her to talk to herself. The inclusion of cards and letters in the novel is another effective tool employed by Seth to give an

insight into the character. The letters of Lata and Haresh written to one another gives the readers a chance to their feelings and emotions. In omniscient mode of novel writing, conversation is also an equally important tool for providing readers an opportunity to share the experience of the character. Tapan's sexual harassment at the boarding school is revealed through the conversation. Seth shows his mastery as a story teller by handling this mode of narration skillfully and tactfully. He employs various tools of narration such as dialogue, letters, notes, humor and irony etc. to develop the plot line of the novel.

The plot

The plot of the novel is well designed and well structured, divided into nineteen well-crafted chapters. The main plot line centers on the issue of finding a suitable boy for youngest daughter of the Mehra's, Lata. The search for a suitable boy extends to three other families; the Chatterjis, the Kapoors and the Khan family. The wedding ceremony at the opening of the novel provides the author a chance of intruding all the major four families of the novel and thereby move the story back and forth. The right placing of the main characters on the canvas takes place in the beginning of the novel. Mrs. Rupa Mehra's elder daughter Savita is getting married to Pran, the son of the State Revenue Minister Mahesh Kapoor. All the families are inter-linked through marriage except the Khans. Seth also introduces a large cast of other characters from across religion, language and caste. Some community stereotypes like money minded Marwadi businessman, the anglicized Parsis, the South Indian professors are also presented as to make the novel a wholly Indian novel.

The other important sub-plot is based on the political situations of the time; the general election of 1952, the first real election after independence. The reader follows Mahesh Kapoor, the State

Minister of Revenue in his dilemma between power and conscience. Should he compromise on his ideals to secure electoral success and remain loyal to Congress or should he leave the party organization and join Kisan Mazdur Praja Party floated by some idealistic leftist Congressmen? While he is initially concerned merely with the passing of a law transferring the ownership of land from powerful local barons to the peasants, he is committed to his goals of anti-feudalism, secularism and abolition of Zamindari system. In post partition Indian politics, religion turned out as a sensitive weapon for politicians. The unprejudiced Kapoor becomes more and more dismayed by the increasingly heated nature of the political scene. Matters are not helped by the plans of the Hindu community to rebuild a Hindu shrine to the west of the local mosque - and install a giant statue of a phallus inside... This religious tension is created during the festivals of Dusserah (Hindu) and Moharram (Muslim), taking place simultaneously by chance due to the Muslim use of the lunar calendar, cause blood to be shed in the streets of Brahmipur. The third main story concerns Kapoor's younger son, Maan, and his relationship with the courtesan, Saeeda Bai. His passionate love for the famed songstress and their subsequent affair lead to a break with his family and exile to the countryside while he sorts himself out. This forbidden love causes tension not only with Maan's family but also with their friends - especially the family of Nawab Khan of Baitar, which has its own links to Saeeda Bai.

The main strength of the novel does not lie in business of match making or the depiction of various typical characters only, but in interweaving the story of matchmaking into the complicated web of social, political and religious issues of India after independence in a credible way. Seth's thematic preoccupations are multifold with Mrs. Rupa Mehra's search for a suitable boy for her daughter Lata as the connecting strand from the start to the end. Seth focuses on the history of India just after independence and partition. The interweaving the story of a search for a

suitable boy makes the historical incidents more intimate. Seth himself explains that he had initially planned to write a short book of two hundred and fifty pages concentrating mainly on Lata's mother search for a suitable boy for Lata. "But having began it with a wedding and having lots of characters come to that wedding, I realized that I was quite interested in the individual lives of these people, and have them come together again. So having opened the gates a bit wider I realized I was writing a different kind of a book." (Kohli:1999: xii)

The setting

Seth has used the locale of an imaginary city of Brahmapur and Calcutta as the setting of the novel. The story moves between these two cities, with excursions to New Delhi, Kanpur and Lucknow. Brahmapur with its North Indian identity represents India as a whole. Brahmapur is situated in the fictitious northern state of 'Purva Pradesh'

This little fire was indeed the center of the universe. For here it burned in the middle of this fragrant garden, itself in the heart of Pasand Bagh, the pleasantest locality of Brahmapur. which was the capital of the state of Purva Pradesh, which lay in the center of the Gangetic Plains, which was itself the heartland of India... and so on through the galaxies to the outer limits of perception and knowledge.

(page16)

In the locale of this representative city of India Seth has successfully presented a multi layered slice of Indian culture and life. The city of Brahmpur is located on the banks of holy river Ganga and the has the upriver attraction place Barsaat Mahal. The fictitious city has a major university, some urban shopping areas with theatres, parks and grounds for cricket and polo. The action of the novel also moves to other real locations of Calcutta, Delhi and Banaras. The political

campaigns of the novel take place in the Salimpur-cum-Baitar region, which is an agricultural area, populated largely by the Muslim people. The fictional Barsaat Mahal is used to represent romance, either budding relationship or melancholy visits over lost love. To present the plight of the poor and lowest cast people in the country Seth has used the locations of the poor tenants area in Brahmipur and the zamindari fields in Salimpur-cum-Baitar. The upper class places like the mansion of the Nawab Sahib and Mahesh Kapoor, the Literary Society and night spots are portrayed to depict the life styles and luxurious ways of the upper class people.

The historical scale of the novel has led it to be compared with *War and Peace* by Tolstoy. Seth presents the history of post-Independence India. The scenes of political, social and religious turmoil are presented in realistic Indian manner. The wide sweep of the novel enables the author to portray various facets of life in a fictitious northern state. The locale of the narrative also moves to a remote village in the north, where Mann Kapoor spends a month in exile. Seth has also portrayed life in Lucknow, Calcutta, New Delhi and Kanpur. The setting of the novel gives the novel a sense of being a purely Indian novel. He has dealt with the variegated aspects of Indian culture and traditions. Apart from throwing light on the political, religious and social affairs of post-independence India, he has also presented the traditions of Indian classical music and poetry. Lucknow has always been considered as the center of all arts and cultures and Seth's Purva Pradesh cultural tradition is a reflection of this Lucknowian culture. However, Seth's portrayal of these classical traditions is ironic as he has presented the impact of modernization at one level and the deterioration of the ancient tradition at the other. He has also shown the gradual alienation of people from the classical music and attraction towards the light and filmy music.

Just as his *The Golden Gate* has received the remarks of lacking the sense of Indian sensibility, here is a novel purely Indian with no influence of the life in the west. He has not made any

special effort to make the scenes accessible to foreign readers, in spite of the fact that the book was first published in England and America. He has not translated many Hindi and Bengali words nor explained Indian references. In this respect Seth says; “When I wrote *The Golden Gate* I did not make any effort to make Californian life accessible to the Indian reader. So why should I do so for foreign readers? I can only hope that the characters and the story interest them sufficiently to make them want to read the book.”

