

Thematic Analysis in The Novels of Vikram Seth

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Abstract

Vikram Seth is one of the most significant Indian novelists of today. 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. Seth's greatest achievement is the narrative voice, which is always self-effacing and utterly transparent. Themes and issues are presented with a steady consistency of imaginative objectivity in his novels. Seth's characters are defined not so much through a description of their consciousness, self-expressive or views of themselves. But through their relationship with others and other's view of them. His characters in the novels crave the basic human desires.

Keywords: Vikram Seth, *The Golden Gate*, *A Suitable Boy*, *An Equal Music*,

1. Introduction

Vikram Seth is one of the most significant Indian novelists of today. He has given a new dimension and depth to the novel by using the sonnet form for the narrative purpose. Although he is Indian by birth, by life style he is diasporic. 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. Vikram Seth is better known as an Indian poet, novelist, travel writer, author, children's writer, biographer and also memoirist.

1.1. Vikram Seth's works -

His novels are *The Golden Gate* (1986), *A Suitable boy* (1993), *An Equal Music* (1999) and upcoming novel *A Suitable Girl*. His poetry includes *Mappings* (1980), *From Heaven Lake* (1983), *The Humble Administrator's Garden* (1985), *All You Who Sleep*

Tonight: Poems (1990) and *Three Chinese Poets* (1992). His children's book, *Beastly Tales from Here and There* (1992) consists of ten stories about animals.

1.2 Awards

- Thomas Cook Travel Book Award (1983 –Travel book – Heaven Lake)
- Common Wealth Poetry prize (1985 – Poem Humble Administrator's Garden)
- Sahitya Akademi Award (1988- The Golden Gate)
- Common wealth writers prize (1993- A Suitable Boy)
- W H Smith literary award (1994- A Suitable Boy)
- Cross word Book award (1999-an Equal Music)
- Emma for best book (2001- An Equal Music)
- Pravasi Bharatiya Samman (2005)
- Padma Shri in Literature and Education (2007)
- 25th greatest global living legends in India (2013)

Vikram Seth is one important writer on the horizon of Indian English literature. His three novels depict the stories set in different countries and of the characters of different backgrounds. It allows the reader to get a comparative picture of endangered nature across the world. His characters vary from the field of computers, engineering, education, politics and commerce to the world of music. These three novels are respectively set in the silicon valley of Californian bay area, India after independence and in London and Vienna.

2. The Golden Gate:

Vikram Seth's *The Golden Gate* comprises 594 sonnets written in iambic tetrameter and follows the fourteen line stanza pattern of Eugene Onegin. Eugene Onegin is written in verses of iambic tetrameter with the usual rhyme scheme 'aBaBccDDeFFeGG' where the lower case letters represent masculine rhymes. This form is known as the 'Onegin stanza'.

The novel is divided into thirteen chapters and is neatly balanced in its presentation of the episodes that are carefully conceived segments of the essential communication of the work. The span of the tale covering a period from the month of September to that of

November next is a little over a year and the passage of time is recorded in terms of depictions of the passing seasons typical of the Californian Bay area.

There are five main characters in *The Golden Gate* all of them interconnected: John Brown, his girlfriend, Elisabeth Dorati (Liz); his friend and later Liz's husband, Phil Weiss; Liz's Brother Ed Dorati; and Janet Hayakawa, John's friend and good angel. Besides there are two children, Phil's son Paul, and Chuck, the son of Phil's neighbours, the Lamonts. John is the central character and his life can be divided into three phases: his initial loneliness, his relationship with Liz, and his life afterwards.

The main protagonist John is a successful corporate engineer, who feels lonely with his mechanical life. His one-time girlfriend Janet places an ad in a personal column on his behalf and through it; John meets Liz Dorati, an elegant and warm-hearted lawyer. An instant attraction brings them together, and they set up home only to drift apart due to opposing views on politics and social ethics, the process accelerated by John's hatred of Liz's pet cat Charlemagne.

