3.1. A Suitable Boy [1993]

In the Post-1980 era love, sex, marriage and their failure are some of the leading themes in the Indian English novel. The description of love and sex is very bold and rather unconventional. Marriage as a social institution has lost its sanctity and relevance, lack of faith in religion and declining moral standard and behaviour are some of the predominant themes in postmodern novel. Corruption in public as well as private lives of individuals too appeals to our novelists and they write novels on this theme. Employing national myths and alluding to national epics like the Mahabharata. There is a shift in emphasis we have moved away from the Gandhian era of village centrism to the city centrism of the Post-emergency era. The ‘locale’ has shifted from the village to the metropolis of our country and then abroad. Writers like Amitav Ghosh, Salman Rushdie, Vikram Seth and few others have won recognitions both at home and abroad belongs to Post-modern era.

A Suitable Boy [ASB] is written in 1993. It has 19 sections divided into 477 small chapters. It is the longest novel in the English language to be published as a single volume.

The novel made history not only on account of its monumental length of 1349 pages, but also because of the astronomical advance of two hundred and fifty thousand pounds that Seth received from Orion, the largest ever aid for a ‘first novel’ in Britain.[Field 47]

A quasi-historical novel, A Suitable Boy chronicles a saga of four inters generational and interconnected families: the Mehras, the Chatterjis, the Kapoors and the Khans. The novel is set against the backdrop of post-independence India inching its way towards the first General elections. It is structured into nineteen sections. The novel opens with a wedding that gives Seth a chance to introduce all these families and several major characters. It is the wedding of Savita, the widowed Mrs. Mehra’s elder daughter, to Pran, a University lecturer and the son of the State Revenue Minister, Mahesh Kapoor present at
the wedding, are members of the Anglicized Chatterji clan and the Khan family of Nawab of Baitar who is Mahesh Kapoor’s close friend. Apart from the Khans, the other three families are connected with the ties of matrimony. Lata is Mrs. Rupa Mehra’s younger daughter and the story of the mother’s search for a suitable boy for Lata drives the logic of the plot and forms the main interconnecting thread of the novel. The other character who leads diverse geographical and cultural sites of the novel is Maan, Mahesh Kapoor’s younger son with his ‘unsuitable’ liaison with a Muslim courtesan Saeeda Bai. Maan’s erotic connection with a Muslim is paralleled in Lata’s falling in love with a handsome young Muslim student Kabir Durrani.

Mrs. Rupa Mehra is shocked and horrified by her daughter’s rebellious act and whisks her off to Calcutta, to the home of her eldest born Arun Mehra who is married to Meenakshi, daughter of a Bengali judge Mr. Chatterji, Amit Chatterji. Meenakshi’s brother is a well-known poet, who in his lazy fashion falls in love with Lata. Since marriage is seen as a duty and an obligation, other members of the family and her friends assist Mrs. Mehra in finding a suitable boy, so adding to the vast canvas of Seth’s novel more characters and situations. Mrs. Rupa Mehra’s efforts in searching out a suitable boy result in her discovery of Haresh, a boy from the right [Khatri] caste who works in a leather manufacturing industry. Which of these three suitors will Lata marry and who, in fact, is the most suitable boy are the questions that the novel unhurriedly plays out.

If the Mehras and Kapoors represent the Hindu middle class of north India, the Nawab of Baitar stands for feudal Muslim aristocracy. The aristocracy is in fact fading in its relevance, which is symbolized by the Baitar library facing to pieces in neglect. The Nawab’s two sons Firoz and Imtiaz are lawyer and doctor respectively, and their careers look forward to the end of the feudal structure, even as the Zamindari Abolition Bill is being discussed in legislature and court. Their friendship with Maan, like their father’s friendship, is a part of the
syncreric traditions of India. Haresh, who considers his work as his religion, and disregards caste restrictions on working in the polluting leather industry, seems to be a sign of the modern ideas of economic progress and social egalitarianism. The Anglicized Chatterji give Seth a chance to self-reflexively portray a novel in the making in the character of Amit and show a colonial metropolis like Calcutta coming to grips with political independence from the British.