The novel is written in English as spoken by the people of India. The words of Hindi and Urdu origin are scattered throughout the novel. As the novel is rooted in India, Seth seems to retain the Indianess of the language also. Seth shows his mastery as a craftsman in handling the idioms, phrases and words. His mastery of playing with the words is best revealed in the depiction of the Chatterji family as means of toying with the vocabulary. He also uses some metaphors in the novel, for example, “... it would unto the threads of her goodwill with the blind torque of distaste (628)”. The novel also reveals Seth’s habit of using unusual choice of words to delineate the situation. In spite of the use of idioms and phrases from Hindi, the language of the novel has been given a touch of simplicity and clarity.

The novel is also throws light on important social and cultural aspects of post-independence India, the emergence of English speaking middle class after independence is treated as one important consequences of British rule in India. The central characters of the novel belong to this newly emerged English speaking middle class. They do not merely speak English, they are familiar with a number of writers and poets of English literature. Pran Kapoor and Ila Chattopadaya teach English literature, while Lata, Amit and Haresh are students of English literature. Mrs. Mehra sums up the birth of her granddaughter with a poem by Wilhelmina Stitch. Amit remarks that “Austen is the only woman in his life”. Lata reads *Emma* during her journey,

in the state of emotional crisis, she turns to Austen. Haresh is fond of Thomas Hardy and goes to watch a matinee show of *Hamlet* in Lucknow. In the department of English at Brahmipur, Pran and Prof. Mishra debate on the inclusion of Irish writer, James Joyce in the undergraduate syllabus. However these English speaking characters do not face any identity crisis as the result of their origin and attachment. They are not caught in the complexities of identity crisis.

The title

The title of the novel is equally noteworthy for the word suitable boy is very common in used in Indian market of arranged marriages, where the search is always on for a suitable boy or girl. The title *A Suitable Boy* makes the clear that Indian sensibility is at work. The subject of finding a suitable husband is not new in Indian fiction as Meenaxi Mukharjee also cites the example of Buddhadeb Bose's *Tithidor*, a novel in Bengali woven round the story of a girl choosing a suitable husband out of limited options. The search for Lata's husband expands into a richly detailed narrative that takes readers in the social, political and religious fabrics of India. Right from the beginning of the novel Seth makes the story of the main plot clear, when Mrs. Rupa Mehra tells her daughter Lata, "you too will marry a boy I choose(3)". This statement of Mrs. Mehra becomes the harbinger of all the events that Lata undergoes. Lata has to either submit to her mother's arrangement or to follow her own instincts. Three candidates meet Lata during the course of the story; Kabir, a handsome and dashing cricketer for whom Lata feels a passionate attraction but as he is a Muslim boy Lata in choosing him will have to defy not only her mother but the barriers of the caste and religion also, the second candidate is a Brahmin boy Amit Chatterji, a sophisticated and rich poet and novelist, and the third is Haresh, an energetic and young man determined to make his career in shoe making industry. The story moves round this

search for a suitable boy and Seth has successfully imparted the element of suspense and wonder in the fashion of a detective story as to whom will Lata marry at the end. At the end she chose Haresh, not because of her mother's compulsion but because of the simple reason that she wanted to marry somebody like Haresh. At the beginning of the novel Lata is presented as a girl of nineteen year and at the end she is twenty. But the difference between the nineteen year old Lata and the twenty year old Lata is not just of one year. She has grown up in the real sense of the term. The moody and willful girl has now become a woman who realizes and understands her responsibilities.

Arranged Marriages: Passion versus Affection.

To impart the novel true sense and color of Indian culture as well as to make it a pure Indian novel, Seth has used some devices to represent Indian culture. The opening of the novel with the wedding of Savita, the elder daughter of Mrs. Mehra with Pran Kapoor, the university professor may be viewed as one of the best opening for a novel based on the quest for a suitable boy. Equally noteworthy is the ending, the marriage of Lata and Haresh. Jane Austin's *Pride and Prejudice* began with the sentence: "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife." In the same fashion the opening of *A Suitable Boy* takes place with the sentence: "You too will marry a boy I chose," said Mrs. Rupa Mehra firmly to her younger daughter." Thus, from the very beginning of the novel Seth lets his reader know what the book is about.

Seth's use of the device of marriage relationship is one such device which gives the novel typical Indian color. Seth, an admirer of Victorian novelists talks about marriages in the fashion of Jane Austin. But there is a difference in the treatment and handling the theme of marriage relationship.

The difference between Jane Austen and Seth is that in Jane Austen's world Marriages are shown as the culmination of long term relationships, whereas Seth deals with the arranged marriage and therefore, the real relationship begins only after the ceremony. The narrator's evaluation may appear a biased one but the author has equipped the narrator to make his biased position clear. According to the narrator, the ruling emotion running to most love marriages is 'passion', while for arranged marriage, it is 'affection'. Generally passion does not last for a lifetime; it vanishes after a few years whereas affection can last for a lifetime also.

The relationship between Savita and Pran Kapoor on one hand and that of between Meenaxi and Arun Mehra on the other justify this view of the narrator. Savita and Pran's marriage is based on solid foundation as affection, trust, friendship are the ruling emotions of their relationship. On the other hand, we have Meenaxi and Arun, whose love marriage is based on an acute feeling of passion towards each other. Their acute passionate nature make them vulnerable towards the sex appeal of other young man and woman. Savita and Pran's baby becomes the icing on their relationship whereas Meenaxi gets her second baby aborted as her uncertainty regarding the father of the child. Three prime characteristics are required for any lifelong relationship; understanding, adjustment and tolerance and Seth seems to suggest that only arranged marriages bring all the three with them.

Seth's hatred for passion may have resulted from his admiration for Victorian novelists, particularly Jane Austen. Austen has always preferred love with marriage and ignored passion. It was a part of her philosophy that a happy marriage was the best thing for everybody. In the same manner Seth too seems to believe that romantic passion must necessarily end in some loss as in the case of Mann Kapoor, whose downfall is the result of his uncontrollable passion for Saeeda Bai. Mann, who has been described as a person "full of liveliness and charm and energy and

affection” stabs his best friend Firoz in a moment of unreasonable jealousy and passion. His infatuation for Saeeda Bai was so powerful and obsessed that it could not be got rid of except any tragic ending. He was imprisoned for stabbing Firoz. Thus, Seth treats passion as fatal.

Seth also deals with passion for religion, politics, power, career etc. For majority of Indians religious beliefs and faiths are more powerful and influential than anything else. But passion in religion is defined by Seth as fanaticism and insanity. The incidents of the communal riots that take place in the novel on the issue of abolishing a mosque and building a temple are results of intolerance and religious fanaticism. Seth’s condemnation of any kind of religious fanaticism is evident when the lunatic Raja of Marh attempts to raise the “Shiva-linga from the bottom of the Ganges and to resurrect it to the great resentment among the Muslims of the area ends in a failure. The linga, which symbolizes both; the destruction and regeneration rolls back down the steps of the ghats crushing a priest on the way, and returns to rest in holy water. All such incidents of the novel are integrated in an attitude that shows extremities of passion.

