

Vikram Seth's Social and Realistic Approach in A Suitable Boy

Dr. Anjali Harangaonker

Associate Professor

Lakhmichand Institute of Technology

Bilaspur

HHH

Abstract

Vikram Seth is one of the most significant Indian novelists of today. His realistic narration, characterization, peopling of the plot with commonplace characters, adherence to truthfulness and plausibility and his unique social concern. The author has stressed his narration around the everyday reality of common people in *A Suitable Boy*. As a true classical realist Seth relies on middleclass characters and their sensibilities and due importance is given to the lower working-class sections of the people at various positions in the novel. *A Suitable Boy* explores many aspects of Indian life: arranged marriage, independence, love, family, politics, culture, poverty, individualism - all under the social manners. *A Suitable Boy* is a typical novel where marriage is the subject and Seth's treatment of the theme is an artistic way to cover the passion of Lata for Kabir, a Muslim boy, over duties and responsibility towards family. Seth's artistic expression objectifies both self and world can be traced with the imagination of human being. Seth's novels are based onto global historical changes and the innovativeness introspective reflection persists in the themes.

Key words: plausibility, explores, innovative, typical

A Suitable Boy, the novel, follows four families during 18 months, and centres on Mrs. Rupa Mehra's efforts to arrange the marriage of her younger daughter, Lata, to "A Suitable Boy". Vikram Seth's novel, *A Suitable Boy* has various themes such as, Religious Intolerance, Love and Marriage personal, prejudice and forgiveness, conflict amidst social groups and families, changing racial norms, unexpected violence, and inter-generational connectedness. *A Suitable Boy* is the story of four families in India in the early 1950s after British occupation has ended and the India/Pakistan Partition has taken place. The novel insists to recognize a positive point under the Indian culture of racial castes and arranged marriages. A great agreement of attempt is put into vision on the part of a family to discover *A Suitable Boy* for their unmarried daughters. Vikram Seth likewise reasonably portrays the social and political image of post free India. In his likeness we prominently locate the amazing mix and blend of the social situation and individual portrayal loaded with sharp perception and certain aim.

Vikram Seth's novel is, at its core, a love story: Lata and her mother, Mrs. Rupa Mehra, are both trying to find -- through love or through exacting maternal appraisal -- *A Suitable Boy* for Lata to marry. Set in the early 1950s, in an India newly independent and struggling through a time of crisis. The novel takes us into the richly imagined world of four large extended families and spins a compulsively readable tale of their lives and loves. A sweeping panoramic portrait of a complex, multiethnic society in flux. *A Suitable Boy* remains the story of ordinary people caught up in a web of love and ambition, humor and sadness, prejudice and reconciliation, the most delicate social etiquette and the most appalling violence. The novel alternately offers satirical and earnest examinations of national political issues in the period leading up to the first post-Independence national election of 1952 including Hindu-Muslim strife, the status of lower caste peoples such as the jatav, land reform and the eclipse of the feudal princes and landlords, academic affairs, abolition of the Zamindari system, family relations and a range of further issues of importance to the characters. Through characters Seth attempted to show the loss of confidence, relationship and solidarity among the differing Indian society. The household life and singularity is being influenced by the political and social changes; which is valid in these days moreover.

Vikram Seth is one of the most significant Indian novelists of today. He has given a new dimension and depth to the novel for the narrative purpose. Although he is Indian by birth, by life style he is Diaspora. He stands as a new comer in the stream of Indo English literature. He has made significant contribution to enrich Indian English novel with respect to both theme and techniques. The cultural tradition of making arranged marriages for Indian children of the higher castes, he manages to insert the sense of disenfranchisement between Hindu and Muslim in reference to political intrigues at the time. These political involvements are kept from being dry historical facts by the active involvement of the various members of the four families in the novel. Lata and her best friend, Malati, serves as foils for discussion of the social situations in the novel. In *An Illustrated History of Indian Literature* in

English, Jon Mee, analyzing the post-Salman Rushdie/ Midnight's Children writers, calls Seth's novel "classic realism," but says despite that it is difficult not to see it "as an allegory of nationhood...., subscribing to an idea of Indian history as a progress towards the goal of a secular, commercial society in the image of conventional Western models of national development." Although Lata shows signs of independence, "the novel is ultimately one of conformity and what it represents as the inevitability of bourgeois life," argues Mee.

A Suitable Boy is set in Brahmampur, a fictionalized Northern Indian city on the banks of the Ganges River. The action takes place sometime around in 1950 to 1952, four to five years after India gained Independence from Great Britain in 1947. The novel is the best example of continuation of the tradition of arranged marriage as true to the times of 1950s. In India, marriage is a well-established institution which presupposes certain customs and rites, various values, issues and obstacles. Marriage in India does not merely mean the meeting of two individuals, but it signifies mixing and mingling of two families and involves respecting and understanding the customs and tradition as well as the members of each other's families. This makes the parents especially the mother, more responsible to install in her daughter the good values that she is able to maintain balance the human relationships and values. The stories of these families bring in other issues of the value of work, the process of change, the injustice of poverty, and the direction taken by the newly independent and democratic India. The novel is not only a love story but also a depiction of India. . The theme of *The Suitable Boy* stands as a hallmark of traditional Indian customs and culture.

