



## CRITICAL ANALYSIS IN A SUITABLE BOY BY VIKRAM SETH

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### ABSTRACT

*Vikram Seth's novel, A Suitable Boy has some themes such as, The Suitable Boy, Religious Intolerance, Love and Marriage. 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. Indian girls gain more independence like going out shopping in small groups of friends and attending university curriculum there occur a clash between many girls and their families above the plan of an arranged marriage. The novel contains a great many political intrigues that are difficult to follow and would be uninteresting were it not for the fact that various family members are involved in the action.*

**Key Words:** *Intolerance, partition, intrigues.*

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

Vikram Seth 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.

#### 2. METHODOLOGY

The relationship between the Hindu and Muslim communities, the importance of caste, love and marriage, and the family. These concerns are echoed and developed in the lives of four families around whom the narrative is organized. Three of them, the Mehras, Chatterjis, and kapoors, are related by marriage. The fourth family, the khans, are friends of the kapoors,

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large landowners and also, unlike the other three, Muslim. 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. 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 a happy ending.

## 2.1 THE SUITABLE BOY

The Suitable Boy is the central theme of the novel by that name. The idea comes from the Indian tradition of arranging marriages for eligible young girls with several points that comprise the ideal match. First, the boy must be of the same religion as the girl. This becomes the main hindrance between Lata, a Hindu, and Kabir, a Muslim. The only way they could have married was to elope and marry without their parents' permission. Another consideration is the caste or social standing of the boy and his family. The theme of The Suitable Boy also brings up the conflict between an arranged marriage and a marriage escaped on romantic love. Lata raises the question at the wedding of her sister to Pran Kapoor and concludes that it is good for Savita but possibly not good for her.

Mrs. Rupa takes the matter seriously and solicits help from relatives and close friends to keep an eye out for The Suitable Boy for Lata. To keep peace, Lata appears to go along with whatever her mother is doing, but she secretly questions whether she will follow her heart and marry Kabir with or without her mother's blessing. Interestingly, Lata eventually selects Haresh Khanna to be her husband, even though she does not love him. She comes to her conclusion, to the horror of her friend Malati, by recognizing religion would eventually create serious problems for her and Kabir and by the feeling that the love of literature would not be enough to sustain a marriage between her and Amit. Lata's reasoning includes the ideas that, eventually she will come to love Haresh, he will be able to support her comfortably, and she will enjoy stability in her married life. In antithesis to The Suitable Boy theme is Malati, Lata's friend, who is a free spirit and given to have relationships with whatever boy turns her fancy. In that regard, the theme of The Suitable Boy stands as a hallmark of traditional Indian customs and culture.

## 2.2 RELIGIOUS INTOLERANCE

The theme of Religious Intolerance runs heavily throughout the novel. Religious difference prevents Lata and Kabir from fulfilling their hearts' desires for each other. The Raja of Marh becomes the arch symbol of religious militancy with his erecting the Temple of Shiva next to a mosque. The phallic symbol of Shiva he intends to use as the pride and joy of the temple is an act of spite designed to insult Muslims. On both sides, riots and attacks occur in the name



of religion. Saeeda Bai, the courtesan, is disdained by the Hindu society more for her religion as a Muslim than for her lifestyle. When the holy days of both religions happen to agree, even death results when neither side is willing to give way to the other. The Religious Intolerance theme occurs when Maan travels to visit the family of Rasheed. He is only begrudgingly accepted by most of Rasheed's family after he demonstrates not so much his tolerance of their customs as his indifference to religion in general. That conclusion, runs thin after Maan is accused of attempted murder of the young Muslim man, Firoz Khan.

