Chapter Five

Conclusion

The relationship between society and self has been theorized through the threefold concept of ‘self’ comprising individual self, social self and political self in Vikram Seth’s narratives, *An Equal Music*, *A Suitable Boy* and *Two Lives* respectively. The present thesis is an attempt to figure out Seth’s protagonists on the model of self-psychologists’ notion of individual, relational, and collective selves. This paradigm has been well fit against this tripartite ‘self’ evolved from these characters discussed in the previous chapters.

Self cannot be easily defined. But whether it is individual self, social self or political self can be defined relatively. All the selves are intra dependent or inter dependent. So naturally they find themselves in conflict, which has been governed by the characters’ experiences. The experiences are analyzed in comparing with each other.

These ‘selves’ have been viewed through the characters that mainly include Michael Holme, Julia McNicholl (*An Equal Music*), Lata Mehra, Mrs. Rupa Mehra (*A Suitable Boy*), Henny, Shanti, and the young Seth (*Two Lives*). They are portrayed either honouring right to life or honouring right to choose. In fact, they are haunted between a pro-life policy and a pro-choice policy that have been set as a social phenomenon used to study the Seth’s world and personae. The researcher has attempted to find an answer for the queries, whether the society is based on individual’s self-construct or the individual is an inseparable, unique entity of society, a mass self without which one’s ‘self’ cannot survive.
Michael’s self is explored as totally of individual self. His longing for music has formed his self which has been primarily studied in this research as individual self. His search for life keeps him continuing with his music journey and he never lives his life. His character is seen as himself preparing to accept his choice. This quest leads to incompleteness and his journey which is conditioned by the choice of music continues. Lata’s longing for life is different from Michael’s because she prefers to live whereas to him, the search itself is life.

Michael’s inner self is engaged in music which is his driving force that determines his thoughts, emotions and beliefs and even makes him fall in love with Julia. Music in relation to love and love to music is the prime theme of the narrative. The individual self of Michael, is in search of both music and love. He gets enchanted by music from his childhood. The sound of the great “Messiah” occupies his mind than anything else. Thus even when he has better opportunities he chooses music as a profession for his livelihood against his parents’ wish. He decides his life according to his preference or choice: “More than anything else I want to be part of such a noise” (AEM 67). He grows with the passion for music. This passion makes his ‘self’ unique and different from other characters in the novel. But he is not aware of one thing that he is part of socialization.

Likewise, Lata too seems self-oriented at the beginning. She is a nineteen year-old college girl who is very vulnerable. She is interested in having a life of her choice. She does not care for anyone including her mother. When her mother Mrs. Rupa Mehra says that she too has to marry a boy of her mother’s choice, she avoids her maternal imperative. She is not interested in marrying a person, just because her mother is interested. She even disapproves her mother’s choice for her sister Savita as
her mother has chosen a “lank, dark, gangly and asthmatic” (ASB 4) Pran as a husband for a good looking, Savita. For her, marrying a man without knowing him is something not acceptable. Moreover she is not interested in marriage and she says: “I don’t think I ever want to get married” (22). She even raises her voice against marrying an unknown person without knowing anything about that person. This interrogative voice is raised against the social custom constructed by the social self.

Michael’s self is framed within the domain of pro-choice policy. From the beginning he is shown as unyielding and unwilling to accept others. For that matter, Lata too has “always been a difficult one, with a strange will of her own, quite but unpredictable” (22).

