CHAPTER III

HISTORY, POLITICS AND ROMANCE IN VIKRAM SETH'S A SUITABLE BOY

The investigator in this chapter analyses the historical, political and romantic factors that are abundantly prevalent in A Suitable Boy by Vikram Seth. This is the second novel after the The Golden Gate, a novel in verse.

A Suitable Boy focuses on the experiences and entanglements of four moderately rich Indian families connected through marriage or friendship at a period of time when India was experiencing her post independence turbulences. It is primarily about the social, religious and familial customs of India and her people with the numerous characters serving as tools to illustrate the veracity of these customs. It is structured into nineteen well-crafted sub sections that allow Seth to move back and forth while telling the story of four families- the Mehras, the Kapoors, the Khans, and the Chatterjees who are related to each other by marriage and friendship. Each family has a minimum of four members who in one way or the other experience a series of turbulent emotions, which slowly season them towards life and its adversities. In addition, to these individuals, there are also hordes of other characters who contribute either in a major or in a minor way, to the development and the progress of the plot line.

A Suitable Boy is wholly set in India of early 50s when the process of nation building was taking place under the statesmanship of Jawaharlal Nehru. With regard to the main plot line, it centers on the question of finding a suitable partner for Lata, younger daughter of Mrs. Rupa Mehra. Three candidates present themselves; Amit Chaterjee, Bengal: poet and novelist, sophisticated, rich and a Brahmin. Kabir, a cricketer, dashing and handsome, but a Muslim, and Haresh, an energetic and bright young man determined to make a career for himself in the shoe manufacturing industry. Lata finally settles for Haresh.
But the main strength of the novel lies not in the business of matchmaking but in the depiction of social, physical, cultural, historical and romantic faces of India just after independence. Seth manages to interweave in a credible way all the larger themes of politics, culture, romance, society and history with the day to day ordinary human emotions of his true to life characters that have strong resemblance to Dickensian characters, over whom countless readers have laughed and cried. A multitude of characters and events through novel, the setting moves back and forth between the cities of Brahampur, which is fictional, and Culcutta and excursions to New Delhi, Kanpur and Lucknow and to the remote village in the north Indian identity is strengthened and stretched to make it a representative of India as a whole. The wide sweep of the novel gives Seth a chance to portray life in factitious northern state of Purvapradesh in its various aspects. The investigator brings out the historical, political and romantic aspects of India of early 50’s that is portrayed in *A Suitable Boy*.

At first, the researcher, of all these fronts mentioned above such as history, politics, and romance highlights the historical aspects that appear in *A Suitable Boy*. The fiction is set in early 50’s as mentioned earlier a few years after independence. Many occurrences of great historical importance have been registered in this work. Some key issues such as zamindar abolition bill which later paved the way for Land ceiling act, the efforts of Nehru in consolidating the nation and the election of Tandon as the President of Congress Party and its consequences and the ambience of first general election in 1951 have got recorded here. The investigator unearths and analyses the historical aspects of the then India. The constitution of India came into force in 1950 and it had been just one year old when the events and incidents that are mentioned in the work took place. Mahatma Gandhiji was no more. The nation was totally deprived of his guidance. The responsibility of building the nation was completely on the shoulders of Nehru, who had to play a pivotal role both in the congress party and the administration of the government. And how he had to tackle conventional and orthodox leaders in the party and how he
endeavored hard to prevent them from interfering with the administration of the government and in policy making are discussed later.

First, one of the landmark bills of young independent India, zamindari Bill and its far reaching impact on the nation and the hurdles and the challenges the policy makers had to encounter in enacting and implementing the law have been so accurately recorded in the novel. The main story takes place in an imaginary and fictional north Indian state called Purvapradesh the Chief Minister of which is Sharma and the revenue and home ministers of the state are Mahesh Kapoor and Agarwal respectively. Vikram Seth has structured this fictional state Purvapradesh in such a way that it stands for the whole of north India in all aspects such as, culture, religion, society, geography and politics. Zamindari abolition bill is the brain child of Mahesh Kapoor, the revenue minister of the state who is a staunch loyalist of Nehru and a strong supporter secular principles. In the loosely narrated story of romance between a Muslim boy, by name, Kabir and a young lady Lata, a Brahampur university student numerous episodes dealing with various other themes have been incorporated without affecting the course, effect and flow of the main story. One such sub theme of historical importance is Zamindari Abolition Bill. In the history of modern independent India, Zamindari Abolition Act turns out to be a milestone legislation which played a pivotal role in streamlining land related matters. It is preceded by the annexure of small kingdoms to Indian union, by the then Home Minister of India Vallapai Patel, known as iron man of India. Even after that, Zamindars were in possession of vast acreage of lands and sprawling estates where landless labourers toil hard to earn their livelihood. There is every possibility for the emergence of a situation where people belonging to the lower strata of society have to continue to remain as landless labourers and earn their bread.

In British India, such a Scenario, where the economically, socially and culturally underprivileged sections were denied justice was prevalent. But even after attaining freedom, when some sections of the nation live in absolute
luxury and the rest of the nation languish in poverty and starvation, it can not be defended and justified. With a view to equalizing the imbalances, disparities and discriminations among different sects of people in every spheres economy and agriculture, Zamindari Abolition Bill was introduced. Mahesh Kapoor a strong follower of Nehru and his principles of secularism, and socialism is strongly under the impression that it will bring about equality in the state and the gap between the haves and the have-nots would be bridged to a good extent. Even if it means that very influential landlords and powerful zamindars are to lose major portions of their estates, fields and land, Mahesh Kapoor does not step behind. One of the affected Zamindars Nawab Sahib of Baitar is a long time and close friend of the revenue minister Mahesh Kapoor.

Notwithstanding that, there is no friction between Nawab Sahib of Baitar and Mahesh Kapoor. The bill, which later becomes a law, imposing a ceiling on the possessions of lands by zamindars and landlords does not damage the mature and refined friendship between the duo. Mahesh Kapoor in the process has to incur the displeasure and wrath of the likes of Raja of Marh who strongly believes that the minister is responsible for the deprivation of their lands. But Mahesh Kapoor is committed to the goals of anti-feudalism, secularism and elimination of zamindari system. On personal front, he is also a determined fighter against feudalism, the evils of communalism and the growing menace of corruption. He is a man of commitment, honesty and integrity. At one point, when Raja of Marh attempts to bribe him to prevent the passage of zamindari abolition bill, he ruthlessly tackles him, by coming hard on him. And he is a man who is capable of outweighing personal relationships for the betterment of larger, general objectives and close friendship with the Nawab Sahib of Baita also helps him in this commitment, in the sense that Mahesh Kapoor’s moral principles do not come in the way of their friendship.

Regarding ‘history’ in A Suitable Boy Zamindari Abolition Law, a historically important legislation finds its expression in the work. Under the Zamindari Abolition Bill, five years of continuous tenancy is enough to
establish the tiller’s right to the land. The agricultural fields of land lords and Zamindars have been ploughed by labourers who are landless and a portion of the yielding they would be given for their labour and the rest would be submitted to the landlords and Zamindars. This had been the custom and tradition during British regime. With the implementation of Zamindar Abolition act, agricultural workers without their own land toiling hard and long on others’ fields for their survival would be entitled to claim their right over the fields and the owners of fields who happen to be Nawabs, Rajas and Landlords would be severely hit by the legislation. They are up in arms against this legislation and they bend over backwards to prevent it from coming into force. Once it is passed in legislature and the governor gives his assent to it, Nawabs, Rajas and the Landlords losing their properties and struggling hard like other common men for their existence and livelihood will be inevitable. Realizing the danger they will be in, they challenge the constitutional validity of the legislation in Brahampur high court. Heated arguments are witnessed in the court both for and against the legislation. G.N. Bannerjee, the counsel for the landlords, presented his argument in the following way.