To enhance the quality of his rich and imaginative plot of *A Suitable Boy* Seth uses the stylistic devices of humor and irony. Seth has attempted in *A Suitable Boy* to pursue “a natural, reader friendly style devoid of literary acrobatics and experimentation, and a clear window approach, in contrast to the play of stained glass”(Basu 67-69). The novel *A Suitable Boy* as it deals with the presentation of ordinary incidents requires a very realistic and convincing approach of narration to hold the attention of the readers. Seth has successfully used the devices of humor and irony to sustain the interest and attention to the scenes of action. He began his novel with “A Word of Thanks” to his readers. From that very start where he mentions; *Buy me before good sense insists/ You’ll strain your purse and sprain your wrists* Seth succeeds in sustaining the interest of the reader and proving his mastery in use of humor and irony.

The contents page itself serves as an abridged version of the plot. The contents in rhyme throws light on how the plot expands. It also shows the author's power of versification and his extraordinary sense of humor. Due to the originality and attractive quality of the contents page, it arises expectations and interest in the mind of the reader. In addition to these rhyming contents at the beginning, the rhyming couplets in the course of the novel also reveal Seth's love for verse and humor. For example the passage in which Kakoli and Meenakshi think about Lata and Amit;

Kakoli felt that Lata and Amit are well matched but that each needed prodding. She rolled off a Kakoli couplet to consecrate their march: "Luscious Lata, born to be Lady Lata Chatterji." She was rewarded by the tinkle of Meenakshi's laughter, and the return of her service: "Luscious Lata, is it hard being wife of a famous bard?:" Kakoli giggling, volleyed the ball across the net: "Oh, so hard it is in rhyme: Loving, doving, all the time." And Meenakshi continued the rally: "Kissing, missing, everyday, cuddling, muddling all the way (881).

All the Chatterji children including their dog Cuddles are source of humor in the novel. They are all eccentric intelligent people, who make witty remarks naturally. The Chatterjis are upper class anglicized Brahmins from Calcutta and they are related to Lata through her brother Arun, who is married to the glamorous Meenakshi. Meenakshi's older brother Amit is one of the contenders for Lata. The character of Amit Chatterji is based on Seth himself. The other siblings; the spiritual Dipankar, the flighty Kakoli and the baby Tapan, are presented as eccentric in their own unique manner. Seth writes: "The Chatterji family at breakfast presented a scene of cordial conflict. It was an intelligent family where everyone thought of everyone else as an idiot. Some people thought the Chatterjis obnoxious because they appeared to enjoy eachothers' company even more than the company of others. But if they had dropped by the Chatterjis for breakfast

and seen the, bickering, they would probably have disliked them less” (441). They have a tremendous liking and ability to form couplets. As Lata asks; “Aren’t there any Chatterjis who don’t make flippant couplets?” (526). Thus the Chatterjis are good comic creations and source of humor in the novel.

Seth’s admiration for the works of Jane Austin can be noticed in his handling the device of ‘dialogue’ for character exploration and their gradual development. Seth also uses dialogues, mostly humorous and witty to advocate his ideology. For example the apparently funny nursery rhyme couplets by Kakoli Chatterji, “ Roly poly Mr. Kohli/Walking slowly up the stairs Holy souly Mrs.Kohli/ Comes and takes him unawares./Mr. Kohli base and lowly,/ Stares at choli, dreams of lust,/As the holy Mrs.Kohli/With her pallu hides her bust”. is actually a severe satire on lust and sexual desires of a mild looking man.

Seth employs the device of dramatic suspense also to serve the purpose of the novel. His style invariably reflects his relation to the subject matter. The suspense and drama as to whom Lata will marry at the end, gives the novel its gripping and absorbing power. Otherwise with the ordinary theme of selecting a suitable boy for a girl would have not succeeded in holding the attention of the reader till the last page. The fortunes of all the three suitors fluctuate dramatically. Each one of them is shown as unsuitable at one or the point of the novel. It is to the credit of Seth, that he succeeds in handling the plot line dramatically and maintaining the suspense. And when finally the suspense thins, it springs out as a surprise to the reader. Lata takes her decision after passing through a lot of turmoil and tension.

Her first instinct was to have a heart-to-heart talk with Savita or Malati, or her mother-or with each one of them. Then she decided that it would, if anything,

only serve to confuse her. This decision was hers to make. She wrote to Haresh the same evening, accepting with gratitude and, indeed warmth- his own repeated offer of marriage. (1295)

Characterization

Seth presents a wide cast of characters on the canvas of the novel. He does an admirable job handling the enormous cast of characters. He develops characters in the course of the novel while dealing with the complexity of India's historical background. Even the most minor characters are distinguishable from each other. At the end of the novel, we feel that we know each of them individually. The novel focuses on the experiences of four upper class families connected to each other through marriage or friendship. The story is set in India just after independence, the period of time when the country too was passing through a period of commotion and confusion. The novel is thus about the social, religious and familial customs of India. The vast cast of characters in the novel serves as tools to illustrate the veracity of these customs. All the members of four families- the Mehras, the Kapoors, the Khans and the Chatterjis in one way or the other experience a series of turbulent emotions. All these experiences make them to understand life and its adversities. Apart from these inter-linked characters, there are other minor characters who contribute in the development of the plot line.

Seth is most proud of his vibrant 'Mrs. Mehra, whose character is based on in part on Seth's grandmother, also named Rupa Mehra. She is vividly drawn and seems to leap off the page with energy, vitality and wit. She is the typical Indian mother always concerned about her children. She is drawn as the most fully realized and emotionally engaged character in the novel. She has only one mission left in life-to arrange a proper marriage for her younger daughter, Lata. Mrs.

Mehra is a woman determined to take care of her family at any cost. There are certain generation gaps in ideas between her and children, but she eventually reaches a sort of agreement with them. She takes care of the children, who do not wish to be taken care of. Seth sums up her as:

Mrs. Rupa Mehra, torn between solicitude for Pran, concern for Savita who was due to deliver at any day now, and desperate anxiety on behalf of Lata, would have liked nothing better than to have an emotional breakdown. But the press of events would not allow it at present, and she therefore abstained.

The characterization of the central character of the novel, Lata shows Seth's deep insight, honesty and truthfulness in portraying an ordinary Indian girl's development towards maturity. At the beginning of the novel Lata is an immature girl of nineteen years and at the end she is twenty. But during the course of one year, she develops towards maturity. She now understands herself better. Her passionate sermon against passion reveals her development as a woman, who knows what is good for her. When she discusses her decision of marrying Harish Khanna instead of Kabir Durrani, whom she loved passionately, she is aware of the dangerous consequences that passion can bring in her life. She says;

...“I don't want to” cried Lata. “I don't want to. If that is what passion means, I don't want it. Look at what passion has done to the family, Mann's broken, his mother's dead, his father's in despair. When I thought that Kabir was seeing someone else, what I remember feeling was enough to make me hate passion, passionately and forever (1296).