Michael’s father wants him to understand the fact that he is interested in his child’s future and cannot bear to see him suffer in the later years as the profession he wants to choose will not earn him a good future and better livelihood. Seth through Michael’s father shows the social self which emphasizes the need for a comfortable space for an individual in a society. His father is further worried about his financial status that if Michael chooses a musical course, with his income he will not be in a position to get him a violin. He is much concerned for his son’s well-being. It shows the commitment of every father who wants his children to settle in life. As anticipated by his parents he is never settled in life – both in music and in love. He himself realizes this at a later stage and shares his view with Julia when she says that how can a musician be bored with music and hate it:

Oh, come on, Julia. Years of training, long hours, pathetic pay – and being no good for anything else – and having no choice in what you play – you could feel trapped, even if you loved it once. I felt like that a bit, when I was
freelancing in London. Even now things aren’t that easy. And, after all, you too gave up playing for a while. The only difference I suppose, is that you could afford it. (AEM 188)

Thus, there is a conflict in his personal life. But this conflict occurs only because of the established social obligations by which an individual self is expected to be obliged to social expectations. The social expectation is apparently not realized by Michael’s individual self. However, his ‘self’ is aspiring for a kind of social recognition which is deeply rooted in his inner psyche. Therefore he continues to set out on social space for something that would fulfill his desire for music. And, throughout the novel Michael is dominated by his individual self and he seems to be leading his journey by his inner urge but his problem is dwelling between his attempt to satisfy his self and his failure to adjust with society. In this case, Michael’s ‘self’ splits into both individual self and the social self relatively conditioned by his fellow men and their social outlook. Thus his individual self plays a counter role to his social self. Here his self cannot be defined without its social influences. Though his ‘self’ appears to be away from society, the society is within his ‘self’.

In the same way, Lata’s widowed mother Mrs. Rupa Mehra is projected as a protective mother who cares well for her children and wants them to be well settled in life. She is always seen worried about the future of her children, like Michael’s father. She too is worried about the financial constraints and fights hard to provide decent and secured life for her children. But Lata is so self-willed and she does not lend her ears to her mother’s advice. Mrs. Rupa Mehra too has a will, and she is determined to have her own way. She feels much happy in satisfying her own will which is socially centered and is conditioned by the obligations of the society and its norms. As a
proud, dutiful mother, she is elite that she has successfully married her daughter Savita to Pran and is confident that her life will be a happy one. No sooner than the marriage is about to be over she begins her next mission. She starts worrying about finding out a suitable boy for Lata. She strongly registers her mission to Lata by saying that what is good enough for her sister is good enough for her too. But the indifferent Lata ironically replies that they both cannot marry Pran for that matter. Shocked with the reply of Lata, Mrs. Rupa Mehra bursts into tears. But she is strongly rooted with the social implications, forgets her humiliation by her daughter and starts to contact through her friends and relatives to search a suitable boy for her daughter. She is highly conscious and keeps advising Lata at regular intervals so as not to keep any wrong foot. Mrs. Rupa Mehra is a woman who carries with her the socialized motherhood looking forward to a recognizable social status to her children. She is determined to take care of them at any cost even if they are against her wish. She does not have any difficulties with Savita, but she is very well aware that her younger daughter will create all sorts of problems that cannot be solved easily.

Henny’s mother Ella’s character is purely contrived by the social self. She is also very protective of her children. She too wishes them to be settled sociably well. She has always been found as a very caring and loving mother. She dislikes Hans and is not at all happy with his behaviour. Though he is Henny’s proposed fiancé, she is not interested in marrying her daughter to him, as she believes that he cannot provide Henny a decent life. Hans does nothing, but lives on his father’s income. This worries Ella and she thinks that he can in no way provide a secured life for her daughter. On the same line Mrs. Rupa Mehra is unhappy with Amit, one of the suitors of Lata, as he is not independent. Amit is socially well off, highly intelligent, a famous poet and
writer and above all a man of dreams. Mrs. Rupa Mehra does not want Lata to move around with him and develop some sort of relationship. She says that he is always seen staring out of the upstairs window, sitting in his father’s house. For her “a young man should do a job and earn his living” (ASB 557). As her social self suggests, a suitable boy is a practical man and he should strengthen the social status of his family by earning money.