“My Lords, the entire way of life of this state is sought to be altered by the executive of this state through legislation that runs in express and implied contradictions to the constitution of the country. The act that seeks, in no citizenry of purva Pradesh is the Purva Pradesh Zamindari abolition and Land Reform Act in 1951 and it is my contention and that of other counsel for the applicants that this legislation, apart from being patently to the detriment of the people, is unconstitutional and therefore null and void. Null and void” (ASB 686).

G.N.Bannerjee goes on to state that the legislature of Purvapradesh delegated to the executive the implementation of the Zamindari Abolition Act. Further, its date of activation, the sequence if the taking over of the estates of the Zamindars, these decisions are to be taken by junior bureaucrats of government administration. He further states to the judges that it is not a
question of merely filling in details, and this is improper delegation of authority and the act even if there are no other grounds will be invalid on these grounds alone. At this point, Advocate general for the government side Mr. Shastri interfered and said that “Your lordships please. A slight correction to my learned friend, date of vesting is automatic with President’s assent. So is activated act one” (ASB 691). In addition to this, Chief Justice asks Mr. Shastri for his response to the argument of Mr. Bannerjee but the policy of the Zamindari Act is not a public purpose but the policy of the political party which for the time being governs the state. Advocate General Shastri replied that in accordance with directive principles enshrined in the constitution, this law has been enacted and it has nothing to do with party policy.

The Court hall is packed with the litigants such as Raja of Marh, Nawab Sahib of Baitar, the general public, media persons and other advocates for whom the entire proceedings are a treat. Nawab Sahib’s own son Firoz who was also a lawyer, was assisting Mr. Bannerjee. On hearing both sides, judges finally give a joint statement that Purvapradesh Zamindari Abolition Act and Land Reform Act do not contravene any provision of the constitution and is not invalid. The main applications, along with the connected applications against it are dismissed. The judgment is a big blow to Raja of Marh, Nawab Sahib and other land lords who jointly challenged that legislation in the court of law. Generally, Zamindars do not have to work hard to earn their bread. They live in luxury on the income derived from their estates where the landless labourers have to shed sweat and blood to shape the fields and draw yielding from it. Major portion of the revenue from the fields would go to Zamindars who spend it on liquor, gambling, whores and other unnecessary things. The working class is deprived of what is due to it. Feudalism is a glaring manifestation of the exploitation of the weak by the strong. Zamindari abolition legislation which aimed at getting rid of this social disparities and strive for social justice and equality comes into force. The architect of the law, and revenue minister of purva pradesh observed only composure. Feudalism was widely prevalent in British India and it sucked blood from the landless labourers and enriched the
Zamindars. *A Suitable Boy* has given a clear account of this and it also portrays how it has been eradicated. What has taken place in purvapradesh, with regard to Land Reforms Act and Zamindari Abolition Act spreads to other parts of India as well. With the implementation of the legislation a history was drafted and it has been documented in *A Suitable Boy* by Vikram Seth. The above mentioned points are only the advantages, Zamindari Abolition law will bring about in the state. It has another negative dimension as well. There are many Zamindars, who apart from looking after the peasants, patronized art, culture, music and language and in the new environment where their position has been reduced to be that of an ordinary agriculturist, they cannot do anything for them any more. Regarding this, *David Myres* in his paper *Vikram Seth’s Epic Renunciation of the passions: Deconstruction Moral Codes in A Suitable Boy* states that “Zamindari Bill will mean the curtailment of the poor but also patronage of scholarship, architecture and the arts particularly music”. He goes on to add “that the elderly Nawab Sahib’s watches his historic country place and his in replaceable library collection decay and is enraged when his munshi protests at the high cost of the Nawab’s patronage of the musician Usteed Khan”(23).

Apart from this, Nehru’s letters to Chief Ministers regarding his suggestions, and advice on how the states, where they are chief ministers can be effectively run and how communal elements in all religions can be contained have also been documented in the novel. Nehru’s letters, his administrative as well as political activities which have attained great historical importance in the history of modern India have also been highlighted in the work. The researcher sheds light on that aspect as part of analyzing the historical elements in the novel. Neelam Srivastava in *Secularism in Vikram Seth’s A Suitable Boy* states that

“A Suitable Boy addresses India’s part as a way of responding to contemporaneous historic-political configurations and in the sense, it can be said to be a historical novel. He goes on to add that a
characteristics of the historical novel is that its version of the national past implicitly projects an ideal present and future for the nation. The historical novel becomes a way to make the past accessible to the present and to assert a metonymic contiguity of the past with the present; the assumption being that if we follow the narrative to its beginning, we can reach the point of origin. In this way, he traces the historical aspects of *A Suitable Boy*”(36).

And *Mufti* also comments that “the single most important feature of Nehru’s account of national culture in *The Discovery of India* is that it sees the latter in historical terms, translating the structure of national-cultural claims in the modern conjecture into a singular trajectory of cultural development” (64). He furthers that *The Discovery of India* thus performs a metaphysical function, that of ‘placing present needs at the origin” in Michael Foucalt’s phrase. *A suitable Boy* recalls Nehru’s *Theological Translation of India* pasts into necessary stages in the evolution of the nation, by placing present needs at the origin— the wish to recuperate the ideal of a secular composite India”(65).

Even if the letter by Jawaharlal Nehru is said to have been written many decades ago, it is still of great relevance to the present administrations, and the country.

In the same way, what happens in the Congress, after the assassination of Mahatma Gandhiji and the rivalry between Nehru and Tandon have also been documented. Purushottamdas Tandon is elected the President of Congress party in the intraparty election held in 1950. He is widely seen as the follower of Vallapai Patel, the first Home Minister of India, known as the iron man of India who was the rival of Nehru. Tandon, a bare-footed, bearded, austere and rather intolerant man, seven years Nehru’s senior and like him from Allahabad becomes the President of the Congress. Nehru is of the view that Tandon aligns with Hindu Chauvinist right wing of the party. And it is thought that whoever becomes the president of the congress at the national level, will have greater say on the issue of selection of party candidate to contest in the first
general election in 1952. And the demise of Sardar Vallapai Patel, just two months after Tandon’s election as the head of the party leaves the right wing leaderless. But Tandon turns out to be a powerful leader who attempts to match his mentor Sardar Patel in instilling discipline, unity and order in the party. In the process, other leaders who are followers of Nehru like Kripalini and Rafi Ahmed Kidwai are not appointed to the Congress Working Committee, a key high level body of the party. That Tandon seems to be nominating only people who are close to him ideologically is the perception of Nehru. Protesting against the move of Tandon in this connection, he refuses to join the working committee. Later, he changes his mind and joins in the interest of the party unity. Nehru is left with a sense of discomfort that once the number of MLAs and MPs who are part of the Hindu chauvinist right wing goes up, they will start influencing the administration of the government with their fundamental ideologies and policies. Nehru is also forced to ruminate that the party leadership uses him to win the poll and bring in its own loyalists to the parliament and state legislatures. It will damage the secular character of the country. And he is very keen on safeguarding the value of secularism in the country and he confronts and opposes religious fundamentalism tooth and nail, regardless of religions. In the work by, Mala Pandurang, entitled *Multiple Readings of A suitable boy: authorial intention and social realism* it is stated that “A considerable part of the narrative is devoted to the crisis in the faction – ridden congress party”(129). “The thought of India as a Hindu state with its minorities treated as second-class citizens, sickens Nehru. If Pakistan treats its minorities barbarically that is no reason for India to do so. Nehru has, after partition, personally pleaded with a number of Muslim civil servants to remain in India” (Vikram Seth 955). At one point, when the followers of the principle of Hindu chauvinism attempts to have a social presence in party’s high level bodies like CWC, he thinks of leaving the party. His followers Kripalini and Ahmad Kidwai leave the party and flouts a new political party namely Peasants’ and Workers’ peoples’ Party- the KMPP for short. At the state level, Mahesh Kapoor, Staunch follower of Nehru and Revenue Minister of
Purvapradesh quits the post. His rival Agarwal, Home Minister of Purvapraadesh is a loyalist of Tandon, he defends Tandon on the ground that Tandon has been elected democratically as the party president and the constitution of congress working committee is his prerogative. He goes on to state that Nehru participates in its meetings and he has no right to effect any change in CWC and he claims to be a democrat and Nehru can prove it by doing the right thing. And if he claims to be a strong believer of party discipline, Nehru should abide by party principles. Agarwal comes out with a brief but fiery speech for Tandon and against Nehru, when Mahesh Kapoor and the Chief Minister of Purva Pradesh Sharma speak to each other.