Through, the vast canvas of the novel and the leisurely handling of the plot in linear time, the novelist attempts to represent more than just the characters and their individual stories. It is the vast and varied life of the young nation that, he attempts to represent through the fictional town of Brahmpur, the capital of Purva Pradesh. *A Suitable Boy* is termed quasi-historical because; Seth takes several historical developments of the nascent nation and makes them a part of his fictional characters: such as the political and legal developments of the 50s. Many political personalities like Nehru, Kidwani and so on are dramatized as real historical figures in cameo representations. However, the novel may also be termed quasi-biographical. It is interesting to note the many biographical points of comparison between some of the characters and situations portrayed in the novel and their real basis in the individual history/memory of the Seth family.

The novel is set against the backdrop of Post-Independence India inching its way towards the first General Elections. It begins with Savita’s marriage in 1950 and ends with Lata’s marriage in 1952. Thus, Vikram Seth has depicted characters and events in the novel with realistic mode, as discussed in the following section.

Seth’s method of character delineation must be considered in the context of his fictional credo of social realism. If there is little room for detailed psychological analysis, this is because Seth invests his characters with great realism of detail with the intention of using them to identify and develop a wide array of social related themes. His thematic preoccupation is not restricted to that of finding a suitable
bridegroom for Lata, but rather to define what is ‘suitable’, and ‘balanced’ in the context of “a new truncated independent India” [ASB 251]. Thus, Seth does offer a different perspective on tradition and the significance of religion in the private sphere, but he does so in the context of the institution of the Family.

The novel deals with a simple theme, the quest for A Suitable Boy for Lata, the younger daughter of Rupa Mehra. She is nineteen year attractive girl, who has just passed her graduation. She has three suitors Kabir Durrani, Amit Chatterji and Haresh Khanna from among who she has to choose her life partner. As Filkin says:

Lata’s choice, then, is India’s choice. The options for each involve either a transcendence of religious factionalism [Kabir], a sophisticated internationalism [Amit, the poet celebrated in England], or a homespun and plodding pursuit of economic stability [Haresh]. However, […] Seth is able to convey the subtlety and complexity of such choices without turning his characters into overt symbols. [Filkin]

Lata provides the commentary on her elder sister’s arranged marriage. The predominant question in Lata’s mind is how Savita agree to marry an unknown person whom “she had met for only an hour, and feel for him the special concern and tenderness that shows on her face” [ASB 15]. Lata’s attitude, we are lead to believe, is partly the result of a generational shift. At first, Lata falls in love with Kabir. He loves her passionately but when Lata learns from Malati, her best friend that Kabir is Muslim, and her immediate reaction is that this would distress her mother. A mistake has occurred because of the name [Kabir] that is also the name of one of the great secular Bhakti saints. Kabir tells Lata that he knows of two marriages where one spouse is Hindu and the other Muslim but Lata does not take comfort from this. She replies, “Ours wouldn’t work. No one else will let it work” [ASB 1287]. “No one else” in this case is her mother, her grandfather, and even her mother’s “samdhin” or co-mother-in-law, Mrs. Tandon. Lata realizes
that her feelings for Kabir are confused, jealous and obsessive. She tells Malati that,

“I’m not myself when I’m with him” [ASB 1296]

Moreover, Lata rejects Kabir; her rejection of Kabir is also a rejection of the turbulent, violent, passionate part of herself. Maan’s infatuation for Saeeda Bai and his wounding Firoze grievously bring unbearable pain to the Kapoor family, hastening Mrs. Mahesh Kapoor’s death. It also drags out into the open the Nawab of Baitar’s youthful fling with passion and its disastrous outcome. Lata, who has been witness to the pain and grief of that death, is surely changed by the turn of events. When Malati reminds her of her passionate love for Kabir, Lata bursts out,

If that’s what passion means, I don’t want it. Look at what passion has done to the family. Maan’s broken, his mother dead, his father in despair. When I thought that Kabir was seeing someone else, what I remember feeling was enough to make me hate passion, passionately and forever. [ASB 1296]

It is the family, which assumes Centre stage in Seth’s narrative. As Anita Desai puts it,

Although, in their rash youth, they Lata and Maan might be tempted by the possibilities of change, defiance, and the unknown, they learn their lessons and return, chastened, to the safety and security of the familiar and the traditional, represented here, in the Indian fashion, by the great god family. [Desai 22-26]

Moreover, now she comes to the importance of family institution.