Henny’s self is centered on transnational, transcultural, socio-political construct. Her self is conditioned by the racial memories and racial desires. Henny’s character has been analysed mostly on the basis of history, individual, family, group, diaspora, local and global. She as a German Jew is forced into exile in the wake of Nazi Germany. She becomes the victim of racial harassment and humiliation. Losing her mother, sister, relatives and friends she gets immigrated to England. She leads a pathetic and sorrowful life on her exile. Her only option in life is Shanti who knows not only her but also her family. She thinks that Shanti only can understand her. She spends her life by trying to find out her mother and sister. Her agony and anxiety to trace them out can be seen through her various correspondences she writes to her various friends. Her plight thus leads to the innovation of the tyrannical history of Hitler’s regime. These correspondences only pave way to explore the character of Henny, about her family, her flight to England, the changing atmosphere in Germany during the thirties, her experiences as an immigrant, a war victim and, her search for her family etc. She is seen inclined to her own race and is against accepting anyone outside her culture even as a guest. Her friends are only Jewish-German. When her mother wants to accommodate Shanti, Henny’s racial gesture is politically emerged and she strongly objects to take Shanti as she treated him as black. Likewise Mrs.
Rupa Mehra denies her daughter’s love with a Muslim boy. She is seriously against the concept of having relationship through marriage in a caste other than hers. Thus she emphasizes the need for not only a suitable Hindu boy, but a suitable Hindu khatri boy. For her to get married out of caste is violation of social norms. Her character is seen throughout the novel as herself abiding by the customs and orders of the society. Hence, when there is no chance of marrying her daughter to a boy other than a khatri, the question of accepting a Muslim boy cannot be even thought of. It will be against the rules of social institution which always discourages inter-caste marriage caused by love and it is considered a social sin.

Similarly the music teacher Carl Kall also represents the good old traditions in the society. Michael to fulfill his own dream of music leaves for Vienna where he wants to learn it under the maestro. Michael cannot think about Vienna without associating Carl Kall; for, in his mind the land and the man are inseparably linked. Thus Carl can be viewed as a symbol of Vienna. The character of Carl has been narrated through the memories of Michael and their letters. The teacher is deep-rooted in the orthodox tradition of music. He wants Michael to perform unique solo performances. But Michael lacking the self-confidence prefers to play in a group. The acidic behaviour and criticizing attitude unnerves Michael. Carl Kall is definitely a true representative of ancient culture, orthodox beliefs and disciplinarian teaching style. The elders always want to be authoritative and dominating over the younger ones. It is viewed that the teacher also like Michael’s father voices for the primacy of the relational-self emphasizing social dependency to grow in life.

Like Michael, Maan Kapoor, is also put under similar pressure by his father Mahesh Kapoor. Maan, the man “full of liveliness, and charm and energy and
affection,” (1341) is forced by his father to marry a suitable girl of his father’s choice. Mahesh Kapoor, is a well educated man and is a state Minister of Revenue. Nevertheless, he is stubborn in maintaining the family custom of choosing suitable spouses for his children and thus having compatible marriages in his family. Maan, an easy going guy, is greatly disappointed. Though he has no liking or affection for the girl he has to oblige his father and cannot say a word against his father’s will. Lata also has to oblige to her mother at last, though she expresses her grudge instantly. On no account people are allowed to choose the life of their choice but have to abide by the choice of others as the society demands.

The conflict arises when the expectations are not fulfilled. Michael does not attempt to cope with and fulfill the expectations of his master in music. His reluctant self does not allow him to learn a lot under his teacher. He realizes his mentor would be a dictator. He leaves Vienna, his teacher, and above all his love Julia. He lands in London and wanders in search of livelihood. With the knowledge of music already acquired he settles as a music teacher and joins the Maggiore Quartet as a second violinist. It shows that society could be a final resort for a self to survive.