Later, Tandon writes a letter to Nehru not to resign from Congress Working Committee. It has been given below.

“I beg of you not to precipitate a crisis at the present juncture and not to press your resignation. I cannot accept it. If you insist on it the only course left to me will be to place it before the working committee for consideration. I trust that, in any case, you will attend the meeting of the working committee on the 11th instant. If to keep you in the working committee it is necessary or desirable that I should resign the presideship of the congress. I am ready to do so with great pleasure and good will.

Yours affectionately,

Purushottama Tandon (ASB-1040).

Apart from the dimension of historical importance of these letters, it is also indicative of the high political culture that was prevalent in the then India. These letters assume more significance at a time when the current political culture and relationship among political leaders have come to the lowest ebb. The difference of opinion between Nehru and Tandon over the constitution of Congress Working Committee is followed by a twist. The crisis is amicably solved. In a noble gesture, Tandon resigns his post of the president of the
Congress Working Committee and he is glad to work for the party headed by Nehru. “With good grace-despite the many personal attacks against him in the press, despite what he sees as the impropriety of Nehru’s tactics and despite they bitterness and length of the battle—he did. In a noble gesture, which does much to assuage any residual bitterness, he joins the working committee under the newly elected congress President Jawaharlal Nehru” (ASB 992).

India national congress was established in1885, under the presidency of Allan Octavian Hume, and Surenderanath Bannerjee, for championing the cause of India turns out to be the party of India’s independence due to the tireless endeavours and enormous sacrifices of Mahatma Gandhiji, Jawaharlal Nehru and other leaders. And the history of modern India cannot be written without highlighting the activities, functions and sacrifices of numerous such selfless leaders. What has taken place in the party also has turned out to be historically important and Vikram Seth has mirrored it in his work *A Suitable Boy*.

Apart from these intra party affairs of historical significance, Nehru’s election campaign for the first general election held in 1951 also has attained the same historical value. The researcher highlights the key aspects of Nehru’s election campaign speeches registered in the text. It is learnt from that Nehru is not at all pleased with the sycophancy and flattery of Party’s leaders. When he is to give election Campaign speeches, he does not like even the second rung leaders of congress to waste time on glorifying and flattering him. To know more about Nehru and the political occurrences then and those affected by the zamindari abolition act Vikram Seth states he visited many places and many ex-freedom fighters witnessing them.

Nehru’s displeasure towards flattery is in stark contrast to the political leaders of present age who find extreme delight and enormous pleasure in being praised. Nehru asks such flattering party people whether they have nothing better to do. He says to Mahesh Kapoor the more they talk about him, the less use he is to Kapoor. During election meetings, he holds the audience
spellbound. At most of the meetings, he points out to the people the irreparable
damage Mahatma Gandhi’s assassination has caused to the country and he
emphasizes that the people should have enormous faith and belief in
themselves as well as in the nation bereft of the guidance and leadership of
Gandhiji. And he is also eager it seems from his speeches, to educate the
masses on the world crises such as Korean crisis and the crisis in the Persian
Gulf. He drives home the point that people ought to learn to live in peace. At
his every meeting, he bends over backwards to sensitise the masses about the
ill-consequences of the dangers communal and religious disharmony. He
furthers that only because of the disunity and disharmony of the people, the
British were able to conquer them easily. He also stresses that people should
not be given to narrow- mindedness with regard to religious fanaticism,
regionalism and linguistic chauvinism.

Other topics that appear prominently in his speeches are landmark
pieces of legislation such as Hindu code Bill and Zamindari Abolition Act. He
is very firm and determined to send the message to the people that he will
never allow religious fundamentalists to have a foothold in the country. He
puts in practice what he preaches. There is no difference or gap between his
word and deed. And this kind of high political culture slowly but steadily
becomes extinct in the country. It is very hard to observe that the major chunk
of political leaders today preach values in public lives but practice vices in
private lives. The phenomenon of law makers turning out to be law breakers
gets stronger and stronger and more and more frequent. Religious bigotry and
regional and linguistic chauvinism will wreak havoc and devastation on the
country and leaders like Nehru were bent on eliminating and eradicating such
evils. In addition, Nehru dwells at length on the development of science and
agriculture. He put a great deal of emphasis and stress on the construction of
dams. Nehru richly deserves the title as the “architect of modern India”.
Excerpts from his speech of historical significance are given below.
“India is an ancient land of great traditions, but the need of the hour is to wed these traditions to science. It is not enough to win elections, we must win the battle of production. We must have science and more and more production. Every hand to be on the plough and every shoulder to the wheel. We must harness the forces of our mighty rivers with the help of great dams. These monuments to science and modern thinking will give us water for irrigation and also for electricity. We must have drinking water in villages and food and shelter and medicine and literacy all around. We must make progress or else we will be left behind” (ASB 951).

The speech mentioned above is not just election campaign speech but it has the substance to be equated with directive principles of a country and can be called guiding principles of our land. Given the current relevance of the preachings of Nehru, the researcher has brought out the crux and the main points of his speech.

In *Multiple Readings of A Suitable Boy*, by Mala Pandurang, it is said that “Seth is able to skillfully reproduce a society in transition largely due to meticulous research evident in his thorough documentation of a number of historical events” (109).

The next aspect of this chapter entitled “History, politics, and romance” is politics on which light is thrown here. Politics of two sorts are discussed here; the politics practiced by seasoned politicians such as Agarwal the Home Minister of Purva Pradesh, Begum Abidha Khan, MLA of Land Lords’ Party and Jha congress committee chief of Rudia District and the politics that prevails in higher education institutions between Prof. Mishra, Head of English Department Brahmpur University, and Praan, an assistant professor aspiring for readership.

At this point the researcher focuses on the portrayal of politics in *A Suitable Boy*. In line with the writer’s intention to create a work of art at an epic scale, great crowd, several occurrences of mass violence or collective
anarchy are depicted in the novel including a student protest turned violent a Hindu Mela gone wrong and two scenes of communal violence. In this part, the activities of political leaders and its consequences are discussed. For this, two riots one related to shoemakers and traders of Misri Mandi, and the other with regard to Muslims March towards the Shiva temple in Chowk and the police firing on them are taken into account. Since Agarwal, Home Minister of Purva Pradesh had a hand in it, this part concerned with portrayal of politics sheds light on it.