Her mother appears to her now as the guardian of the family; and with life and death so near each other here in the hospital. It seemed to Lata that all that provided continuity in the world or protection from it was the family. [ASB 877]
Returning to Lata and her decision, we see that has not formed her own opinion of the place of passion in her life and the importance of her family. She has also owns a certain concession to her individuality from her mother. One critic certainly sees it in those terms and thinks, furthermore, that it would have been impossible in 1990’s India to portray a mixed marriage:

In the aftermath of the horrible Indian partition and the resultant communal Frenzy, in the 1951-52 it was unthinkable, on the part of Seth, to show inter religious marriage [Agarwalla 28]

Lata does not like Haresh when she sees him. Her first reading of Haresh is:

He was shorter than she had expected. The next when he opened his mouth to speak was that he had been chewing paan…in fact paan did not go at all with her idea of a husband [ASB 569].

However, Lata wants to know more about Haresh as an individual, Lata asserts to Haresh: “Haresh I think we should meet and talk a little more before I can make up my mind. It is the most important decision of my life. I need to be completely sure” [ASB 1146]. Lata appears more practical at the end of the novel in every aspect. She does not follow her mother’s decision; she examines every situational and contextual experience in her life, which makes her a good decision maker. She accepts Haresh Khanna only after discovering her feelings, views and future with him, Lata does not succumb to her brother’s pressure not to accept Haresh.

The novel insists on the human relations from cultural perspective and ensures them perfectly through marriage and family. Seth gives priority to the claims of the individuality of the woman. This may be one of the reasons why, Lata singles out Haresh out of the three men with the hope that, he would permit her enough space to enjoy her
indivisuality with mutual regard and respect. Haresh stops his paan-chewing habit to please her. Haresh is also practical thinker like Lata and appears a suitable boy to the light and sensitive-hearted girl.

Amit Chatterji, the son of High Court Judge and a writer, is the second suiter for Lata who proposes in section eighteen of the novel. He makes passionate advances to Lata. As a poet, he appears to be in dreams. Therefore, he would not prove a good husband. After some reflections, Lata realizes that she regards him more of a friend and cannot see herself as his wife. “We are alike”, she tells Malati, and also adds; “…and if his mind’s on a book I don’t know he’ll have any time for me. Sensitive people are usually very insensitive-I should know” [ASB 1296].

In this way, she is also apprehensive that life with Amit may mean to her a loss of identity. It is interesting that Amit meets all the dreams that a girl, reading English Literature at a university, might cherish: he has a degree from Cambridge, has published a book of poems, is writing a novel, is funny and affectionate and he is socially and financially well placed. However, Amit’s lazy wooing awakens no answering spark in Lata. And Mrs. Mehra also rejects Amit and rushes off to Delhi in search of a Suitable Boy.

Lata’s rejection of Amit brings to light another face of the changing Industrial India. She is the product of the industrialized world where she cannot remain oblivious of the realities of material life. She muses about Amit,

And what would it be like to be married to such a man?
He was just Amit- to convert him into a husband was absurd–the thought of it made Lata smile and shake her head. [ibid. 1289]

She finds him non-serious and a flippant person who would not be able to shoulder the responsibility of a marriage. Thus, Love is not
secularizing and democratizing sentiment in Seth’s novel. It flourishes in the secure confines of class, caste and religion.

Haresh, aged 28, a self-made man, English educated, is the third suitor whom Lata finds suitable. Lata not only rejects the dashing Kabir she also rejects the gentle Amit. The work ethic is presented in the novel with a dash of poetics, as shown in the following description of Haresh working at a pair of Goodyear Welted shoes:

No poet ever worked harder or more inspired to craft a poem than Haresh worked for the next three days on his pair of shoes… he examined and folded the components, stamped the lining for size and style, fitted the upper and lining components together and carefully stitched them to each other. [ASB 920]

Haresh also thoroughly enjoys the work of making shoes even though; it involves handling the hides of dead animals, traditionally unclean work done only by outcasts. In all these small ways, Haresh is giving the sanctified hierarchy of the caste system in India a small nudge here and there. Haresh, who considers his work as his religion, and disregards caste restrictions on working in the polluting leather industry, seems to be a sign of modern ideas of economic progress and social egalitarianism. Lata finally decides to marry Haresh Khanna for pragmatic reasons. She explains to Malati why, she has rejected her other two suitors; “Haresh’s feet touch the ground, and he has dust and sweat and a shadow. The other two are a bit too Godlike and ethereal to be any good for me” [ASB 1299].