The novel is basically the story of a man who is unhappy in his life and ends up much the same way as he begins – a lonely and depressed human begins. At the end, we realize that catharsis and enlightens has taken place for John. He is unhappy from beginning of the novel to the end of the novel. But in the course of the time, he comes some way towards understanding, and tolerance, towards connection with the rest of mankind. John is selfish, rigid, uncompre- hending, independent of family, and an agent of destruction. His life has come full circle and his bittersweet experience of life has made him a mature and better human being.

3. A Suitable Boy

Vikram Seth's second novel *A Suitable Boy*, released in 1993. It is the longest book in a single volume. The novel is divided into nineteen parts with One Thousand and Four Hundred pages. Each part is described by a rhyming couplet. The story of four families over a period of 18 months as a mother searches for a suitable boy to marry her daughter. *A Suitable Boy* is set in Brahmpur, 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 most realized and emotional character is Mrs. Rupa Mehra who has only one mission left in life to arrange a proper marriage for her youngest daughter, Lata. Mother and daughter are generation apart in their ideas, but not surprisingly they eventually do reach an agreement of sorts, as a result of which they find that they are closer than they had ever imagined. Mrs. Rupa Mehra is a woman who is determined to take care of her family at any cost, in fact, to take care of them even if they do not wish to be taken care of

Lata is a nineteen year old college girl, vulnerable yet determined to have her own way, and not be influenced by her strong mother and opinionated brother Arun. Her story revolves around the choice she is forced to make between her suitors Kabir, Haresh and Amit. The search for a suitable boy for Lata is four parallel stories, encompassing four families: the Mehras, the Kapoors, the Chatterjees, and the Khans. Together these families furnish the social structure of post-independence India. Connected by either marriage or friendship, these four families cleverly balance a saga of social manners with a historical account of the Indian sub-continent trying its fledgling wings amidst the chaos of political, religion, language, the land reform movement and so on.

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.

Vikram Seth portrays the world of past-independence women in detail. His women are associated with family clusters. He portrays a patriarchal world. Male heads of family

such as Mahesh Kapoor and the Nawab of Baitar celebrate the ideal domestic space as that where men and women live within the specific roles delegated to them.

As a novel of social realism, *A Suitable Boy* ascribes to a society where men and women through understanding and empathy, are able to create a balance with self and society. Through the theme of marriage, the novel unobtrusively depicts the fractured nation, its problems and failures pervading the different tenets of society.

4. An Equal Music

Vikram Seth's third novel *An Equal Music* is the tale of an emotionally volatile musician Michael Holme and his gradual recovery of the self. The backdrop of the novel is the enchanted, romantic world of contemporary London, Vienna and Venice and the subject is Western Europe's supreme cultural achievement: classical music. Brilliantly interweaving the themes of loss, longing and power of music, Vikram Seth has created a deeply moving story about the strands of excitement that run through all our lives. The book is about the unspeakable pain of violinist.

An Equal Music by Vikram Seth is a classic in every sense of the world. An exceptional novel is often woven out of the lives of exceptional people. It is a novel of musicians who dedicated their life to music. Music has been presented in this novel as a noble addiction. Michael and Julia are musicians. The book centres on two gifted musicians: Michael Holme and Julia McNicholl.

As Michael works on a Beethoven piece for the Maggiore Quartet, he grows increasingly preoccupied with recollections of his student days in Vienna where he met Julia. When the two are re-united by chance in London, their relationship is re-kindled. One of the most impressive aspects of this novel is the way in which it manages to convey music through language. While Seth is modest about his musical abilities, the fact that he was commissioned to write a libretto for the English National Opera in 1994 suggests he is no novice.

5. Conclusion

Seth's greatest achievement is the narrative voice, which is always self effacing and utterly transparent. Themes and issues are presented with a steady consistency of imaginative objectivity. His three novels have been virtuoso performances and for serious literature

immensely successful with the reading public, and translated in many languages. Each novel has been very different from the others and has taken an older literary form in unexpected new dimensions.

He writes the novel in the Omniscient. It is as though the reader is looking through windows into the family relationships and the mental and emotional attitudes of the individual characters. Seth's characters are defined not so much through a description of their consciousness, self-expressive or views of themselves. But through their relationship with others and other's view of them. His characters in the novels crave the basic human desires.

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