The first riot involving the Jatwas and the Traders had a bearing upon the second one Muslims versus police personnel. There is a scuffle between traders and the Jatva community. A confrontation between the employee of a trader and some jatvas in a liquor shop has turned out to be violent. And it becomes a group clash between traders and the jatvas who surround the Govind shoe mart run by a relative of Home Minister of Purva Pradesh. When the trouble brakes out in Misiri Mandi between Jatavas and the traders, the Chief Minister, Sharma, is out of the state and the Home Minister Agarwal has to look after and administer the entire situation. He gets the district Magistrate Kishan Dayal on the phone and orders him to deploy a very strong posse of police in addition to the existing force. He gives him specific instruction on the places of police deployment. There is now a possibility of the Jatavas threatening to block the entrance of the Govind Shoe Mart. When the district Magistrate Kishan Dayal who takes care of the law and order of the area along with superintendent of police of Brahmpur suggests to him that it is mandatory for the administration to retain a considerable force of police in chowk police station because there is also a likelihood of violence and trouble in Shiva Temple in Chowk. He also apprises the Home Minister about the presence of Mahesh Kapoor under whose constituency the place of present trouble comes. But the Home Minister does not like the magistrate giving him suggestions on the handling of the situation and intimating to him the presence of His rival Mahesh Kapoor. Agarwal said to the Magistrate.
“God will take care of the Shiva Temple. I am in close touch with many members of the committee, do you think I do not know the circumstances”? (ASB 79). When the magistrate asks him how long the police force has to remain there, Agarwal replies until he gives further orders. The heavy deployment of police personnel here before Govind Shoe Mart and Brahmpur Shoe Market, which is far more than the need and the necessity, paves the way for Muslims’ uninterrupted march towards the Shiva Temple in Chowk and the resultant firing on them. Selfish motives and hidden agenda are attributed to the decision of the Home Minister Agarwal. He is more concerned about the protection and the security of Brahmpur Shoe Mart and Govind Shoe Mart than that of order and peace in Shiva temple in Chowk and the muslims’ security. The reason for this is Agarwal himself hails from a trading community. The shoe markets are run by his relatives and friends. And during the elections, they provide him with huge sums of election funds. And has made him accord top priority and importance to the safety of shoe markets and not duly concerned about the security of muslims and chowk shiva temple. “The threatened picketing would finish them off. L.N. Agarwal himself came from a shop keeping family and some of the traders were good friends of his. Others supplied him with election funds” (ASB 156).

In GJV Prasad’s “Vikram Seth, An anthology of Recent Criticism” Priya Kumar in the paper History, Politics and Romance in Vikram Seth’s A Suitable Boy comments in the following way:

“when Brahmpur becomes the scene for a caste conflict between the traders of Misri Mandi and the shoemakers who are largely of the Jatav caste, L.N. Agarwal, the Home Minister – by reason of his own caste affiliations- despite the sound advice of the Magistrate decides to deploy a vast majority of policemen for controlling the uprising of the low-caste Jatavas; as a result there are only a handful of policemen left near the site of the mosque and temple when the riot broke out. And the police
are forced to fire at the Muslim mob due to the lack of an adequate deterrent police force and several people lost their lives” (129).

The decision of Home Minister with regard to the excessive police deployment in the vicinity of shoe markets put the administration headed by the Magistrate and the superintendent of police in a situation where they have to spare only handful of policemen near the mosque that ends up in police firing on the rioting Muslim mob. And what is to be noted here is that how hate speeches by religious leaders force people to lose their faculty of thinking and incite them to resort to violence without ruminating about the consequences. Priya Kumar in the same paper entitled History, Politics and romance in A Suitable Boy states that

“The Raja of Marh laid of foundation stone of a temple of Shiva – as a consequence the Imam of the Alamgiri Mosque gives an inflammatory speech to his congregation on Friday and in a typical instance of cyclical violence, a riot breaks out between the Hindus and Muslims of the city over clashing religious symbols. Priya Kumar continues to say that Seth clearly demonstrates how fundamentalist discourages play a huge role in the transformation and crystallization of religious identities over and above all other identities in moments of conflict” (129).

In Vikram Seth’s A Suitable Boy Raja of Marh, Imam and L.N. Agarwal, the Home Minister are all not ordinary people or people of average intelligence but they are high profile people in society. They are more privileged, well informed, more knowledgeable than the masses following them. It is their responsibility and bounden duty to guide their followers in the right direction and on the right path. But they fall far short of society’s expectation of them. Raja of Marh who owns a city state spends most of his time on drinking and in Saeeda Bai’s house. Worse than that he attempts to erect a Shiva temple in the vicinity of Alamgir mosque and needlessly and unnecessarily infuriates the followers of Islam. L.N. Agarwal does not seem to realize that he is a minister not just for his community people but for the entire
state. He aims for petty and selfish political gains. Imam on his part injects the poison of hatred and vehement dislike against Raja of Marh and Shiva temple among the worshippers at the mosque. Imam of Alamgir mosque delivers his poisonous speech in such a way that the gatherers there march towards the upcoming shiva temple to demolish it. The worshipers turn rioters. Since the superintendent of police has gone to intensify the security in the vicinity of Brahmpur shoe mart and Govind shoe mart run by home minister’s relatives the onus of maintaining peace near chowk shiva temple is on the shoulders of kishan Dayal, the magistrate with the help of a few constables. The police force is too poor in strength to control the rioting Musilm mob marching towards the shiva temple. He opens fire on them to disperse and many lose their lives in the police firing. Seth describes the event in the following way

“The wild and dangerous mob, hundreds strong, faced with this sudden terror, halted, staggered, turned and fled. It was uncanny. Within thirty seconds it had melted away. Two bodies were left in the street. One young men had been shot through the neck and was dying or dead; the other, an old man with a white beard had fallen and been crushed by the retreating mob. There was blood in several places in the alley, so it was apparent that here had been other injuries, possibly deaths” (ASB 237).

There are three riots described in A Suitable Boy first one between shoe makers and Jatavs, the second Muslims’ march towards the Shiva temple and police firing on them and the third one the clash between Moharram mourners and Ramlila devotees. Of all these three riots, the first two are orchestrated and the third one breaks out of religious fanaticism. Priya Kumar in the paper entitled History, politics and Romance in A Suitable Boy says that in “Seth’s representation of the riot involving Muslims march towards the Shiva temple and the resultant police firing, the state is undoubtedly held culpable for its passivity and mismanagement of the situation. It is further stated by the writer of the essay mentioned above that the narrator’s pithy statement that is quoted
below is clearly indicative of the state’s hand in causing the riot which it could have prevented had it had the political will”(122).

Some riots are caused, some bring themselves into being (ASB 245). The government's administrative machinery, headed by the Magistrate Krishnan Dayal and the Superintendent of Police of Brahmpur, finds itself in a critical position where it, on the orders and instructions of the Home Minister L.N. Agarwal, has had to dispatch greater part of police force for Misri Mandi unrest. The heavy deployment of police there is viewed far more than necessary and the need. Even the no non-sense Magistrate Krishnan Dayal is unable to convince the Home Minister L.N. Agarwal to deploy equal strength of force in Chowk area. Had the required force of police been there, they could have dealt with the crisis and tackled it in a much better way. They would have given warning to the crowd at first to disperse and if it did not work they would have opened fire in the air and only finally, while all their attempts and efforts to disperse them did not materialize and ended up in fiasco, they would have resorted to open fire on them. And loss of lives could not have been on this scale. And later, this incident is reported to have serious political repercussions. In the assembly, Begum Abidha Kahn comes down hard on the Home Minister for this police firing and he unable to put up with her severe criticism and leveling of serious charges against him feels humiliated and very badly insulted and resorts, to political vendetta. That is discussed latter part of this chapter.