But Lata on the other hand wants to choose a life of her own. Nevertheless she is determined to have her own way and not to be influenced by her conservative mother and strongly opinionated brother, Arun. She falls prey to love against which her mother always worried. When love is vehemently opposed in such a society, she starts loving a Muslim boy. But the irony is that she is the one who once said: “I always obey my mother” (9). She renounces love as a boring subject. When her close friend Malati says: “I’m wondering whom you’ll get married to. Your mother will get you married off within a year. I’m sure of it. And like an obedient little mouse, you’ll
obey her,” her immediate reply is, “Quite right” (30). Such an obedient daughter, who is afraid even to think about anything wrong, is now fallen in love. In spite of the fact that her mother will never accept her love, she wants to continue her love with an unsuitable Kabir.

Shanti loves Henny. But he knows that she has an inclination towards Hans and loves him. Shanti is forced to conceal his love within himself. But his love for Henny is deep in heart and continues. It would have definitely continued even if they never marry later. His love for Henny is expressed in his letters to her after her immigration. Though he knows that Hans has deserted her, he is reluctant to approach her, expresses his love and proposes her as his life partner. He is very careful and does not want Henny to have a wrong opinion about him. He never wants to create a situation for her to think that he is trying to make use of the opportunity. He waits too long to know whether she too loves him and wants to make him her life partner.

In the same way, Haresh too starts loving Lata. He expresses his love for her through his letters. Lata too responds to his letters and the same incident has been found in Henny’s case also. But both of them never reveal what is there in their mind. Henny and Lata were in love. Henny loved Hans, half-breed, a ‘Mischling’ while Lata loved Kabir, a Muslim. Their love could not become a success as Hans betrays Henny in one way or the other by marrying a Christian just to save his life from the atrocious Nazis. Kabir on the other hand, when Lata at a critical stage asks him to marry her, as she will be compelled to marry somebody else on her mother’s will, wants Lata to wait till he completes his study and gets settled in life. Both are dejected in love and have not fully recovered from the memories and wounds of their past love. They take their own time to come to normal life. At last both socially driven, understand their
responsibility, forego their love and go with the society in accepting their partners as decided by others.

At the surface level, Lata’s individual self is seen as one which could operate on its own whims and fancies. She is seen as not willing to lose her ‘self’ for the sake of society, but in the deeper level she cannot resist herself against the social will of her mother. In the case of Henny, even though she feels Shanti is a better choice for being a life partner, this decision of Henny is conditioned by socially driven political self. Lata’s self is determined by the social consciousness of her mother. So her self is social, whereas Henny’s self is socio-racial and hence political.

The study also shows that Lata’s self is rather a normal Indian woman self which is promiscuous in nature. Seth refers Lata’s name to vine plant, creeping on the sources available nearby. He says: “Lata was named after that most pliable thing, a vine, which was trained to cling: first to her family, then to her husband. Indeed, when she was a baby, Lata’s fingers had had a strong and coiling grasp which even now came back with a sweet vividness to her mother” (22). To substantiate this view, Lata’s mother’s advice to her goes as: “Lata, you are vine, you must cling to your husband!” (22). The metaphor vine has significant implications in the character Lata as this attributes her dependency on others than herself. Hence, from the point of view of the novelist, indeed, the ‘self’ in her is inevitably shaped by others in her family inside as well as outside. Traditionally Indian woman is always dependent either on her father or husband or son. This is a social custom imposed on every woman self. Hence, woman is not allowed to be independent but her individual self is portrayed hidden and so it has been conditioned by social norms. Thus society on the whole
influences her individual self. Even her friend Malati who has been brought up by her mother of modernist attitude adds socialist value to Lata’s self.

There is also a similarity between Lata and Julia; they both fall into the categorization of social self. Julia in *An Equal Music* is depicted as a woman fascinated by music but this fascination cannot make an impact on her individual self which has been romanticized by Seth through his narrative. In her ideal inner world she seems to be caught in her whims and fancies to fall in love with Michael but her realization of social norms could not allow her to continue her life with Michael. She says:

I’m happy I’m here with you. Well, but I meant, being away from – from London? I miss them. But that would be true even if I’d stayed on Vienna. But it’s just not that. Today I withdrew some money with my credit card, and I thought, the records will show this took place in Venice. I’m not used to thinking in that way. It is horrible sort of subterfuge. (*AEM 275*)

Julia is practical and knows what would be her future if she lives with him. She plans for her life by the voice of her inner self but leads it by what her social self suggests her.