Haresh impresses her as, being “generous, robust, optimistic, impatient, and responsible” and willing to “Mehraise” himself for her sake [ASB 1290]. As she puts it: “Haresh is practical, he’s forceful, and he isn’t cynical. He gets things done and helps people without making a fuss about it” [ASB 1297]. Replying to Malati’s question if he would let her teach, she says, “I’m sure of it. He hates to see anyone’s talent
wasted. He encourages them and is really concerned about people….”  
[ASB 1297]

Haresh is honest with Lata and confides that he has had to give up his love for Simran, a Sikh girl, whose family has decided that she should not marry him because he is from outside their community. Haresh is also impressed by Lata and perceives her as good “wife material” [ASB 597]. Due to her simplicity and intelligence, Haresh’s instant opinion about her is “This girl is intelligent without arrogance and attractive without vanity” [ASB 579]. We learn that “he isn’t the kind to ask for it [dowry] and there is no one to ask on his behalf” [ASB 562].

Lata’s marriage to Haresh is almost an arranged one, which is the subtle shift of meaning that the author makes possible. Mrs. Mehra does not agree to marry Haresh; Lata chooses to marry him and indeed personally writes to him about her decision even before informing her mother. Seth is obviously making the best of both worlds: having a heroine individual enough to make a traditional choice. We have seen that it was one within the limits imposed by the expectations of the family. Haresh adopts a straightforwardly reformist and economic approach:

If he had his way and was given funds and labour, he would have this neighbourhood on its feet in six months. Sanitation, drinking water, electricity, paving, civic sense—it was simply the question of making sensible decisions and having the requisite facilities to implement them [ibid. 237]

Even Lata herself has to overcome “an atavistic revulsion against the whole polluting business of hides” [ibid. 625], which he never seems to register. Haresh’s preference for utility over backwardness and tradition is, not only signalled in his relation with India, but also his pragmatic attitude toward the former colonial power. He is foreign returned, but from a British technical college rather than
the elite institutions of Oxbridge. Once again, this educational background associates him with the universal values of capitalist modernity over colonial authority that is Haresh wants technical knowledge rather than the totemic authority of the traditional seats of learning in England. “If Haresh had any God”, we are told later, “it was quality” [ASB 658]. Lata has to overcome an initial prejudice to understand Haresh’s worth.

Originally, she had found ‘the thought of their getting married was ridiculous.’ The matter of his job combining with his less than perfect English with its traces both of Hindi and English midlands accent makes him seem ‘half baked’ to the heroine in the middle of the book. The main contrast that emerges between the more romantic choice of Kabir and Haresh is not only one between Hindu and Muslim, but one between economic man oriented to the future and romantic possibilities associated by religion at least with Brahmopore’s fading Nawabi Culture. The difference is deeply marked by ideas about temporal stages.

The realization of the significance of the family and the community, and the need to control passion in order to achieve balance between oneself and the larger organism with which one is affiliated, is finally the driving force behind Lata’s decision. In such a way, many of the main concerns of the novel are present in Lata’s story: the relationship between the Hindu and Muslim Communities, the importance of Caste, Love and Marriage, and the Family.

Mrs. Rupa Mehra best expresses the traditions of Indian wives. The ‘helpless’ Mrs. Mehra was compelled to depend on the goodwill of others for support to allow her four children to continue to enjoy the benefits of an excellent English medium boarding school education. Now, in her mid-forties, Mrs. Mehra preserves the memory of her deceased husband, Raghubir Mehra, a senior civil servant. Her veneration for her late husband is represented by the use of a ‘capital’ whenever she refers to him [honour usually reserved for God]. When
Mrs. Mehra asks, “Do you think it is easy for me, trying to organize things for all four of my children without his help?” [ASB 3] ‘His’ refers to her husband. Whenever she remembers him and in times of need, and trouble, which evokes fun. On the wedding day of her elder daughter Savita, she recalls sweet memories of her dead husband: “if he had been here, I could have worn the tissue-patola saree I wore for my own wedding” [ASB 3]. Therefore, she is the responsible mother, and the task of arranging Lata’s marriage is a commitment ordained by social norms. At the marriage of her elder daughter, Savita she says to Lata, “You too will marry a boy I choose” [ASB 3].