With regard to this riot, Priya Kumar opines that “Seth indict the state for its complicity in allowing the violence to take place in the first instance when it so easily could have been controlled and averted. The essay writer comments this way:

“In a thinly veiled fictional reconstruction of the Babri Masjid conflict, Seth constructs a Scenario of dispute over an historic mosque that is purported to stand on the site of an ancient Shiva temple. The Raja of Marh and the Home Minister L.N. Agarwal appear to be the Hindu
nationalists of early fiftees. The decadent Raja who was quite happy to consort with Muslim courtesans like Saeeda Bai chose to build a Shiva temple to stand cheek by jowl with the grand mosque constructed by Emperor Aurangazeb two and half centuries ago on the ruins of an earlier temple to Shiva. If he had his way, the omniscient narrator tells us, the foundations of his temple would have stood on the rubble of the mosque itself. For him, it is a great joke to think that the muslims will be bowing down in the direction of his Shiva-linga five times a day”(123).

The consequences of police firing on Muslims in Chowk has had enormous impact in the state assembly. The activities and transactions in the assembly on this issue leads to political vendetta as well. That is dealt with here. Begum Abidha khan, wife of Nawab sahib’s brother is an MLA in purvapradesh. Her husband has settled abroad and when her relatives persuades her at the time of partition to settle down in Pakistan, she has chosen to settle in India. In the assembly of purvapradesh, Begum Abidha khan comes down hard on the Home minister, Agarwal, for the police firing on Muslims. She fires a volley of questions against him which he is unable to answer properly. Agarwal feels humiliated in the assembly and it makes him take revenge actions on her. Since Abidha khan accuses him of conniving with those attempting to erect shiva temple in Chowk area near mosque, he wants to retaliate.

Agarwal sends a team of police as well as revenue officials to the fort of Nawab Sahib to take over the unoccupied portions of his fort under evacuee property act. The police team arrives at the fort when Nawab is out of station. Only his daughter Zainab along with her sons is there. Though she is in deep trouble, she functions intelligently by sending her servant with her son to the Chief Minister Sharms’s residence to inform him about the arrival of official team at their ancestral house. Chief Minister Sharma is infuriated by the unilateral action of the Revenue Minster Agarwal and he orders immediate
withdrawal of police force from there. Chief Minister Sharma’s timely intervention prevents the fort from being taken over under evacuee property act. This episode is a clear indication of politics of vendetta on the part of revenue minister Agarwal. Since he feels Begum Abhidha khan very badly insulted and humiliated him in the assembly, he wants to take revenge against her.

Having brought out the politics of vendetta depicted by Seth, the researcher then sheds light on politics prevailing then in institutions of higher learning. Praan, Mahesh Kapoor’s elder son and spouse of Savita is a lecturer in English in Brahmpur University. There is a difference between the Head of the Department and him over inclusion of James Joyce on the syllabus. Praan, is very firm in incorporating James Joyce on the syllabus for which the Head Prof. Mishra does not give consent. It causes a friction between the two. Praan, when a reader vacancy arises in the department, applies for the post. Even though he is in possession of the required eligibility, experience and length of service, Prof. Mishra causes difficulties to him. When the election results of first general election are due to be out, the interview for the post is slated to be held. Mahesh Kapoor contestes in the election and Prof. Mishra is gathering news and information on the prospects of success for Mahesh Kapoor who if he makes it in the election will again emerge as a high profile and all powerful minister. Prof. Mishra has made up his mind not to support Prann to get readership in the department. He goes out of the way to prevent Praan’s appointment as reader and he poisons the minds of Dr.Illa Chattoparthy and Prof. Jayakumar, the external subject experts and selection committee members. But, when prof.Mishra’s sources inform him about the possibility of Mahesh kapoor’s victory in election, he favours praan’s elevation as reader in the department. Candidates’ merit and caliber are not taken into account for their promotion but their political background decides their position even in academic field.
This episode demonstrates the fact that even institutions of higher learning do not escape the politics of vindictiveness and favouritism. It is the bounden duty and the solemn responsibility of universities to inculcate the values of probity, fairness, uprightness, impartiality and the equality of treatment for all based on merit among its pupils. What top level university professors are supposed to do, they do not do. Furthermore, they attempt to resort to unfair means when they wish to bring in their candidate to the university as the reader. The custodians and the protectors of values, ethics, and virtues themselves attempt to cause grave damage to it that too at a time when the process of nation building is on. These academics, with all their knowledge, scholarship, erudition and intellect, should have had a predominant role to play in the process of nation building and they should have set a model and precedent on the higher education front. But they throw the rules to winds and try to go out of the way in key matters such as appointments of faculty for the departments. But for the vociferous opposition of Dr. Illa Chattopadhyay, in her capacity as the external subject expert, an ineligible, unworthy and undeserving candidate whose only strength is strong political back up would have come in with a connivance of the Vice-Chancellor and the head of the department. The researcher, being a Tamilian, is filled with wonder when he comes across Vikram Seth’s knowledge of Tamil, which is revealed through Prof. Jayakumar, one of the subject experts from Tamil Nadu, who comes to Brahmpur varsity to conduct the interview for the appointment of the reader. He quotes a famous Tirukural couplet’s English translation.

“Certainly, it is true, said professor Jayakumar as it says in the thirukkural and here he paused to translate- that after assessing that man can do this task because of this competence he has, and this tool he can use, that task must be assigned to that man” (ASB 1275).

Back to the main portion of the topic of university politics, in the paper entitled, *Multiple Readings of A Suitable Boy* by, Mala Pandurang, it is stated as follows:
“In the department of English, at Brahmpur University Pran and Professor Mishra debate on the inclusion of Irish writer James Joyce in the undergraduate syllabus. The debate on the English literature syllabus has little to do with the politics of cultural nationalism” (86).

After the analysis of historical and political elements in Seth’s A Suitable Boy, the investigator at this juncture sheds light on ‘Romance’ in the fiction. With regard to the portrayal of romance in the novel Lata and Kabir’s affair is of most vital significance. Besides, the after marriage romance between Praan and Savita, and Arun and Meenakshi is also focused on.

This part of the chapter deals with portrayal of ‘Romance’ in the novel. In light of this, the affair between Kabir and Lata, when Rupa Mehra intensifies her efforts to search for a suitable groom is highlighted. In addition to that how other candidates Amit and Haesh Khanna also try to reach out to Lata is also discussed before concentrating on the after marriage romance between Praan and Savita. Lata has no inclination towards arranged marriages. It is known well from her statement made at the beginning of the novel “we can’t both marry Praan” (ASB 5). It is symbolic of the fact she is not in the mould of conservative, traditional and orthodox type of girl. But generally, Indian women before their wedlock are brought up in a protective and disciplined atmosphere and it requires immense courage and strength on their part to break away from that strong family bond. And there is always this risk that once you break free, it is almost next to impossible to get back into the fold. At some point, Lata becomes gutsy to go away and then on realization that it will not work, she accepts her mother’s advice.

The first meeting between Kabir and Lata takes place in a Book shop called Imperial Book Depot run by the brothers, by name, Yaswant and Balwant. Students of Brahmpur varsity visit this book stall on a very frequent basis for the purchase books and take coffee in “Danuse Coffee Stall”. On an occasion when Lata stands there in the book stall, having a look at Maths shelf which forces her to think about her brother Varun whose subject of graduation
is maths, she smiles to herself by thinking about the words of advice she briefs him on the day after Savita’s and Praan’s marriage. When she remembers Arun and Varun she smiles to herself, and at that time a young man standing there is also included in that smile accidentally.