### 2.3 HINDU-MUSLIM RELATIONS

The relation between Muslims and Hindus as the Muslim courtesan, Saeeda Bai Firozabadi entertains at a party on the event of Holi, a Hindu festival. The festival which features throwing of bright colored pigments on people is thoroughly enjoyed by the younger Hindus but often shocking to the older generation who happen to get dry with color. There is a great deal of an Indian alcoholic drink passed around during Holi, and Maan Kapoor has a decided taste for the drink. Attending the party at the Kapoor house, Maan first becomes sensitive of Saeeda Bai and is immediately taken with her. Aside from her recitals at parties, Saeeda Bai is more or less kept by the Raja of Marh, a fact that does not get in the way Maan's love. Lata and Kabir had been to India's most romantic spot, the Barsaat Mahal, and now Maan goes there where he finds Firoz who fills him in on the latest conversation about him and Saeeda Bai. The Raja of Marh, visiting Saeeda Bai, rips a page out of a book of Urdu poems given to the courtesan by Maan. The page is an illustration of Muslims at prayer. The Raja of Marh is firm to raise a Temple to Shiva just west of the Alamgiri Mosque, which is bad enough in so far as the Imam is concerned but to make matters worse, the future Temple will have as its focus the recently found Phallus of Shiva which will be placed directly between the mosque and Mecca.

L. N. Agarwal, the Home Minister, becomes the attack point in the governmental inquiry over the police handling of the riot. Begum Abida Khan, a female Muslim MP, attacks Agarwal in Parliament. The main political conflict in the story is the Bihar Zamindari Act which is popular with the a lot who may gain land but unpopular with the zamindaris who stand to lose important holdings. In the course of the conflict between Begum Abida Khan and L. N. Agarwal, the house of Begum's family is almost lost.

### 2.3 LOVE AND MARRIAGE

The self-conscious situation continues into the entrance hall where Lata faces the old question from her grandfather as to why she is not married. Back at school, Lata suffers a complete block as she stares at the questions on her English exam. Outside the exam, Lata meets up with Kabir again by accident. Lata goes to her friend Malati where they discuss Lata's interest in the boy from the bookstore. Two days later, Lata and Malati run into the



handsome boy again at a music recital. Malati recognizes that Lata is falling in love with Kabir. She begins by meeting him at a poetry club gathering which soon graduates into walks and eventually a river boat trip to Barsaat Mahal. The two young people fall in love in spite of Lata's discovery that he is Muslim. She confides in her sister, Savita, who advises that she not tell their mother talk however, travels fast and Mrs. Rupa Mehra soon learns of the situation which she fears will forever spoil any chances of marrying Lata off to a suitable boy. Mrs. Rupa carts Lata off quickly to Calcutta.

Kabir has learned of Lata's whereabouts and sends her a letter which she does not open for fear that her mother will come in any minute. Lata finally gets enough solitude to read Kabir's letter which reawakens the confusion and suffering in her. The outing with Amit produces a level of emotional attachment in Lata who enjoys his knowledge of poetry. The time is somewhat spoiled by a discussion of low caste servants. The subject of sexual prejudice comes up when Lata finds a newspaper article about how employment in the Foreign Service can employ only those women without encumbrances. Lata finally makes up her mind to answer Kabir's letter, expressing her feelings for him. Haresh is looking for a new job. He meets Mrs. Rupa who believes she has never seen him anywhere before although Haresh is convinced he has seen her. Mrs. Rupa believes Haresh might be a suitable boy and sends for Lata, but Haresh has gone to Kanpur. Lata is angry that she had been brought from Calcutta on false pretenses. Kalpana puts in a good word for Haresh. Kalpana writes to Haresh promoting a match between him and Lata. Haresh's life is one of effort and hard work, a fact of which Mrs. Rupa approves. Lata likes Haresh, but the thought of marrying him is unreasonable to her. Lata compares Kabir, Amit, and Haresh, and Haresh comes in a distant third. Haresh turns out to be an excellent host and takes great care of Mrs. Rupa and Lata. The interesting twist of connecting Haresh, Kabir, and Amit offers the reader an opportunity to consider the various merits of each of these characters. The man Lata finally chooses comes as rather of a surprise twist. Kabir does not attend the wedding, and Malati maintains her opinion that Lata has made a big mistake. Clearly Lata likes but does not yet love Haresh. There is a certain poignancy to her throwing food to the monkeys as the train pulls out, taking her to her new married life

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The novel continues throughout the novel centering mostly on the "suitable boy" theme played out in sub-plots involving Maan Kapoor and Saeeda Bai, Ishaq and Tasneem, and most especially Lata and Kabir and *suitable boys* to whom she is introduced in Calcutta. In the end, Lata resolves to give up Kabir and marry a *suitable boy* she likes but does not love. Aside from Lata's heartbreaking decision not to marry Kabir, there is little real ugliness in the novel outside of inter- and intra-family intrigues which Seth somehow manages to make interesting reading.



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