In *Two Lives* too one can witness the breakdown of marriage proposal due to social upheaval. Henny and Hans are ‘in-group’ members of the race and the land. Henny is Jewish-German, in this combination, she belongs to the nation Germany that ruthlessly denies her presence in the land, whereas Jew the term denotes her racial identity for which she should migrate from the land. So her individual self is haunted between collective and political selves of both land and race. Finally the racial self
wins so that she is able to move from Germany and also to marry Shanti. Because of her racial identity she has got into diasporic politics and she redisCOVERs the landless entity in Shanti who is also trapped by diasporic situation. Her in-group members vitally influence her self to be racial, so she is part of the collective self which is politics specific.

Hans is a German but a half-breed of Jew. As he is partly a Jew he falls in love with Henny. But because of the political situation he has to deny his love for her. The war crisis plays a major role in Han’s marriage with a Christian woman Annerose. Seth describes:

Hans was a bureaucrat during the war, but neither he nor Annerose ever joined the Nazi Party, though it would have been greatly to their advantage to do so. Later, they would avoid joining the Social Unity Party, or SED, which was supported by the Soviet military administration, and were to suffer as a result. Their spirit encapsulates in a sense the struggle of private individuals against the domination of the heavy-handed, inclusivist state. (TL 329)

The socio-political force is more powerful than the individual’s will to satisfy his inner self. The political motivation leads them to break up. Both Henny’s and Hans’ ‘selves’ are victims of war-torn Germany.

The pre-war and the post-war emigrations brought about by the policies of Hitlerian Germany led to the Jewish diaspora. This causes the emigration of Henny’s circle of friends. None of Henny’s Jewish friends and her family who remained in Germany survived the Second World War except Jazko. He could be safe as his wife is non-Jewish. Her friends could survive because they have fled from their homeland:
The Pawels had fled to Sweden, Adolf Berliner to the United States, Fredy Aufrichtig to China. Some of Henny’s acquaintances, like Walther Schachtel, who became a bus conductor there, had fled to Palestine. Others, like her brother Heinz Caro, had fled to South America. Even after the war, many survivors left Germany. Friedel Alexander went to South Africa, the Wolffskys to Australia. In different parts of the world, under the burden of grief and with the memory of fear, still thinking and dreaming in German, they tried to rebuild their lives. (350)

In *A Suitable Boy* also Seth details a political situation in which Veena’s husband Kedarnath Tandon’s family turn to be diasporic. Their family has to face the partition riots. They are forced to leave Pakistan. Old Mrs. Tandon flinches on hearing someone mentioning about ‘comings and goings’ from Pakistan:

Three years ago, her whole family had had to flee the blood and flames and unforgettable terror of Lahore. They had been wealthy, ‘proprieted’ people, but almost everything they had owned was lost, and they had been lucky to escape with their lives. Her son Kedarnath, Veena’s husband, still had scars on his hands from an attack by rioters on his refugee convoy. Several of their friends had been butchered. The young, old Mrs. Tandon thought bitterly, are very resilient: her grandchild Bhaskar had of course only been six at the time; but even Veena and Kedarnath had not let those events embitter their lives. They had returned here to Veena’s hometown, and Kedarnath had set himself up in a small way in – of all polluting, carcass-tainted things – the shoe trade. For old Mrs. Tandon, the descend from a decent prosperity could not have been more painful. (*ASB* 21)
Seth in his writings elaborates social events that incidentally affect every individual ‘self’ that has been much intended to be realized by every characters. All his protagonists are found struggling to retain their individual selves but in their identity crisis they have to accept/adjust themselves with the society.