“The tall young man, whom Lata noticed was aware and who had a slightly wavy black hair and very good, rather aquiline, looks, seemed to be as interested in poetry as in mathematics, because a few minutes later, Lata was aware that he had shifted his attention to the poetry shelves and was glancing through the anthologies. Lata felt that his eyes were on him” (ASB46).

This is the first meeting between the duo. A little later, he voluntarily goes to Lata and introduces himself to her saying that he is Kabir, a history student in Brahmpur University and his father Dr. Durrani is Maths Professor there. Then, witnessing Lata silent and calm, he asks her whether she will not ask him his name. Not responding to him, Lata moves forward and joins Malati, her friend, who later makes several enquiries about him. Silence is the only response Malati can get from Lata.

After the first meeting, for several days both of them do not have any opportunity to meet. And the second meeting between them occurs on an examination day. Lata, having performed very poorly in the examination, comes out, proceeds to the park on the campus and sits under a tree on a bench. Meanwhile, students conduct postmortem on their paper. When someone tells them about his satisfactory performance in the exam, it disappoints others. Seth has portrayed the typical post examination ambience of a university realistically. And that is the time when Kabir and Lata meet for the second time. Seeing Lata in depression over her examination performance, Kabir approaches her and ensures that not doing well in the examination is the cause for her worry. And he comforts and consoles her by stating that in the due course of time she will forget every thing. Then, he proceeds to add that a pupil of his father attempted to commit suicide and he was rescued and later,
the student managed to score higher marks than he expected in the next examination. Kabir impresses upon her the fruitlessness of brooding over the concluded examination. Kabir’s consolation for Lata has made her develop good will for him.

A little while later Lata also starts moving with him in a casual way. She asks him whether he too has done poorly in the exam and he replies in the affirmative. Then he adds to her that he having seen her sitting alone with so much dullness he arrives there to meet her. “When I was standing there, feeling low, he said pointing to the top of the steps, I noticed you here looking even worse, and that cheered me up. You don’t have any objection to my walking along with you for a bit?” Kabir asked. “I can’t very well stop you” said Lata. India is a free country now” (ASB141).

The second meeting of Kabir and Lata is described in 3.4. At that point, Lata, unlike before, converses with him without any anxiety and hesitation. Then two sub-chapters latter, in 3.6, Kabir has the opportunity of meeting Lata, when he goes to a music programme performed by Ustad Masjeed Khan in Baratendy auditorium for which Lata also has turned up along with her friend Malati. Before the commencement of Ustad Masjeed Kahna’s programme, there is a sitar recital in the I half. After it gets over, the spectators come out, gossip and spend time. At that time, Lata left alone by her friend Malati, stands there and Kabir proceeds close to her and asks whether his presence beside her disturbs. And she replies that she does nothing and feels her heart beats fast. Again, while he enquires if he troubles her thoughts, she says she is not having any, but actually she tries hard to control a sudden overload of them. Besides, she feels embarrassed with being seen with the young man. If anyone known to her mother witnesses them together it will be a big problem for her. But she feels that having been unkind to him twice she is determined not to rebuff him. Seth’s account of the meeting between them is given below.
“Kabir asked, Well, May be at our next meeting?

Lata took this remark quite coolly.

“I suppose there will be one” she said. We seem to keep meeting by chance”

Does it have to be by chance? asked the young man. When I talked about you and your friends, the fact is that I had eyes mostly for you. The moment I saw you enter, I thought how lovely you looked, in a simple green sari with just a white rose in your hair”. The word ‘mostly’ bothered Lata, but the rest was music. She smiled. There is a meeting of the Brahmpur Literary Society at five o clock on Friday evening at on old Mrs. Nowrojee’s house- 20 Hastings Road. It should be interesting and it is open to anyone who feels like coming, With the university vacations coming up, they seem to want to welcome outsiders to make up the numbers. The university vacations, thought Lata. Perhaps we won’t see each other again after all. The thought saddened her” (ASB 145).

This is the exact place where both of them feel their love for each other and they express it by one way or the other. Kabir wants the meeting to be held on a more frequent basis and he wishes to plan for it as well. When Lata hears the word “vacation” which means that they will have to wait for a couple of months to meet again, she gets upsets about it. And it is a clear indication of her love for him. This is how the love between them has blossomed and bloomed. It leads them to be passionate about each other. On another occasion, Kabir is seen with his friends and all of them are in cricket attire. He looks very handsome and Lata feels like following him. And when there is regret in her for her desire to meet him, she pacifies herself by thinking that on the earlier three occasions it is he who followed her and why can’t she now. Kabir’s handsomeness and sports man personality leads her to assume herself
as a Gobi and Kabir as Krishna who instead of a flute is in possession of cricket bat.

At this juncture, Malati, Lata’s friend is of some help to her in building up her relationship with Kabir. She is the one who first told Lata that Kabir is a cricketer and asks her to try to learn more about him. When Lata states to her that she knew Kabir’s interest and enthusiasm in literary activities, Malati responds their participation in literary activities can be made use of to further cement and solidify their affair. In accordance with their scheme, Lata visits 20 Hastings Road at five o’clock the next evening with an objective and hope of being able to meet Kabir. This single episode demonstrates clearly the depth and intensity of her love for Kabir. She has been brought up in a traditional and conventional way and it is quite unimaginable and unthinkable for girls of her age in 1950’s, to come out of their homes and meet the boy they love. Her passionate love for him drives her to search for him, in the literary club of Brahmpur where he says he will come frequently. The intensity and magnitude of Lata’s passion and love for Kabir can be well known from this episode. Her conventional upbringing, her traditional mother and orthodox family background does not have any bearing on Lata’s romance.

Kabir attempts to locate the residence of Lata on his own. At one point, having found out her residence, he goes near the house and stands under a tree, waiting for the arrival of Lata just to thrill her. When she meets him there, it hugely surprise her. But, she is very happy with it. Only by this time, Lata becomes cognizant of his religion through her friend Malati who once tried to nurture the love between the two, warns Lata to stay away from Kabir. Before Malti was aware of the religion of Kabir, she thought that the affair between them might end up in success. Having gained the knowledge of his faith, it becomes quite obvious to her that it will have serious repercussions on the family. And so, she advises her friend Lata to keep away from him. For Lata, being and spending time with Kabir gives her enormous joy and ecstasy except a faint idea arising in her mind that he could have revealed his religion to her.
during their earlier meetings. But she has spoken to him about her much-beloved father, her mother with the Gita, Arun and Meenakshi and Savita and Praan. At this point, their affair has grown to a stage where it becomes very easy for Kabir even to take Lata in a boat in the Ganges in an early morning to Barsaat Mahal, a famous tourist spot and places beyond that. Then, both of them after spending so much time together return to the shore. They sit on the twisted root of the twin banyan trees. Lata is at a loss as to what to say. She hears herself saying:

“Kabir, are you interested in politics?”

He looked at her in amazement at the unexpected question, then simply said, ‘No’ and kissed her.

Her heart turned over completely. She responded to his Kiss-without thinking anything out – but with a sense of amazement at herself – that she could be so reckless and happy.

When the Kiss was over, Lata suddenly began thinking again, and more furiously than ever.

“I love you,” Kabir said

when she was silent, he said:

“Well, aren’t you going to say anything?”