When she takes the decision of marrying Harish, her mind has not ceased to feel the passionate attraction for Kabir. She does not choose Harish because of her mother's compulsion, but

because she wanted to marry a man like Haresh. Her choice is not the result of her sense of social recognition or status, rather it is her cry against the stifling snobbery and blinding passion. The negative and snobbish attitude of her brother for Haresh, because of his involvement in the shoe business propels Lata towards her fateful selection. Lata has the opportunity of choosing between three totally different men. Kabir, Amit and Haresh are different from each other in their personality as well as behavior. Regarding Lata's choice for Haresh, David Myers opines;

Lata is not marrying Haresh: she is marrying a symbol of what Vikram Seth would like to proclaim as his hope for a new India- an ambitious, pragmatic, anti-snobish, working-class, self-made Indian man (1994).

Savita Kapoor is another idealized character of the novel. Seth seems to have more than a soft spot for her, than any other character of the novel. She is described as beautiful, intelligent, understanding and devoid of any sort of vanity. She is the only one who understands Lata totally. Even Lata's best friend Malati cannot compete Savita's understanding of Lata's relationship with Kabir. She possesses an acute sense of perception. She understands very well that the base of Lata- Kabir relationship is not the strong bond of affection but the thin thread of physical attraction, which will not last longer.

The character of the gifted, intelligent and witty Amit is also an important and interesting one as Seth mocks himself in the guise of this character. It may be seen as a loose self-portrait of the novelist. He is often seen as sitting about all the day staring out of window, as Seth himself used to do. Amit is Meenakshi's elder brother and thus he meets Lata more as a relative than as a suitor. He is presented as a materialistically spoiled and eccentric character. When Lata needed a diversion in her life, Amit's wit, and concern did work as a balm for the broken hearted Lata.

Amit gets attracted by the charm, simplicity and innocence of Lata. His wooing of Lata is not as passionate as that of Kabir but it has its own charm, as it comes in the form of a poem:

MODEST PROPOSAL

As you have asked for black and white,
May I send these lines to you
In the tacit hope you might
Take my type at least as true.
Let this distance disappear
And our hearts approach from far
Till we come to be as near
As acrostically we are. (1288).

The title, MODEST PROPOSAL is borrowed from Swift. The tone of the proposal is careful and controlled. Seth also uses the character of Amit to highlight his process of fiction writing on an epic scale. Amit is writing a long first novel on famine in Bengal. He compares his method of writing with the performance of a raag. Thus, Seth's love for music and writing both are revealed in the character sketch of Amit.

Kabir Durrani is presented as the most unsuitable boy of the three suitors because of his being Muslim. His character has been portrayed by Seth with a touch of sensitivity. Seth has not revealed any aspect of his personality as to make reader feel negative towards him. He succeeds in winning Lata's heart but fails in winning her hand. Seth has taken great care in depicting this character. Though he fails to win Lata at the end, succeeds in winning the sympathy of the reader.

Vikram Seth has offered a blend of fictional and actual typical characters and events from history in the tradition of George Eliot and Hardy. The city of Brahmapura and the state Purva Pradesh are fictional, but these places are not located in some vague land, they are in north India and inside the Hindi belt. The central characters of the novel are invented but the fictional politician reading a real letter by Nehru is an actual incident. Thus, he successfully interweaves the actual incidents of the time and the fictional characters of his novel. Khushwant Singh, who lived at the time, says; "I lived through that period and couldn't find a flaw...It really is an authentic picture of Nehru's India".

There are a number of women characters on the huge canvas of the novel. Besides Lata and Mrs. Mehra, there is Savita, Malati, Veena Tondon, Mrs. Mahesh Kapoor and her mother-in-law, the fashionable Chatterji sisters; Kakoli and Meenakshi, Mrs. Tondon, Muslim women; Zainab, Abida Khan, Saeeda Bai and Tasreen. Seth presents a patriarchal world where the male head of the family celebrate the ideal domestic space, whereas women live within the specified role. Some women in the novel are portrayed as subordinate to man. They are bound to perform the role of domestic duties. Veena Tondon wishes to pursue her passion for classical music but she faces restriction from her mother-in-law. Priya Goyal lives in a joint family and suffers in an intolerable situation with her in-laws. Zainab, the Nawab's daughter disappears into the world of purdah after her marriage. With the exception of two female characters, Ila Chattopadhyay who is a professor of English literature and Abida Begum, the Nawab's sister-in-law, who is an MLA and one of the leaders of the Democratic party, all the other women characters are confined with the four walls of the family. However, by depicting the restrictions enforced on women Seth in a way poses the question of woman's space in a male dominated society. Actually Seth is much

more concerned with the happy domestic scenes of married life, than in describing the oppression of women in the society.

At the same Seth draws characters of modern Indian woman and their new role in Indian culture. On one hand, there are the traditional women like Mrs. Rupa Mehra, Mrs. Mahesh Kapoor, Savita Kapoor, and Mrs. Chatterji who represent the old ways of social custom. Lata represents the middle ground. She is traditional in her respect for her mother and her ultimate choice of deciding the partner her mother approves. However, she is at the stage of questioning traditional practices and taking a few steps on her own. This trait reflects the attitude of a modern woman to her own future. Other women in the novel represent the post independence modern Indian woman. Malati has broken tradition of the society by moving about on her own and enjoying the company of young men she likes. Meenakshi is the truly liberated woman who indulges herself in an extra marital aspect that has nothing to do with her feelings for her husband. She dresses flamboyantly, goes out at will, and thumbs her nose at gossips who criticize her behavior. Kakoli Chatterji is a young woman flexing her independence by consorting with a young German boy, Hans. She holds her own with the eccentric Chatterji family in their pseudo-intellectual rhyming games. Begum Abida Khan is perhaps the most startling of the liberated women in the novel in that she is a Muslim woman, living alone, and active in politics. Like Meenakshi, she is unaffected by the gossip of the more traditional people who surround her. This recurring theme runs throughout the novel about women breaking free of the cultural limitations traditionally placed on them.

Seth has been criticized for lacking the psychological depth to his characters, the presence of innumerable characters does not give him chance to develop characters fully. He continues to introduce new characters until the last fifteen pages of the novel. All the characters are brought

together at the end of the novel at Lata's wedding. The vast cast of the characters are presented in a skillful manner by Seth, but he has been criticized for not investing psychological insight in their sketches. Anita Desai is critical of the remarkable absence of 'psychological depth' from the novel "which is written as if Freud's theories had never filtered down through the bazaars of Brahmipur". This according to Desai results "in flat characters less any wrenching psychological realism".(1993:25)

Seth's characterization should be viewed in the context of his social realism. The novel focuses on the social, political, religious and familial situations of India of 1950s. Seth is much more concerned about the social realities of the time, his characters serve as means to reflect the picture of the society. To give the novel a touch of reality, Seth visited many places, met different types of people who lived through the period. It took him eight years to complete the manuscript and Seth acknowledged his debt to all those people who assisted him in the research and fieldwork. His plot, though revolves round the search for a suitable boy for Lata, also focuses on what is suitable and balanced for the independent India. The novel on the whole gives a faithful picture of the society during the period of transition.