Maan’s life takes its turn from the time he comes in contact with the courtesan, Saeeda Bai. He is driven mad on her beauty and is highly obsessed with her. He keeps spending most of his time with her without realizing the meaning or purpose of life. Maan and Raja of Marh represent the patriarchal social self conditioned by male dominated society in which man is all privileged over womanhood. Both are epicureans and they want to be given priority and importance and force her to satisfy their desire. Saeeda could not avoid Raja of Marh though she does not have any interest in that old man as he is a Raja who has the power to act according to his own will. She is afraid of the consequences that she might have to face if she provokes anger in him. Saeeda Bai stands for women’s oppression under the chauvinism and is compelled to dance to their tunes. She has not been allowed to voice for her self’s longing for social justice. She reflects the victimized gender biased side of the society:

Despite Saeeda Bai’s revulsion she had not been able immediately to escape from Marh, where the crass Raja, restrained only by a succession of disgusted but tactful British Residents, held ultimate sway. Afterwards, she was too frightened of the sluggish and brutal man and his hired ruffians to cut off relations completely with him. (120)

Raja wants to continue this in his future generation too. He takes his son Rajkumar to Saeeda Bai’s house to make a man of him, as he thinks that the Rajkumar is a useless
fellow. In terms of interpersonal relationship every individual self is guided or
directed by other social selves. Seth’s characters are always surrounded by their
fellow men and women.

In *A Suitable Boy* also every character is interdependent and social interaction
among them helps the plot move. Malati senses that Lata has an inclination towards
Kabir. She only helps Lata to gather information about him and eventually finds him
to be a Muslim. She advises Lata not to continue her love further:

> You haven’t a chance. Your family will be dead against him. Forget him. Put
> it down to experience. And always find out the last name of anyone with an
> ambiguous first name . . . . It didn’t occur to me – it just didn’t occur to me –
> but didn’t it occur to you either? With a name like that – though all the Kabirs
> I know are Hindu – Kabir Bhandare, Kabir Sondhi – . . . I’m so sorry. Poor
> Lata . . . . Read a P.G. Wodehouse or two. (155)

Malati sternly warns Lata to desert Kabir but Lata wants to continue as she enjoys his
company. But at the end when she expresses her decision to marry Haresh, Malati
strongly objects saying that she should marry Kabir as she loves him: “Then perhaps
you’ll see some sense and undo what you’ve done. You love Kabir, and you must
marry him” (1295). She convinces Lata to re-think. Because she thinks that Lata has
not taken this decision on her own and she might have been forced by her mother:
“Was that her reaction? I thought she was keen on Haresh. Trust you to do just what
Mummy says. But I won’t have it, Lata, you can’t ruin your life like this” (1295). Lata
however points that it is her own decision and her mother does not know anything
about it and Malati is the first person to know about this decision. When Lata asks her
that why she is dead against Haresh, Malati replies:
Because I see nothing, nothing, nothing at all in common between you two. And it’s completely obvious you don’t love him. Have you thought this thing through, Lata, or are you just making up your mind in a sort of trance? Like that nun business that Ma keeps talking about. Think. Do you like the idea of sharing your possessions with this man? Of making love with him? Does he attract you? Can you cope with the things that irritate you about him – Cawnpore and paan and all that? Please, please, Lata don’t be stupid. Use your brains. What about this Simran woman – doesn’t that bother you? And what do you want to do with yourself after your marriage – or are you just content to be a housewife in a walled compound full of Czechs? (1297)

Malati’s view on the concept of husband is revealed as her social self has well absorbed the society’s role in making of man, a suitable boy. Malati voices Lata’s inner consciousness which is fairly of her social consciousness.