“Oh, I love you, too said Lata” (ASB 170).

The above passage explains the Zenith of their love. And only here, Lata opines to him Kabir could have said about his religion. In response to that, he asks why all this is so important to her and further enquires if that is why she is so distant from him at times.

Later, through Mrs. Mahesh Kapoor, Rupa Mehra is informed about Lata being seen with a young boy near Barsaat Mahal. Expectedly, all hell
broke loose at home. Rupa Mehra strongly feels her younger daughter has betrayed her trust. She burst into uncontrollable tears and Savita, who has fore knowledge about Lata’s affair, attempts to calm down her mother. When Lata firmly tells her mother she will marry only him, Rupa Mehra retaliated stating that having married him, she will have to be ready to hear the words Talaq, Talaq Talaq at any time when a trouble or difference of opinion arises between them and Lata will have to be on the streets. When Rupa Mehra comes to learn about Lata’s affair that too with Muslim boy, she can’t believe her ears and it is a bitter pill for her to swallow. She has never thought her daughter will do like that. Then, she decides that it is not advisable, on her part, to allow Lata to stay in Brahmpur during vacation. She readies herself to take her daughter to calcatta.

This is how the affair between them comes to an end. Before they leave for Arun’s house in Calcutta, Lata secretly meets Kabir and suggests to him that they can go somewhere and get married. But he turns down the suggestion of Lata on the ground that he has aims to achieve in his life. “Two years you have to wait, I think. First, I have to finish my degree. After that I am going to apply to get into Cambridge- or may be to take the exam for the Indian Foreign Service- Kabir said” (ASB 186).

On hearing these words from Kabir, Lata is left shell-shocked. And she becomes extremely frustrated, dejected and downcast. She does not know how to embolden herself. She then, does not argue with her mother anymore. They proceed to Arun’s house, which according to Rupa Mehra can be a precautionary measure on her part, to prevent further damage in the life of her younger daughter. Later, Kabir manages to write a letter to Lata in Calcutta in the same tone which further upsets her. She feels impelled to write a letter back to him but on second thoughts, she drops the plan.

The milieu of the novel is set in India of early fifties. That was a time, when even inter community love was quite unthinkable and unimaginable. When such is the situation, what can be the fate of inter religious love. The
affair is described to have taken place between them just a few years after independence and partition, which cost the lives of thousands of people. Even after that, religious fanaticism and communalism, was at its peak, inspite of the sincere efforts of leaders like Nehru to get rid of it. Under these circumstances Lata’s and Kabir’s affair will be most unlikely to turn out to be successful. Regarding this Priya Kumar in the paper History, politics and Romance in Vikram Seth’s A Suitable Boy points out that

“Lata Mehra, the younger daughter of an English speaking upper middle class Hindu Khatri family, happens to meet Kabir, a fellow student from a similar class constituency at Brahmpur University, who turns out to be a Muslim, but since he has an ambiguous first name she does not know until later he is a mulsim. When his identity is revealed, she is at once aware that a relationship with him is ‘impossible’ knowing the clear taboos against Hindu-Muslim miscegenation in the specific cultural and religious practices of the Indian sub-continent. Her friend Malti’s initial response to Kabir’s muslimness exemplifies such an awareness when she advises Lata to better drop him as well as Lata’s own reiteration at various points in the novel that this relationship is “pointless” and futile”.

Surprisingly when Kabir became aware that his being a muslim mattered a great deal to Lata he asked here whether it counted. With regard to this Priya Kumar in the same paper mentioned above says “Kabir’s reaction to the seemingly impossible social taboo against Hindu –Muslim marriage is a secular surprise that this should be an issue at all”. You love me. And I love you. That is all that matters” he avows in a classical affirmation of love transcending all differences of culture, class, religion, race or caste” (124).

The same essay writer goes on to add that …“in the specific context of caste society, while the idea of marrying anon-Khatri Hindu is transgressive in itself, the very notion of a Hindu – Muslim marriage is unspeakable and unthinkable for Rupe Mehra. It is arguable the most pre-eminent taboo concerning marriage in the sub continent and rests on
ideas of purity, pollution and religious exclusivism. Moreover, when Mrs. Mehra discovers that Kabir’s mother is suffering from a mental illness, it only confirms her ‘othering’ of Muslims. “Muslim and Mod”, she warns Lata as if the two words are synonymous for each other.

Inter-community or racial romance has after been used as a novelistic trope in the European novel. Cross cultural love has after been employed as a tool for combining cultural, religious and racial boundaries within the country as well as across national borders. Peter Halme substantiates how such love plots articulate the ideal of cultural harmony through romance. In the light of Indian writing in English, Arundhati Roy’s “The God of Small things” is perhaps the most famous example of this literary convention mentioned above- love between higher caste syrian Christian woman and the untouchable paravan velutha. The romance between Kabir and Lata turned out to be an ill-fated inter religions love for which there was no place in then India. On the lines of expectation, Lata’s affair with Kabir was not just discouraged but totally rejected and refused”(126).

Another thing to be noted here is that after the demise of Raghubir Mehra, the Mehra family lives on the charity of friends. Despite the fact that the family finds it hard to make both ends meet and Dr. Kishan Chand Dayal, the surgeon father of Rupa Mehra, is also not of great help to the family and the entire onus of running the family is on Rupa mehra, Lata, is drawn toward Kabir and goes to the extreme of venturing out into a boat journey in the Ganges and getting kisses from him. When she puts forward the idea of elopement, he turn it down. Lata is from an orthodox family which is passing through a tough phase after the passing away of its bread winner. Still, she is ready to elope with him but Kabir citing, his higher studies abroad and intentions to sit for civil service examinations, rejects it. Regarding this Seemita Mohanty states that “romantic, impulsive Kabir kindles Lata’s passion without a single thought as to what he will do with her aroused sexuality, his
lack of financial stability and the impracticability of an inter-religious marriage in the India of 1950s. When faced with all these problems all of a sudden he is unable to find any solution, which leaves Lata dejected, disgusted and feeling rejected but still very much infatuated” (175).

The next man to enter Lata’s life, though not in the strict sense of the term is the gifted, intelligent, witty, but eccentric and materialistically spot poet Amit Chatterjee from Calcutta. Amit is Meenakshi’s brother who studies Law in England And he enters Lata’s life more as a relative and a friend rather than a suitor. To the down-hearted Lata who badly needed distraction from her affair, Amit’s relationship has a soothing effect on her. His sharpness, wit and concern, combined together brought out a cheerful and carefree Lata to the fore. Gradually, Amit gets drawn towards her charm, innocence and simplicity. And Vikram Seth equates the wooing of Amit with Kabir’s though it lacks passion. It is interesting to note that Amit’s wooing comes in the form of a lyric, the tone of which is controlled and careful.

Amit Chatterjee proposed to Lata in section eighteen of the novel. After some reflection, Lata realizes that she regards him more of a friend and can not see herself as his wife. “We are too alike” she tells Malati and also adds of his mind is on a book which she does not know will allow him to spare time for him.

After that, Haresh Kanna appears in the life of Lata. He is the last to enter Lata’s life. He enters her life as The Suitable Boy, selected after a good deal of research work by Mrs. Rupa Mehra. But he is ironically portrayed by Seth as somebody who is socially awkward and unlettered in the sophisticated of life. Nevertheless, he is acceptable to Lata because he is sincere, hard-working, honest, brave outspoken, broadminded, egalitarian, and last but not least he is a supporter of the family tradition.