So, other members of the family, as well as relatives and friends, are therefore, expected to assist Mrs. Mehra in performing her parental obligation. To work out an appropriate ‘alliance’, Mrs. Mehra must take into serious consideration issues of religion, caste and social standing.

Mrs. Rupa Mehra has no inclination for Amit Chatterjee as a suiter for Lata, Chatterjees as she thinks that they are proud of their class and are hypocritical. She thinks of Amit: “Poet, Wastrel! He has never earned an honest rupee in his life. I will not have all my grandchildren speaking Bengali” [ASB 486].

Seth presents the native Indian traditions and customs in Hindu and Muslim communities. When Lata reveals her intention to marry Kabir Durrani, a Muslim, her mother gets shocked and speaks of the impossibility of the success of such interreligious marriages: “he will marry you and next year he’ll say ‘talaq talaq talaq’ and you’ll be on streets” [ibid. 182]. This is the custom of divorce without any legal process in the Muslim community. In such a way, she represents widowhood, parental obligation and place of husband in the life of Indian women.

In family institution, male as heads of family such as Mahesh Kapoor and the Nawab of Baitar celebrate the ideal domestic space as
that where men and women live within the specific roles delegated to them. They relegate their wives to a privatized ‘domestic sphere’ having little or no impact on the ‘public’ sphere in which they themselves participate. The older women confirm to these patriarchal expectations of the ‘wife’, ‘mother’, and ‘widow’.

“Mahesh Kapoor believes in women’s education but doesn’t believe in a woman working” [ASB 845] and tells his daughter-in-law, Savita that she should concentrate on her duties as a mother. Surprisingly, Mrs. Kapoor demurs, and Savita continues to read her law books despite her father-in-laws reaction.

In public sphere, Mahesh Kapoor’s secularism is much valid by Muslims including the Nawab Sahib, and it is a quality endorsed by the narrative. However, Mahesh Kapoor has his own extremism: at one point he baits his wife that neither of their sons will perform the “Shraadhd” rites for them when they are dead [ASB 1026].

Mrs. Mahesh Kapoor is the maternal pillar of support in Prem Niwas, the home of the Kapoor family. She is the ‘samdhin’ or the ‘co-mother-in-law’ of both Mrs. Mehra and the old Mrs. Tandon. As she is not a widow, she is also “the only one who was still mistress in her own house” [ASB 177]. In keeping with tradition, she refers to her husband either as ‘Pran’s father’ or as ‘Minister Sahib’ for “to call him by name was unthinkable.” ‘My this was all right.’[Mahesh Kapoor] [ASB 177]. We never learn her own name. The nurturing role of the ‘decent kind and affectionate’ Mrs. Kapoor is lauded by her family and she is identified with the Harsingar tree which was stolen from Indra’s heaven by Krishna to present it to his wife. “…..the tree flowered, but kept nothing for itself” [ASB 1042]. They relegate their wives to a privatized ‘domestic sphere’ having little or no impact on the ‘public’ sphere in which they themselves participate. The older women confirm to these patriarchal expectations of the ‘wife’, ‘mother’, and ‘widow’. Mahesh Kapoor believes in women’s education but doesn’t believe in a
woman working. The self-effacing Mrs. Mahesh Kapoor, whose first
name gets lost behind her role as wife and mother.

In such a way, she also embodies an ideal, recognizable as a
type in Indian Literature Society that of the model Hindu wife who,
putting the needs of her husband and children before her own, will not
eat until after her husband has eaten, does not contradict him openly,
but still guides his opinions through a life of unobtrusive virtue.
Therefore, she is the moral Centre of the novel.

A courtesan, Saida Bai Firozabadi occupies a pre-determined
public space. Any education that Saeeda has received-the study of
poetry and music-has been directed towards making her a more
desirable object for male consumption. Saeeda once lived in the
disreputable quarters of the city with her mother Mohsina Bai, in the
infamous alley of TarbuzKaKazaar. She has used her physical
attractiveness to assert her independence and now lives with her
younger sister Tasreen in Pasand Bagh. Saeeda Bai’s knowledge of
Urdu poetry and her choice of music reflect, “A strong intellectual taste
for so sensuous a singer” [ASB 85].