Religious intolerance and Hindu-Muslim Relationship

As the novel deals with India of 1950s, the era of post-partition, Seth describes the relationships between the Hindus and Muslims. The issue of religion becomes important in administrative matters also. Seth also focuses on the tension and turmoil resulted from the religious controversies. Ramjanambhumi-Babari Masjid incident took place on 6th Dec 1992, the book was in press at that time, yet the resemblance between the horrifying scenes and events reveals Seth's power of perception and imagination.

The theme of religious intolerance serves as a tool to depict the post-partition tension in India. Kabir, the attractive, young and handsome boy is rejected on the base of religion. Lata is passionately in love with Kabir and yet she decides to marry another man because she is fully aware of the consequences that she will have to face in such caste-conscious society. Seth has presented the arch symbol of religious militancy in the character of Raja of Marh. His act of erecting a temple of lord Shiva adjacent to a mosque is an act of religious intolerance. On both the sides riots and attacks occur in the name of religion. When the festivals of Dusherra and Mohram happen to coincide, neither side is willing to give way to the other.

While depicting some scenes of people's intolerance in the matter of religion, Seth also depicts individual relationships between Hindu and Muslims. Mann-Firoz relationship is a good example of this. Their relationship is pure and genuine. Mann saves Firoz from the attack of the mad Hindu mob is presented in a heart rendering manner. However, Mann's passionate and sexual involvement with Saeeda Bai results in a tragedy. As he sees his best friend Firoz with Saeeda Bai, he could not control his passion and anger and in the fit of intense jealousy, he suspects his friend and stabs him. He is arrested and in the dramatic courtroom scene Firoz pleads a memory lapse and does not give any statement or evidence against Mann. Thus, Seth presents the restoration of the inter-communal relationship.

The period of the novel

As stated above, the novel is about Lata's search for a suitable boy as well as the new born independent India's search for a stable and suitable governance. The Indian nation-state is

preparing for its first general election under the Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru. The growing disillusionment among the people of his own party has created a rift in Congress Party. The rift resulted in the conflict and quarrels between the supporters of Nehru and his political rival Purushottam Das Tondon. Zamindars had enjoyed large proprietary rights from the British Government. The implementation of land reforms was also necessary. There also were differences of opinion among the politicians of the period. Partition had uprooted many people; the memories of pain and pangs of partition also created a sense of insecurity and instability among many Indians. Seth has successfully depicted all these in the novel and his interweaving of all varied political, social and religious issues in the main plot line is so skillful, that the novel on the whole gives a panoramic view of India after independence.

Anita Desai, commenting on the novel says that 1951 was “not a year that is particularly memorable in modern Indian history, yielding up not even one momentous event to memory... by choosing it rather than another, Seth displays his proclivity for the common place and quotidian”(1993:23). But as this novel has taken place after a lot of research by Seth himself, he through his extensive reading of newspapers of the time realized that the year 1951 was neither “an innocent time” nor a period of great public probity”. He had also conducted interviews with the people who were young students at that time. Seth explains: “You’ll realize what bitterness and cynicism had crept in already at that time”.(Paranjape,1993:20-24)

To present the real political picture of the time Seth has portrayed his political characters with great skill and artistic view point. He has presented some real historical figures like Jawaharlal Nehru, Rafi Ahmed Kidwai and Rajrishi Purushottam Das Tondon in their real names. He has assessed their role in the history of Indian political scene and presented them in that manner. There are other political characters who appear in the novel in different names, but their role and

images can be easily identified with the leaders of the period. A good example of this type of character is the Chief Minister of Purva Pradesh S. S, Sharma, who resembles the real character of G.B.Pant, the Chief Minister of U.P. The character of Mahesh Kapoor and L.N. Agrawal seem to be modeled on Damodar Swaroop Seth and C.B.Gupta respectively.

Seth has praised Nehru in his brief appearance as the champion of tolerance, unity and modernization. He is viewed as an enemy of fanaticism, bigotry and racism. S. S.Sharma, the Chief Minister of Purva Pradesh is also portrayed as having the similar political sentiments. Mahesh Kapoor is also presented as an ideal figure on the political front. His rude and unreasonable behavior with his wife and son may have resulted from his excessive involvement in the politics. However, as a politician he is a man of principle and like his hero Pandit Nehru, champions the cause of unity, equality and modernization. He is a leader in the Indian National Congress and his most important legislative goal is the passing of the Zamindari Abolition Act. The act will result in the dissolution of the large estates of landed aristocracy. The act will have negative consequences for zamindars. Mahesh Kapoor's friend the Nawab Sahib of Baitar, who is a member of this hereditary class will also have to face the consequences of the act. With the help of all such real national and the fictional characters and incidents Seth successfully reproduces a nation in transition.

Seth has presented a panoramic view of post-independence India. He has dealt with the issues of political debasement, social immorality, corruption, individual hypocrisy and dishonesty etc. while narrating the story of his heroine Lata's search for a suitable boy. No aspect of Indian society of the period has escaped his notice. He has taken into account the minutest detail of the time. His presentation of all these aspects is so true to life than many scenes of the novel can be compared with the prevailing situations of Indian society of today. In this respect it can be aptly

said that *A Suitable Boy* presents not merely comprehensive but a sensitive and intelligent creative account of India. It not merely exposes, but criticizes the morals of the people. The numerous characters of the novel are portrayed as individuals with different traits and tastes. The novel is not about a single individual, or a single family or a single event, but about the India itself. Seth's India is not the India of sex and passion, high fashion, fast car and slick life; it is an India of arranged marriages, self-made men, rationality and sanity, tolerance and understanding.

Just as the Industrial Revolution affected the England of Jane Austin, the socialist attitude of Nehru affected the India of the fifties. Nirad C. Chaudhari, the sharp observer of the Indian scenes writes:“ A far stronger force, in actual fact the only positive force, is the Hindu's insatiable greed for money....it is this love of money which is the true motive behind the industrialization in England and India, the insatiable greed for money led to the birth of a middle class. Mrs. Bennet and Mrs. Rupa Mehra, members of this class find it increasingly difficult to search suitable boys for their daughters. In today's India, this social problem has assumed a monstrous form, where thousands of daughters are burnt for inadequate dowry. Very few writers have cared to probe the miseries and agonies of mothers of many daughters, with scant resources and who are caught in the vicious tentacles of caste, religion and conservative traditions. Vikram Seth, basically an English brown Sahib, sitting away from the growing and unfulfilling aspirations and consequent frustrations of this middle class, writes marvelously on this theme.”