Haresh is introduced to readers in section four of the novel. He is on a visit to Brahmpur on business from the Cawnpore Leather and Footwear
Company. He has a B.A Honours in English from St. Stephens College, Delhi and also possesses a diploma in leather technology from England but has the disadvantage of having gone to a Midlands Technical College, unlike Amit Chatterji who studies at Cambridge. In Brahmpur, Haresh meets Kedarnath Tandon, Mahesh Kapoor’s son-in-law. Kedarnath is also in the shoe business and he carries deep scars of the wounds inflicted on his palms during the partition. Still, he symbolises a generation that survives the trauma of 1947. Having lost everything in Lahore, he set himself up in Brahmpur in the polluting, caress-tainted shoe trade, a profession not typical to his caste. Kedarnath takes Haresh to visit the poorest parts of the city where the Jatav shoe makers live and work in insanitary conditions. Haresh witnesses the squalor of the home of Jagat Ram at Ravidespur, and experiences the sickening conditions of a stinking tanning pit. His reaction to the illiteracy, poverty and lack of discipline around him reflects his pragmatic thinking at a level of social change. If he had his way and was given funds and labour, he would have this neighborhood on its feet in six months.

Sanitation, drinking water, electricity, paving, civic sense – it is simply a question of making sensible decisions and having the requisite facilities to implement them. With total confidence, he quits his job in Kanpur and negotiates for a better job at Praha Leather Factory. He is a forward looking young guy brimming with the spirit of optimism, positive frame of mind and full of self-confidence. He is given to helping people as well. When he sees the interest of Bhaskar, veena’s son in mathematics, he introduces him to Dr. Durrani, Maths professor and Kabir’s father for further nurturing his skills. Regarding him, David Myres comments in the following way:

“Haresh’s managerial skills, practical approach, determination and utter devotion to the capitalist work ethic of higher productivity enabled him to rise in position to a foreman in the czech-owned shoe-trade empire of Prahapore. This is a new India of opportunity and there was something in Haresh that resembled a cheerfully stakhanovite hero of labour” (75).
In keeping with his desire for order, Haresh maintains diary in which he records not just his business activities but his impressions of those he comes into contact with. It indicates his being systematic. He also writes elaborate letters to Lata. Seth makes use of this device to allow us an insight into Haresh’s personality, as also to note his keen observation of personality traits in Lata and also other members of her family. He is honest with Lata and confides that he has to give up his love for Simran, a Sikh girl, whose family is determined that she should not marry him because he is from outside their community. Haresh does not wish to uproot Simran from her family, and accepts that the door is closed to him. He does not however elaborate on his affairs with English girls abroad.

Haresh first sights Lata at the Brahmpur Junction at the end of the section four of the novel, when Mrs. Mehra took her away to Calcutta from Kabir Durrani. He actually gets to meet her only in section nine, when Mrs. Mehra once again panicked at the interest that the anglicized Amit Chatterji is showing in Lata. A Bengal of Brahmin stock, Amit does not have Mrs. Rupa’s approval. At the home of Kalpana Gaur, she is introduced to Haresh Khanna and consequently arranges later to meet him too. Haresh is impressed by Lata and perceives her as good wife material.

Lata’s first impression of Haresh does not go with her ideal of a husband and she finds the thought of marrying the pan chewing Khanna wearing two-tone-correspondent shoes of brown and white, quite ridiculous. Later she finds that his accent has traces of Hindi and the local Midland, dialect and he is not westernized in the proper sense. But she is impressed that he does not attempt to lay on idious sincere charm typical of Arun’s friends at Calcutta. The straightforward Haresh gradually wins over Lata’s affection more through his letters than in person (they meet five times in all). In addition to this, Lata is marrying Haresh because in her own way she is in love with him. Haresh’s unaffected ways and sincere concern for everybody unconsciously endeared him to her and to Lata this kind of steady affection looks far more enduring.
than the desperate emotions she feels for Kabir. She chooses the flickering but steady light of the star over the blinding but temporary brilliance of the lighting. Though Haresh is no handsome who swept Lata off her feet, there is sense of mystery in losing herself in his world, a world populated by people who were as unreal to her as Haresh is a reality.

Another thing to be noted here is that by the time Lata accepts Haresh’s proposal, her mother was having second thoughts about him because of some derogatory remarks made by her friends and relatives concerning his involvement in the shoe business. Arun also arrogantly rejects Haresh, on the ground that he is socially inferior to them, and therefore will be more of an embarrassment to their family rather than a useful addition. Arun’s dislike for Haresh is given below.

“A second not unrelated point is that Haresh does not and can never aspire to, move in the same social circles as we do. A foreman is not a conveyed assistant, and Pran is simply not Bensten Pryce. The small of leather clings rather too closely to the name the Czechs who are his bosses, are technicians, sometimes barely literate in English, not graduates from the best universities in England. In a certain by choosing trade rather than a profession, after his graduation from St. Stephen’s Haresh had downgraded himself. I hope you do not mind my speaking frankly on a matter of such importance to your future happiness. Society matters and society is exacting and cruel; you will find yourself excluded from certain circles simply by virtue of being Mrs. Khanna” (ASB 1293).

This negative and snobbish attitude of her brother propelled Lata towards her fateful decision. She has not yet ceased to feel passionate attraction towards Kabir, yet she chooses Haresh, a decision that is both difficult and painful to her and her friend Malati. But she does not choose Haresh on the ground that he would shower riches, comfort and luxury on her. Her unromantic and practical decision is a cry against stifling snobbery and blinding passion and towards championing the cause of rationality stability and
economic productivity – “Haresh’s feet touched the ground and he has dust, sweat and shadow. The other two are a bit too God like and ethereal to be of any good for me (ASB1299).

The approach of Arun toward Haresh Khanna with regard to his shoe business and his employment in Praba Shoe company and his contempt for Haresh also impacts the decision of Lata to select Haresh as her spouse. Finally, they get married.

Another couple who are worth being mentioned and discussed in the light of romance are Savita and Pran. Theirs is an arranged marriage and the after wedding romance of there is a breezy read. Throughout the novel, Seth appears to have more than a soft sport for her, then and of his other characters including his heroine. She is beautiful, intelligent and devoid of any sort of vanity. Even if she is very pretty and good looking and Praan was lanky, dark, gangly and asthmatic, she does not seem to have even iota of grudge against Praan.

The requirements of an ideal love life such as care, concern, intense love and passion, solicitude and understanding are present in abundance and in eminent degrees. Both of them are loyal and faithful to each other, which is a stark contrast to the affair and after love relationship between Arun, Savita’s elder brother and Meenakshi, daughter of a judge belonging to West Bengal. Unlike Savita, Meenakshi can not be loyal and faithful to her spouse Arun Mehra despite the fact that theirs was a love marriage. And Meenakshi is given to adultery and she goes for an extra marital relationship with Billy Irani, Arun Mehra’s friend. At times, Billy Irani is scared of continuing this immoral relationship and it is Meenakshi who emboldens him and arrange the date and place of their meetings. By going for this sort of immoral and extra marital relationship, despite from an aristocratic and highly educated family, she betrays the trust of Arun, who is not in the know of things and who is proud of his wife’s family background. Such an immoral and hypocritical aspect does not figure at all in the life of Praan and Savita.
Rupa Mehra’s confident statement on the day of Praan and Savita’s marriage that “they will be happy” (ASB 4) which in due course has become a fact. Seth, throughout the novel, has portrayed Praan and Savita as an ideal couple. Their love and affection blooms after their marriage. The mutual trust and understanding they have towards each other has helped them to get over all the obstacles and hurdles they encounter in their life.