Society and its concepts continue to expand in order to make a considerable impact on an individual self. For instance, the cross cultural-self identified in Meenakshi, Lata’s sister-in-law makes her aware of the westernized self in her. Lata’s meeting with Amit happens in Calcutta because of her association with Meenakshi. Lata’s presence in Calcutta shows that she has got an opportunity to be socially exposed. Amit is one more boy associated in the search for a suitable boy as the title of the novel itself reflects the role of social consciousness in making of ‘self’ in each character. So the girl must have undergone a process of seeking a marriage partner who must be suitable to her and this process is socially constructed. This is how traditionally marriage has become a complement to an individual self. Seeking for a boy in the name of suitable boy is a ritual and broadly speaking this would have given
space for Lata to change her choice from Kabir to Haresh. Thus the society has played a role on self. Society never has a concern for the individual’s self-ratification but always cares for the continuity of social norms. To her, marriage is not a personal affair but a social affair.

Pran has been projected as a suitable boy by her mother Mrs. Rupa Mehra and her sister Savita. There arises a question, what makes them realize a suitable boy in Pran. The qualification of a suitable boy is measured by his social status as his father is the Minister of Revenue of the state of Purva Pradesh, he is a professor of English. Another quality what is identified in him is the sense of caring. And society accepts such qualifications as anticipated by the fellow beings. Mrs. Rupa Mehra expects a boy of Pran’s quality alone could be suitable to Lata also. Thus Lata’s mother through her social self universalizes a suitable boy. Though her individual ‘self’ rejects her mother’s universalization of suitable boy her social self transcends her inner self to fulfill the social needs. There is a conflict between her individual self and her social self and finally the relational self is socially broadened entering the main stream:

Thrust so suddenly into the marriage market this year, forced to travel from city to city, Lata had begun to look at marriages (the Sahgals, the Chatterjis, Arun and Meenakshi, Mr and Mrs Mahesh Kapoor, Pran and Savita) with more than a disinterested eye. But whether it was owing to the hectoring of her mother or her overly copious love or the vision of these different families or Pran’s illness or the birth of Savita’s baby or all of them combined, Lata felt she had changed. (877)

The change occurs in her personality and it is a notable transition from her individual self to her social self.
On the religious side the depiction of Ganga in the novel is used as a supporting metaphor of how civilization spread in the country. Ganga was once the part of earth; now has become part and parcel of social life: “Quietly they moved down the calm and sacred river that had come down to earth so that its waters might flow over the ashes of those long dead, and that would continue to flow long after the human race had, through hatred and knowledge, burned itself out” (1070). The river Ganga witnesses all sorts of human relationship that includes the love affair between Lata and Kabir, their love failure and the rituals as part of societies’ routine, exploitation of human beliefs in religion, blind belief in holy dip in it leading to mass destruction of lives and lack of governance of the Government. These are all considered the social life in practice with the river Ganga. Thus Ganga is not only a river but a social source grown on social components like myths, legends and rituals. And so helps an individual turn to be social.

The novel *A Suitable Boy* remains a social survey of the nation:

The richness of the book comes from the hundreds of interactions between families and friends, brought together as passing strangers or made enemies by legal, religious, musical, literary, economic and social institutions. *A Suitable Boy* bears out a truism of Indian society: that at a certain level everyone seems to know everyone else. (Richard B. Woodward)

The novel is a social document through which Seth tries to trace and record all the possible social practices, events ranging from religion, politics to trade, beliefs, rituals, ideas, opinions in terms of human experiences and relationships.
Haresh’s social ‘self’ in fact helps Lata’s ‘self’ realize what she actually wants to have in her married life. He is portrayed as a man of socialist values who believes in the quality of labour and the quality of product. He is at ease in mingling with his fellow men and workers:

He had no airs of superiority when he talked to them, and this pleased them. Through their pleasure in exchanging the expertise of their trade, Haresh himself got interested in the machines: how they worked, how they could be kept in good condition, how he might be able to make small innovations to improve their performance. (ASB 1113)