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Chapter-V

An Equal Music

An Equal Music

Vikram Seth's next novel *An Equal Music* published in 1999 received considerable attention and interest from literary critics and academicians as his previous novels *The Golden Gate* and *A Suitable Boy* established him as a writer par excellence. *An Equal Music* as the title suggests is a story of love and loss set against the background of music. It is a novel of moderate size consisting 381 pages as compared to the epic dimensions of the previous novel, *A Suitable Boy*. *An Equal Music* is a tale of an emotionally volatile musician. Seth explains that the idea of writing a novel about a musician and concerns germinated from a visual image of a musician. Walking across a park on a very wet day, Seth and his companion Philippe Honore see someone staring at his own image in the water of the Serpentine river in Hyde Park. As they wonder about the man, Philippe suggested that he might be a musician, and thereby the idea for the novel took root. (Vidyasagar: 1999). Seth dedicates the book *An Equal Music* to his friend Philippe Honore, as the idea occurred to him in the companionship of this man.

The novel is story of a musician, Micheal Holden and his emotional attachment to Julia and his violin. Vikram Seth has succeeded in creating a living, breathing world of music and the narrative enchants and grips the reader. Seth remarks at the end of the novel, in the author's note: "Music to me is deeper than speech. When I realized that I would be writing about it, I was gripped with anxiety. Only slowly did I reconcile myself to the thought of it." Even in his earlier books, Seth refers to the theme of music. In *The Golden Gate*, there are references to both pop and western classical music. In *A Suitable Boy* also, he talks about the ragas and the ghazal performances by Saeeda Begum. Seth himself studied the *khayal* under Padit Amarnath during his short visits to India. The classical Indian music and the vocal music influenced him in writing

about music in his novel. In *An Equal Music* he deals with the European classical music of Bach, Beethoven, Haydn and Schubert.

The Spectator reviews the novel “Where *An Equal Music* pleases most is in the ravishing refinements of its technique, its sure placing of scenes and the unerring truth of its portrayal of a small enclosed social world...A virtuoso performance.” *An Equal Music* really establishes Seth as the master of rendering his poetic craft in the form and situation of his story. His mastery of technical and literary devices enabled him to be ranked among the notable writers of the time. He captures the every details related to the world, he is dealing with. He makes enough research before plunging himself into that world. In the author’s note at the end of *An Equal Music* he acknowledges the contribution of all those musicians whom he met and interviewed. His research in the respective field helps him in portraying true to life picture and events.

Narrative Technique:

In *An Equal Music* Seth adopts the first person narrative mode, in contrast to the omniscient mode that he adopted in the novels. Seth explains why he chose to write in this mode. Firstly he understood that it was “notoriously difficult” to write about an acceptable art form in an expository way, and therefore the only way to get into music through words was to describe the thoughts of someone actually a musician himself. Secondly, an idea of telling an intense love story in the first person held a greater appeal to him. (Kohli:1999:13). The device of the narrative helps the author to view the world of music from the eye of a musician. It the voice of the protagonist. There is a distance and nearness to the writer. As a tale of intense and passionate love, the voice of the person who has experienced the joy and agony of love suits the purpose. As

the hero himself is narrating, the issue of authenticity of feeling does not enter the mind of the reader at any point.

His narration gives voice to his agony and his passionately imaginative mind paved the way to his emotions. It is only by surrounding himself in the emotional extravagance of sensations, he could play at all. He is thirty-seven year old and is a second violinist in an English quartet, named Maggiore. Michael also teaches violin to a few music students. The reader enter into the world of Michael's life from the daily routines of teaching, solitary practices and rehearsals and his getting the fleeting glimpse of Julia, whom he had loved and lost in Vienna and has been unable to find again. Michael's search for Julia, their meetings and parting are all woven in the story. At the same, the story of other musicians of the quartet, Maggiore has also been given space. The plight of the musicians whose precarious income prevents them from buying the finest and most beautiful instrument of their choice and requirement is also portrayed in the novel. The reader is also thrown into the lives, whims and chemistries of classical musicians. The protagonist, Michael is drenched in love and longing narrates the story of his past and present in the voice of a broken hearted lover. In the story of this passionate lover music plays an important role. The lines of the narrator and even other characters have music in them.

As compared to the narrative techniques of the earlier novels, *An Equal Music* is different. The voice of the author in previous works provided Seth an opportunity to display his wit, humor, satire and gentle mocking of the characters, whereas in *An Equal Music*, as the hero himself is narrating the events, this quality of wit and humor is lacking. However, the device of the first person narrative has enabled the writer to explore and expand the theme from the point of view of a musician.

The Title:

The title of the book is derived from John Donne's sermon describing life after death. A passage from the sermon in which Donne describes the entry of the redeemed Christian soul into heaven sets the epigraph of the novel : "*And into that gate they shall enter, and in that house they shall dwell, where there shall be no cloud nor sun, no darkness nor dazzling, but one equal light, no noise nor silence but one equal music, no fear nor hope, but one equal possession, no foes nor friends, but one equal communion and identity, no ends nor beginnings, but one equal eternity*".

John Carry suggests that Donne's phrase of leave taking yields apt meaning as it brings out the balance between the four instruments that the quartet aims at, and the sound of unheard music in Julia's head matching the sound of her playing (1993:13). Donne is speaking of an equal music as a metaphor for perfect peace, harmony and balance to be attained in the heavenly realm. Seth in the novel *An Equal Music* presents the story of Micheal's love for music, his love and loss of his lady love Julia and his attachment for Tonani, his violin. However the separation from his favorite violin does not take place, as Mrs. Fromby, a true lover of music leave this valuable instrument in the right hands.

Markand Paranjape opines about the title *An Equal Music* "might refer to the equal music of Vikram Seth's poetry and prose"(1999). The author when questioned about the title has answered that the book had much to do with equable as with equal. *An Equal Music* therefore stands for music which has attained perfection. As the novel deals with a story of love, it hints at the perfection of love marked by balance and harmony. As Julia tells Michael, "making music and making love-it's a bit too easy an equation."

The Setting

The action of the story moves between London, Vienna and Venice. The real life of the novel is the music; the novel takes reader into the world of music. It is indeed a tour de force of lyrical and emotive writing. It is a poignant love story of Michael and Julia and its events unfolding in the dramatic settings of London, Vienna and Venice. Seth has used the different locales for his novels. His first novel *The Golden Gate* is set in the bay area of San Francisco and the classical novel *A Suitable Boy* is set in the fictitious city of Brahmpur. Now as this novel deals chiefly with the world of music, the western classical music, he takes the reader in the realm of these musicians; the Europe. The various different settings used by Seth reveal his transnational personality. Seth believes in the perfection of the presentation; to present a story of love of a western musician for music, the proper setting should be in west only. The first half of the novel is almost magical, with its melancholic descriptions of London's Hyde Park. The magical backdrop of the concert hall in Vienna and the canals of Venice are presented by Seth in evocative prose.