Maan, Mahesh Kapoors son falls in love with her. But Saeeda
knows that she cannot afford to get emotionally attached to Maan as
she has a ‘profession’ to keep up. As a public woman, Susie Tharu
explains: “To be a public woman was to be a woman who was not the
private possession of a patriarch, a woman who did not answer to the
law of the father” [135].

We will never learn of what happens to Saeeda Bai and Tasreen
who, like the caged parakeet that they keep, are dependent on the very
system that exploits them. What will be their future once they are
denied the patronage of the elite? We learn why Saeeda receives a
regular monthly stipend from the Nawab of Baitar only towards the end
of the novel when Saeeda finally admits her past to Firoz. The Nawab
had molested the young fifteen-year-old Saeeda in a drunken moment.
Tasreen thereby is not Saeeda’s sister but “the child she had conceived in terror, had carried in shame, and borne in pain” [ASB 1212]. [Incidentally, both Saeeda Bai and Tasreen, her daughter-passed off as sister, are associated with a caged parrot].

It is paradoxical that the very system, which had exploited Saeeda Bai and her like, had also sustained them. Saeeda Bai, who, represents the worst victimization under feudal power. She had been raped by the Nawab of Baitar and sexually harassed by the Raja of Marh-is yet so helplessly, dependent on the very same people who pay for the pleasure they extract, that she has no choice. Yardley on the other hand found protagonists fully realized-

Each is a wonderful character who, over the long unfolding of the plot, develops in ways that are convincing, appropriate, pleasing and not a little heart breaking: each of them becomes sturdy and real in the reader’s mind, so that letting go at the novel’s end is far from easy. [3]

In such a way, each of the character seems too familiar to Indian traditional ways. They are the representative of how the religion, caste, class and secular value deals in the contemporary society.

This section will examine the novel as historical representation where history coincides smoothly with fiction. A number of related issues such as history and the nation, and their realistic representations in A Suitable Boy, the land reform legislations, religion, and caste in the context of secularism and modernity in the public sphere will also be explored. Vikram Seth mocks himself in the guise of Amit Chatterji in the novel. Leila Seth, Seth’s mother, enumerates the several areas of research painstakingly undertaken by her son in her autobiography: On Balance [2003]:

He worked very hard on the book… he used to walk to the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library regularly and
read the newspapers and gazettes pertaining to the period. He also watched movies from the late forties and early fifties; he must have seen Deedar half a dozen times. He learnt Urdu from a teacher in order to understand the nuances of Muslim culture better. He met and interviewed our extended family, our friends, our acquaintances and many others whom he felt could give him an insight into understanding particular aspects of life or work or the psyche of the times. This included boxwallahs, bureaucrats, doctors, judges, lawyers, musicians, naturalists, politicians, policemen, professors, teachers, saints and gurus. He read all the land reform cases in the law reports, went-as Shantum had done earlier- to live with a Jatav shoemaker’s family in Agra, stayed for a month at the height of summer in a largely Muslim village in eastern UP, tried to figure out how one visited a courtesan, and bathed in the kumbh Mela at Allahabad. [350-1]

This long list of areas, by no means exhaustive, is an indicator of the vast canvases of the novel that Seth peoples with characters and incidents.

Seth invests a fictional place that is symbolic microcosms of the nation, with the intention of making his representation of India seem authentic and true. Neelam Shrivastava, in her insightful study, argues, “Seth constructs an organic idea of India through the microcosm of Brahmpur” [88]. The invented city of Brahmpur though identifiable with North India, indicates a geographical area that is representative of the Indian nation in all totality. The very first section of the novel makes its symbolic significance clear:

….perhaps 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 unpleasantest locality of Brahmpur, which was the capital of the state of Purva Pradesh, which lay in the center 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. [ASB 15]
Seth has said, “I realize quite early on that I would run into trouble if I didn’t create my own city”. [Woodward 32]. Brahmpur, he says, is a composite of Delhi, Lucknow, Agra, Patna, Banaras and Ayodhya, and Purva Pradesh is a state that has features of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. Thus Brahmpur, where most of the action of the novel is concentrated and Purva Pradesh of which it is a capital, become typical North Indian places, and Shrivastav rightly says that, “their national representative-ness depends on the fact that they are typical rather than specific localities” [89].