He is much principled to give respect to the craftsmanship. He never bothers about the age old caste discrimination and willingly visits a shoe maker and becomes friendly to him: “HARESH also visited Ravidaspur one morning. He took with him bananas for Jagat Ram’s children, the good news about the Praha order, and an invitation to his wedding” (1334). Thus his self is undoubtedly socially elevated voicing Seth’s wish for caste-free society. Haresh is the only character concerned for social justice. And, Lata is able to realize Haresh’s social self on their wedding day when he shows her Jagat Ram’s wedding gift and states that the gift is given by a cobbler. On hearing this Lata says: “I like it” (1348). Her statement is suggestive of her appreciation of the gift as well as Haresh’s friendly gesture to a cobbler, an outcaste. Through this incident Lata finally turns to have socially committed self. It happens because of Haresh. He is in the real sense socially acceptable and much anticipated suitable boy not only to a woman like Lata but also to the nation.

Haresh becomes at last the suitable boy to Lata as he is practical and socially committed. These characteristic features are primarily the motivating forces which
Seth wants to promote through his characters. This is reflected in the autobiographical characterization of young Seth in *Two Lives* in which Seth is not only shown as modern Ulysses searching for knowledge but also he is true to the life history of Henny and Shanti, whose socio-political experiences are serve him as real sources for the writing of a memoir based on the contemporary social history of India as well as post-war Europe.

On the whole young Seth in *Two Lives* elaborates his social consciousness when he refers to his previous works like *The Golden Gate*, *A Suitable Boy* etc. And, these references show that how far Seth is a writer committed to socio-cultural economical indices of his nation. Seth’s self is all about his society. Though he temporarily migrates to England, his mind is obsessed with his parents and his family members. He thinks about the geographical space and the cultural space of India when he mentions about his writing on the novel *A Suitable Boy* in which through the social self of Lata Seth describes about the wedding with fire ceremony:

... this little fire was indeed the centre of the universe. For here it burned, in the middle of this fragrant garden, itself in the heart of Pasand Bagh, the pleasantest locality of Brahmpur, which was the capital of the state of Purva Pradesh, which lay in the centre of the Gangetic plains, which was itself the heartland of India ... and so on through the galaxies to the outer limits of perception and knowledge. (15)

Thus, through young Seth the notion about self and society spreads over all these protagonists as individual, social and political selves in the narratives *An Equal Music*, *A Suitable Boy* and *Two Lives* respectively. Majority of the characters imply the significance of social impact on individual self. No doubt, Seth’s men and women...
are truly social and they have been characterized so as to illustrate that self and society are inseparable.

The findings of the present study may comprehensively be categorized as follows:

- The self is a complex entity of both an individual’s mind and various norms and regulations of the society.
- An individual self cannot be always isolated from society.
- Even to realize one’s inner self one must undergo a process of interpersonal relationships that have been cleverly rendered by Seth through his prime characters in his narrative texts.
- Individual self is also an outcome of Social construct.
- Self is contextual specific, by which it never evades from social believes and practices.
- Self is realized only through socialization

Thus, the experienced self of the characters in Vikram Seth’s writings has the socio-cultural features like self-identity, individuality, inter-personal relationship and its link with social environment.

This study on “Society and Self in the Narrative Texts of Vikram Seth’s Recent Writings” with its findings cited may help the academics and researchers to have a better understanding of how the ‘society’ and ‘self’ have been constructed in literature in general and in Vikram Seth’s narratives in particular. This is based on socialization of self and locating the responsible role of self in making a better society.
The thesis may lead one to have further study in Vikram Seth’s writings with reference to discourse analysis detailing his linguistic contribution to Indian Writing in English. There is also scope for analyzing his texts under transcultural themes. Also a study on the resistant attitudes of his characters is possible. Researchers can make note of his knowledge on geographical survey of India and continental space and his concern for continuity of tradition and make use of them for their further study.

Seth’s view on “Art and Market” may also be considered to undergo further research in his writings. From this point of view the policies of globalization also have recognizable impact on his writings which can also be academically reviewed. His writings may be categorized as new genre on frontier writing. Technically speaking his works are identified with post-modern writings using diaries, letters, memory within memory flashes, jumbled interactions between characters and so on that may be explored further.
Notes and References

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