To write about diverse themes and diverse places is a challenge and an attraction in itself and Seth, the writer of not only one country but a writer of human beings with different national and geographic identities takes this challenge and reveal his skill and craftsmanship as a creative writer. He says; "I know from an editor's point of view or a publisher's point of view it's easier to slot me into a particular niche. But I know that I would be bored unless I wrote a book that in some sense was a challenge. And this might mean I vary the form by writing a poem or a play or a novel. Or set the stories in different countries or write in the first person as opposed to the third or in the present tense as opposed to the past or a very long novel as opposed to a short form."

However many critics on this ground questions his position in the categories of writers. Moreover, the Indian reader may have some familiarity with the world of *The Golden Gate* because of the widespread exposure of American culture through media, but the western classical music may create the gap of familiarity for ordinary Indian reader.

Language:

Seth's passion for western classical music played an important part in writing of the novel. The musical world of Bach and Beethoven forms the background of the novel. Seth weaves the tale of Michael Holme's love and longing and the power of music in the musical world. The lines of the novel have music in them. Seth has succeeded in turning prose of the novel to poetry. The lines possess rhythm which makes the novel itself a musical one:

What is the difference between my life and my love?

One gets me low, the other let me go.

O Luke, O Luke, rack me no riddles more.

The novel right from its very first line creates an impression that the novel might have been composed first as poetry and then words are rearranged as prose. The voice of the narrator drenched in love and longing, reflecting back about his lost love provides the novel a heart rendering tone. The attractive clarity and precision of Seth's prose makes the novel a classic. Seth manages to convey the world of music through Michael's daily routine and his involvement in the quartet as a second violinist. The language employed in the novel creates an impression that the author himself has toured in a quartet to Venice. Seth proves his elegance of language in handling the passages on music. As Mala Pandurang says" Seth is able to recreate the fragile process of creating music through his descriptions of the members of the quartet re-tuning their instrument and re-initializing their hearts and practicing a four minute encore for an hour"

(Pandurang:163). Carey points out that by using the quartet as a focal point, Seth deals with some problems of writing about music, “by putting music back into the people who perform it... You come at the music through their hopes, quarrels, ambitions, loves, professional contracts they have to make with the agents, critics, instrument makers, players...”(1999:13). However the intense discussion on Schubert, Schumann and Bach sometimes becomes tedious and boring. There is a bit of German words and phrases throughout the narration without any translation which makes the novel somewhat difficult for an ordinary reader.

Characters:

The novel as it a tale of love and music focuses on the central character of the novel, Michael Holmes. Seth’s attitude towards his characters is sympathetic and particularly in this novel *An Equal Music* the satirical tone of the previous works is absent. He tries to justify the character of Michael by retelling the story of his past, parents and teachers. It is in fact a tragic story of Michael’s passionate love and Seth reveals almost all aspects of his personality to give reader enough ground to justify him in the context of this. His attitude towards the privileged children can be clearly noticed as a reaction of an underprivileged person, when he reacts angrily to Luke, who is entitled to an education in music, while “tearing music out of the lives of poorer children. Now children, say your LMN. Literature, Musicate and Numerate. Now once again all together: Illiterate, Immusicate, Innumerate. These sainted powers will starve you of music as surely as the damned. Leave music to those who can afford indulgences. In twenty years no butcher’s son will be a violinist, no, nor daughter, neither”(346). His can never make himself free from the memories of his past as a butcher’s son and dismissive attitude towards mass music is the result of this.

Seth gives enough understanding of his behavior and thus at psychological level all his actions and reaction to the society, towards other co musicians of the quartet, his fear of losing Julia and his violin Tononi all these can be understood from a psychological point of view. Seth prefers the traditional mode to post modernist ways of writing. His characters lack the psychological depth of the fully developed characters. They all fall in the category of flat characters. But here in the case of Michael Seth has given some hints that focus on his present behavior. Seth has also dealt with the world of musicians. Michael's co-musicians: Helen, Billy and Piers, are also discussed in the light of his behavior and relations with them. Carl Kaell and Mrs. Formby occupy the place of surrogate parents in Michael's life—they are his parents in music, whose roles in the novel are of greater consequence than that of his one surviving real parent . Even as the novel painstakingly and fully creates the world in which the characters live and perform, “the characters themselves” appear one-dimensional. While Michael represents the intense, brooding artist, the other three members of the quartet are rendered in clichéd terms. Helen is a rather silly woman, oblivious to the world around her except when she is playing the viola. Piers is a bitter and offensive homosexual who has lost his lover and whose characterization borders on the homophobic. Billy is a gentle but boring and pedantic man. Michael's reclaimed lover Julia is depicted as beautiful, elegant, and refined, and she is a gifted pianist, a devoted mother, and an unfaithful wife; yet these attributes and capacities remain unconvincing. Because the focus stays on the musicians, those who surround them are little more than undeveloped walk-ons, each one fashioned in predictable terms.

To varying degrees, the significance of these secondary characters is restricted to their significance to Michael, who is very much at the center of the book. It is his search for "an equal music"—peace, contentment, freedom from the emotional turmoil that haunts him—that the

novel details. Some characters—Julia and Mrs. Formby, for instance—are drawn **more** fully than others, such as Piers, Helen, and Billy. One key figure, Carl Kaell, enters the novel only through two brief letters and Michael's unhappy memories of him. Ultimately, though, all of these other figures simply form the psychological landscape through which Michael journeys, and it is the narrator himself who demands our most careful attention.

Michael suffers from a depression that appears to date from a crisis in his past—a breakdown of sorts that drove him to London from Vienna, suddenly ending both his troubled relationship with his teacher, Carl Kaell, and his apparently fine one with Julia McNicholl, the woman he continues to regard as the love of his life. At the novel's outset, Michael is frozen in that ten-year-old moment, still in London, his chosen city of exile situated metaphorically between Vienna and his home, the northern town of Rochdale and still desperately longing for a woman whom he has neither seen nor spoken to in a decade. Seth depicts Michael's movement out of this emotional paralysis toward a partial but, for him, apparently sufficient resolution.

The plot:

An Equal Music as compared the previous novel *A Suitable Boy* is smaller in size, but it is quite extensive, as Seth successfully weaves the ordinary tale of love and longing into the world of western classical music. The novel portrays the panic attacks of a passionate lover, longing for his lost love and his ecstatic performances simultaneously. His character has been presented in such a way that the reader can recall him in his association to the quartet, his wandering around London, his relationships with women, his thoughts etc. Seth weaves this tale of intense love and that of music a manner that it becomes sheer impossible to view either of them separately. The plot line moves round Michael's passionate relationship with music and his intense love for

Julia. His 12-year old attachment to his 270 year old Tanoni violin and his longing for the woman, whom he lost twice, frames the central theme of the novel.