The philosophical approach to death and the gentle reproach of the Pandit to the gathering for their display of [Mrs. Kapoor’s death] grief are reminiscent of the teachings of the Bhagwad Gita. Death is inevitable and the body perishes, but the soul remains so why grieve over death? The Gita similarly preaches that a man of wisdom should exercise self-control. A person who is a victim of uncontrolled desire is frustrated when she fails to satisfy her/himself, tends to get angry, and loses sense of right and wrong. This will lead to ruin. In this context it is difficult to agree with Makarand Paranjape’s comment on the novel, that “what is Un-Indian about it is the sensibility or point of view informing it” [136].

In Calcutta, as elsewhere, there is awareness that the Muslim community in India has been weakened by partition. Amit’s father realizes that there “was not a single judge in the Calcutta High Court in 1948” [ASB 471], because they had all migrated to Pakistan. The 1952 election, as the narrator comments, “was in fact to be the largest election ever held anywhere on earth. It would involve a sixth of its people” [ASB 1085]. In such a way, it shows India is the world’s largest democracy.

Mahesh Kapoor, the State Revenue Minister is the prime mover of the Zamindari bill to abolish large and unproductive landholdings in the State. Zamindari system, whereby Zamindars collected rent for themselves and revenue for the government. If a tenant farmer did not
pay up, the Zamindar could have him evicted from the land, which would lead to the destitution of him and his family. In addition to paying rent, tenants were often forced to work for free, and the narrative represents these historical conditions.

It was expected of Kachheru that whenever there was rain during the day summer months he would go for the next day or two into his master’s fields and plough them while there was still water in the soil […]. It was exhausting labour, and it was not paid for. [ASB 531]

Kachheru belongs to the lower caste. Kachheru is pinned down by passages of extended description about a typified peasant and his poor accommodation, inadequate diet and back-breaking labour. By the end of day’s ploughing:

His face was flushed red. His feet, callused and cracked though they were, felt as if they had been boiled. After a short day’s work he usually shouldered the plough himself as he drove the cattle back from the fields. But he had no energy to do so today and gave it to the spent cattle to haul. Hardly a coherent thought formed itself in his mind. The metal of his spade, when it touched his shoulder accidentally, made him wince [ibid. 534].

Zamindari refers not only the system of agrarian relations but also to the area controlled by a Zamindar. “One of the promises on which the Congress Party, which formed the first government of independent India, was elected that they would abolish the Zamindari system” [Zaidi 33]. There was a whole raft of measures, but importantly, the tenant would get security of tenure for any field he had tilled for a certain number of years [usually twelve] and his rights would be more secure. It was hoped that a system which had meant that a minority held most of the power over most of the village land, was to be changed in favour of the majority who worked the land but had little control over it. The legislation was delayed by challenges in the Court-Land it failed to make any significant improvement in the lives of the poor farmers.
There were many factors, which led to the failure of land reform in the years immediately following the Zamindari Abolition Act. “The legislation was limited, concentrated on shoring up the rights of tenant farmers and did little to improve the lot of labourers who had no rights to land” [Merillat 120].

The landlords also found way to evade the legislation, by moving the tenant around so that he could not clock up the required number of years to gain occupancy rights [ibid. 117-8], or “having land records falsified” [Jannuzzi 140]. The Congress party which had passed the legislation and which, in the states in which these novels are set, also made up much of the executive was split on the issue of Zamindari abolition. “Much of the funding for the Congress Party came from the big landlords whom congress could not afford to alienate” [khilnani 36], and indeed many Landlords joined the party. The people whose job it was to enforce the legislation often did not do so because it was against their own personal interest.

