

RESEARCH PAPER



AN ELEMENT OF MULTICULTURALISM IN VIKRAM SETH'S A SUITABLE BOY

ABSTRACT

A Suitable Boy is one of the greatest masterpiece written by an Indian writer in English, Vikram Seth. He is an internationally prestigious writer. He is an Indian novelist and poet. He was awarded with Sahitya Academy Award and several awards as well. Seth's collection of poetry such as *Mappings* and *Beastly Tales* are notable contribution to the Indian English language poetry canon. He has written his immense variety of literary works while in three continents. For him 'the world is his stage and its people his characters', no matter to which nation, color, creed or caste or the background to which they belongs. He is not only restricted to the diasporic writing but is a universal acclaimed writer. Seth's perspective is that of a globalised Indian, who views the world through a prism which may be multicolored but is one. He once said, "if you are tapped on the shoulder and inspired to do something, you don't say, 'my training isn't in this'. I just let the imagination work" (Gupta p.11). This paper is an attempt to throw light on the elements of multiculturalism in his select novel *A Suitable Boy*. His multicultural milieu adds to his artistic skills which has helped him in bringing his English writings on to the stage of world literature.

KEY WORDS : Multiculturalism, Cultural Identity, Materialistic attitude, Political involvement

INTRODUCTION

The concept of multiculturalism endorses the idea of difference and heterogeneity that is embodied in the concept of diversity. The concept of multiculturalism contributes to this agenda of democratization and non discrimination. First it locates cultural identity as a source of discrimination in society. Second it argues that equality for diverse cultures requires a system of special group differentiated rights.

The study of Vikram Seth particularly *A Suitable Boy* brings to light the various reactions of the ideology of Multiculturalism. This novel is nothing but a story which examines the interworkings and travails of four families the Kapoors (Punjabi), the Mehras (Punjabi), the Chatterjis (Bengali), and the Khans (Muslim). This novel is a tale of a hindu family looking for a suitable husband for their daughter. Vikram Set sets up the major conflicts in the novel. 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, serve as foils for discussion of the social situations in the novel. The setting is post-independence India of the 1950's at the end of the colonial rule and the beginning of the Indian republic and industrialization Indian slowly pace towards the materialism. As it is mentioned by Seemla Mohanty through industrialization , materialistic life enters in India and creates the high middle class : Just as the industrial Revolution affected the England of Austin. Nehru's socialist and industrial Revolution affected the India of the likes of Nirad C. Chaudhary, a sharp observer of the Indian scene writes "A far stronger force in



actual fact, the only positive force, is the Hindu 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 , let to the birth of a middle class, find it increasingly difficult to search suitable boys for their daughters". (Mohanty Seemita,2007:70-171).

This is one of the longest novel ever written by Vikram Seth. The novel centers on Mrs. Rupa Mehra's efforts to arrange the marriage of her younger daughter Lata, with a "suitable boy". We can say it as a love story set in a young, newly independent India. The novel opens with a wedding ceremony that brings the four main families together and thereby allows Seth to place his main characters right away onto his canvas. Lata is a 19 years old college girl, vulnerable yet determined to have her own way, and not be influenced by her strong mother and brother Arun. Her story revolves around the choice she is forced to make between her suitors Kabir, Haresh and Amit. This novel encompasses the various issues faced by post-independence Indian including Hindu-Muslim strife, zamindari system, land reforms and empowerment of Muslim women. Seth introduces a large caste of other characters drawn from across religions, languages, class and caste.

The novel stands as a hallmark of traditional Indian customs and culture. It is nothing but the choosing a suitable bridegroom. It is nothing but the search India's development in all the strata of the entire society after freedom. In this novel Vikram Seth offers a tremendous , thick and multilayered slice of Indian life, in its all encompassing serve to counter too much spread false views of India. He focuses on the society which is the symbol of high society : Just as George Eliot examined the great political and social changes in an earlier England, as Seth, writing in 1990s recreates the period of transition (1951-52), after independence (1947) but without Eliot's demanding critical dimension" (Mohanty, Seemita,2007: 163). The picture of the Chatterji's family is nice portrait of materialistic life of metropolitan city Calcutta.

Calcutta is the suitable choice for the setting of a cosmopolitan family like the Chatterji's as Calcutta was the social, cultural and political capital of the British in those days, long before Delhi became the centre of things. For writing on the materialistic life in India in 1950-52, Seth should choose Calcutta as it is the city of changing India of that time. Seth points out that students riots and protests were taking place in places like Lucknow to support this observation". The stories of these four 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. It portrays only a specific piece of it, the middle and upper classes of North Indian society in the early 1950s. Its depiction is broadly speaking, comic and tone varies but is most often light, and the plot finishes with a wedding, which is traditionally nothing but an happy ending.

The Hindu and Muslim characters are mostly opposite to each other. Almond observes that in Seth's presentation Muslim's "are more serious , more melancholy, more self-discipline, and with the kinds of goals and expectations which self discipline connotes somehow mor repressed, more unhappy, more replete with possibilities for the tragic" (Almond 46-7). Characters from Muslim and Hindu families embody traditions and the emergent transitions that relates to cultural and individual liberty and the making of identity. With its many pages of byzantine subplots, upto five at a time woring together in a parallel display of Tolstoyan complexity, Seth presents a fairly equal number of Hindu and Muslim sympathetic characters, along with an equal number of authorial remonstrations for the fanatical excesses of both faiths (Almond 43). Seta, despite presents an objective view of the community-oriented Indian society, do not ignore the tragic interviewing of religion and politics, the ancient rivalry between Hindu and Muslim, the underlying suspicion and resentment that can be blown into flame at any moment by unscrupulous office seekers or bigoted religious leaders (Gupta 64). Howevor one might sc in his portrayal of Muslims a