Seth has also dealt with the world of music and musician, while retelling the story of love and attachment as a literary craftsman. His love for the strange and unfamiliar is apparent in the character of the hero, Michael. He belongs to a northern working class family. His father was a butcher and Michael returns to the small town of Rochdale on three different occasions. His desire to escape his past is largely due to his childhood experiences. At the age of nine when he gets an opportunity to see a concert by “the small and ailing Barbiolli”, Michael decides to be a musician. The problems that he encountered on the path of his goal to be a part of the world of music are all described with a fine blending of pathos and irony. Michael has to live with the guilt of his mother letting down. He fails to fulfill his obligations as a son to the family. He is determined to cut off links with the “distressed and constrained town”.

Seth’s love for the western classical music enables him to take the readers in the world of music. The consummate performance of Schubert’s Trout and the quartet’s use of first contrapunctus of Bach’s *Art of Fugue* for an encore all have been portrayed with extensive detailing. He has presented all musical technicalities in a lucid descriptive manner. However, all these are not comprehensible to a reader who is not familiar with fugues, adagios and allegros.

Julia whom Michael loved passionately as a student in Vienna enters the story towards the end of part two. Michael is not able to make himself free from the memories of his relationship with Julia. Their reunion takes place after ten years and at the time when Julia is married and has a son. Michael and Julia get to re-live the past and Julia is persuaded by Michael to join him for ten days in Venice. Michael comes to know about Julia’s deafness from her seven year old son,

Luke. Julia, the pianist is suffering from the auto-immune disease of the inner ear. She is gradually going deaf and lip reading and a concealed hearing aid will continue to help her. She still plays piano, but that playing is from her memory and imagination as well as her power to watch other players movements. She also describes the psychological trauma she passed through and her husband's tremendous support which helped her to come out of the state and got her to play again. Her agony as a musician makes it more touchy and poignant when she says; "Music is the heart of my life. For me, of all people, to be betrayed by my ears was unbearable" (150).

The character of Julia is portrayed by the novelist leaves a memorable impression of a strong willed lady on the mind of the reader. When Michael deserts her, she was heartbroken, but she does not allow her grief to control her passion for both life and music. She develops her career as a pianist, devotes herself to her child and learns to love James, her husband. And when she discovers that she is gradually losing her power to hear and becoming deaf, she faces the challenge with courage and determination. When Julia meets Michael again, her deafness has began to disrupt her life. At this very sensitive juncture of her life she falls back into an affair with him, as she had been "so hungry to speak of music- and to play it with someone who understand me as I was before I- before all these changes in my life"(137). They respond quite differently to this new situation. Julia accepts the transient happiness the relationship gives her but at the same quickly sees the impossibility of it. She cannot come to terms with living in "dual world which chafe with each other"(168). Her feeling of betrayal and guilt brings her involvement with Michael to an end. Michael does not wish to have an end to this relationship, but at the same he does not have any practical suggestion as to how they can manage to get it. On their last night together, Michael is frustrated and enraged by Julia's determination to go back to her husband. He viciously bites her on the neck. At the end of the novel Julia is seen back with

her husband and deep in *The Art of Fugue* and Michael is back where he was at the beginning, nursing the pain of recapitulated loss.

Another important issue that has been dealt with in the main plot line of the novel is Michael's 12 year old attachment to 270-year-old instrument; Tanoni violin. This violin belongs to a rich widow Mrs. Framby, who has lent it to Michael. He despairs of living a life without the violin. He is traumatized thinking about his life without this violin and cannot tolerate the thought of it lying "unplayed, unloved and unspeaking"(56). Seth's attitude towards his characters is always sympathetic and in presenting Michael's attachment to an inanimate object Seth has revealed his humanitarian attitude. However, from the first mention of his attachment to this violin, reader knows that Michael will not be separated from his Tanoni. Mrs. Framby is presented as a true lover of music and the lover within her will never allow her to leave this precious possession in the wrong hand of her nephew.

When Michael hears the news of Mrs. Framby's death, he realizes that he is left with only a few months with his intimate violin. He says, "I've spent more time with it than with any living soul, but, well it's still not mine. And I'm not its"(127). Seth's power of describing emotion has rendered the violin a life of blood and flesh. He very poignantly describes the intimate relationship between a man and an instrument in the words of Michael; "with the back of my hand I touch its back, its belly. How long we have lived together". When Michael gets into the state of utter despair due to his dual loss, Mrs. Framby's solicitor informs him that she had bequeathed the Carlo Tononi, circa 1727 to him. He unable to believe this asks Mrs. Framby's soul, "What possessed you to repossess me of it, you were close to death and lacked clear speech? Is it the violin alone you want to give me, or must learn some lessons from the

world?”(361). It brings him back to life. His relationship with the violin is ultimately the most satisfying and intimate one left to him.

An Equal Music has received high praise among many Indian reviewers. Seth got the *Crosswords Prize* for best fiction for 1999. Shobha De goes to the extent of regarding *An Equal Music* as “a masterpiece’ in her review of the book in *The Sunday Observer*(1999:6). Seth has been praised by reviewers for following his instincts and opting for the universality and transcending power of beauty of music. His place in the canon of Indian writers as well as the international writers is argued on the basis of the universality of his theme and treatment. Seth is a gifted artist; he has the power of transforming the ordinary into extraordinary. The ordinary tale of a musician’s lost love receives the best possible expression in the setting of the musical world of Bach, Beethoven and Schubert, that it acquires the power of a literary classic. Seth handles the story set in San Francisco, in a fictional city of India and in the European cities; London, Venice and Vienna with equal ease and intimacy. He does not write the story as an outsider, he is an insider in all the three novels. He employs the narrative, technical and literary devices with the ease and aptness of a literary craftsman. Though a student in Economics, his works reveal him as a man well-equipped in poetic craftsmanship and well versed in English language.

In the contemporary literary scenario, Vikram Seth has been often compared with Salman Rushdie. Moreover, the publication of Rushdie’s *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* at the time of the publication of *An Equal Music* also created comparison between two writers from the same country as the central theme of both the novel revolves round the world of music. In this respect, Jyotirmaya Sharma in his review of the book in *The Sunday Times of India* (1999, April 11) opines that “Rushdie inaugurated the arrival of a new form, an entirely different style which was welcomed the literati like the appearance of a new comet. The triumph of the new genre lay in

its ability to shock, questions the sacred and re-evaluate values.” In contrast, Vikram Seth’s novel restores one’s faith in the fictional form. It is a book written with “a bone-bleached economy of expressions and emotions.” As the novel progresses, it implores the reader into a “lucid silence”.

Indeed *An Equal Music* provides a journey of lyrical and emotive writing to the reader. It is a tale of love and longing. The narrator takes the readers into the realm of music and his personal emotions. The novel presents this memorable story in the dramatic settings of Vienna, Venice and London. Seth has skillfully and brilliantly interwoven the story of love and music. The novel because of its musical and technical qualities succeeds in establishing Seth’s position in the canon of international novelists.

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