The plots of *A Suitable Boy* are structured around pursuit or search and this gives force and coherence to the novel. Mrs. Mehra is in search of *A Suitable Boy* for Lata; Dipankar is in search for a spiritual base; Mr. Mahesh Kapoor is in search of a political base and the Nawab is in search of his feudal stability. All these searches are centered in the period of 1951-52, the period of newly free country, embarking on the path of finding a permanent footing internally and externally. *A Suitable Boy* shows up in the verifiable family with ordered occasions which adjusts the anecdotal characters, who goes at the same time following one another. The novelist appears to be rising up out of the content as storyteller of the story and furthermore a character inside the novel. In *A Suitable Boy* Seth achieves this by the faithful representation of a vibrant society with all its intricacies and potentials.

According to Malcolm Bradbury, *A Suitable Boy* "is a vast chronicle novel of post-Independence Indian life, and

one of the more startling works of the early Nineties."

A writer's social consciousness in society while observing its various formations. It can also be defined as social awareness; to be aware of the problems that different societies communities he shares within a and face on a day-to-day basis; to be conscious of the different cultural, political and civic aspects. The factors that form various strata of society interact with the cognitive and biological processes of the writer, while he lives in the society. This interaction slowly shapes the reaction of the writer to his society and his inner and outer experiences add to this process. he society. *A Suitable Boy*, the central motif of the novel is the search for a companion in life. A vast, panoramic tale charting the fortunes of four large families and exploring India and its rich and varied culture at a crucial point in its history. Seth's social consciousness enables him to make an almost photographic representation of many of India's cultural and religious festivities in *A Suitable Boy* and in addition to this; he makes a thorough analysis of the formative years of post-independent India by exploring the history of the period by concretizing certain historical figures in his fictional world. Thus, he has made a two pronged strategy-one cultural and the other; political-armed with the essential assimilatory social consciousness a creative writer should possess to complete his unbiased and faithful representation of the Indian society. A kaleidoscopic presentation of India's varied religious and cultural festivities are strewn in the length and breadth of *A Suitable Boy*. Thus, Seth has succeeded to achieve a panoramic view of the Indian society that can easily be assimilated by any reader from an alien culture. *A Suitable Boy* presents the mosaic of the common and multicultural, multi-lingual and multi-ethnic India. He acknowledges the demand of reproducing microcosm India with different dialects, cultures, social and customary issues. In the words of Ruth Morse, "*A Suitable Boy* is social satire and social history, from the politics of the great man to the maneuverings of a mother." *A Suitable Boy*, the novel of the record was not a small achievement in 1993, impressed critics and reviewers all over the world, "More than 8 lakhs words, kneaded in 478 sections of 19 parts in its 1347 pages, weighting about fifteen hundred grams." One of the major characteristics of the realist novel is its preponderance of middle-class life Indian society of the 50s is witnessing the gradual growing up of this particular segment. British Raj left in India a class of anglophiles who became executives in the earlier positions occupied by the British master. They are a class apart, engaged themselves in consumerism and pomposity. The snobbishness of this particular class forms a major chunk of *A Suitable Boy*. They share the cultural

lineages of the whites and are whites in their souls albeit Indians in physic. Arun and Meenakshi are the typical representatives of this class. There's something about long-drawn, multi-threaded family sagas. A fascination that becomes habit in watching lives unfold with all their strange complexity, the simple yet irresolvable tensions between members and the oftentimes quirky motivations that guide them. All of which present necessary insights and grant us an easy omniscience as well. Seth's novel, however, presented difficulties in adaptation. With one central storyline - finding A Suitable Boy for Lata Mehra - there were myriad other stories branching out in small and big ways. Some assumed critical importance, others meandered away into too easy resolute ions.

Regarding politics, M.K. Bhatnagar says: "In a society characterized by widespread ignorance and illiteracy with fatalistic and other worldly attitudes, religion becomes a tool of exploitation."

Seth's novel is a quintessential Indian story, or as has been said, it's the one big Indian novel telling the big story of newly independent India. There is the suspense-filled courtroom trial in the very last episode, echoing similar scenes in countless films over the decades. On the other hand, Seth's description of what will transpire at Maan's trial is elegant in its simplicity, especially when he writes of a crucial exchange between the Nawab of Baitar and his son.

James Beatlie Expresses his views which is quite similar with Vikram Seth: "A great part of our fashionable music seems intended rather to tickle and astonish the hearers, than to inspire them with any permanent emotions . . . Simplicity makes music, as well as language intelligible and expressive . . . In music it is indispensable, for we are never pleased with that music which we cannot understand and which seems to have no meaning, who is good enough, but not someone she's in love with: Haresh. As the saga concludes, Lata Mehra finally makes her decision: she will not marry Kabir. Instead, she marries another 'suitable boy.' Thus, Indian English fiction may be regarded as "a systematic study of cultural contact and cultural change, with Indian world view at the focus" and "knowledge of acculturation process."

With his representation of India in the 1950s, Vikram Seth's A Suitable Boy (1993) has appropriated the nineteenth-century realist tradition in novel writing to his own ends. The Nehruvian idea of India as a 'unity within diversity' and a secular approach to religion features prominently in this novel. The ordinary human experiences are subjected to observation and logical analysis. Realism recognizes the fact that, as the naturalist

supposes, it cannot rest either on a lifeless average or on an individual principle which dissolves its own self into nothingness. True realists are always striving for truthfulness. They have an intense desire for probity and are sincere and honest in describing the situations and characters. A well-defined form coupled with characterization made his work something other than a mere photographic representation of reality, social concern also helped them to model their types according to their ideological stands. Seth's effort is to tame the receding reality in the works of art. This striving of man to know truth and its representation is the manifesto of realism.

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