However, in the rural area, the legislation is ineffective and the lot of the peasant does not improve. Maan Kapoor, son of the architect of the Zamindari Abolition Act travels to the village of his friend Rasheed and sees there the effect of the legislation. When he first visits the village of Debaria, the Zamindari Abolition Act has not been passed. However, the Zamindars, Rasheed’s father and grandfather, are acting on the assumption that it will be and are planning accordingly. Kachheru, the family’s senior worker, has tilled the same field for years and so under the legislation would gain rights to the land but when Rasheed’s father hears of the impending legislation he has the patwari, the keeper of land records, alter documents to show the field as having been tilled by Rasheed rather than Kachheru. Rasheed tries to ensure that the legislation can take effect by secretly visiting the patwari and having the records changed back again to show Kachheru as the tiller of the field. The patwari, suspecting that the rest of his family may not sanction Rasheed’s instructions, alerts Rasheed’s
father. The family, furious at what they see as Rasheed’s duplicity, temporarily strip him of any rights to inherit the land that would have been his; meanwhile they turn Kachheru off his fields and he becomes destitute. Kachheru pleads with his erstwhile master to relent but does not start a court case or initiate any other action to get back the land he had tilled for so long. Rasheed, having incurred the wrath of his family and inadvertently provoked the ruin of the man he was trying to protect, goes mad and later commits suicide. The Zamindars are left with their land intact but no son to inherit it.

The drama of property owner vs. peasant is played out in the mind of just one character, Rasheed, who finds himself caught on the horns of dilemma:

Torn between family shame and family pride, forced to choose between loyalty and justice, between trust and pity, what must he have been through? Was he too not a victim of the tragedy of the countryside? [ASB 1182]

The sense of tragedy in the social conflict is heightened by being contained within one character, but sorting these two codes within one person rather than in society is impossible. When an individual mind is asked in this way, to resolve something it cannot, the logical fictional outcome is madness, suicide, or in this case, both.

The effects of the legislation as felt in the city is, seen in the lives of the Nawab of Baitar and the Raja of Marh who are directly affected by it and indirectly in the lives of the courtesan Saeeda Bai and the Hindustani classical singer Ustad Majeed Khan. The survival of these artists has largely been dependent on the patronage of the elite and the Zamindari Bill will curtail such support. Saeeda Bai, the Muslim courtesan, refers to Mahesh Kapoor as “a wood-cutter” she tells his son Maan:

It is very difficult to cut down a banyan tree, Dagh Sahib, especially one that has been rooted so long in the soil of
this province. But I can hear your father’s impatient axe on the last of its trunks… the shakes will be driven from its roots… but what will happen to the birds and monkeys who sang or chattered in its branches? [ASB 355]

This has direct reference to the minister’s sincere work regarding the Zamindari Abolition Bill. Saeeda Bai’s allusion to the banyan tree here serves as an excellent summing up of the situation in the early 1950s on the eve of the introduction of the Zamindari Abolition bill, the expectations and fears roused by the new era. As Krishanan comments about Land Reform Bill and its effects.

The social contract that kept Hindus and Muslims in a state of tolerance, friendship and love, nurtured over the centuries by a common interest in the finer things of life, music, dance and art, is beginning to break up after partition. An already populist government attempts to bring in legislation, which will deprive landholders of their properties, which in turn would mean that all those who were dependent in a feudal system would suddenly find themselves left high and dry, especially musicians and courtesans. [Krishnan S.]

However, Jagatram is also sceptical about the land Reform bill, as the members of the ‘untouchable’ communities in the villages that he knew of, none owned any land. Fewer still would be able to make use of paper guarantees of the land reform.

The Congress Party had Promised Land reforms as a part of their electoral campaign. Though the ruling congress government passed the legislation and the courts upheld it, the legislation failed in its execution for a host of reasons dramatized in the novel. The government could not alienate the interests of the powerful Landlords who were members of the Congress Party and it could not enforce The Legislation in rural India because of vested interests.

Besides, the Zamindari Abolition Seth also refers to other legislations such as the language policy of independent India. Seth presents the debates in Purva Pradesh legislative assembly on a bill,
sponsoring Hindi as the state language. Here the issue is filtered through Hindu and Muslim right-wing politics. Mahesh Kapoor, who has been brought up during times when boys were educated in Urdu, finds it difficult to read the Devanagri script and understand the heavily Sanskritized Hindi that the right–wing members take pride in.

Seth mentions the Hindu Code bill, dear to both Nehru and Dr. Ambedkar, which had to be abandoned, having met with opposition from MPs from all sections of Parliament, including those from the Congress, amidst the reconstruction of Nehru’s increasing disillusionment with his party and the ascendancy of the right-wing faction in the congress. The complex twists and turns of political maneuverings in the Congress Party are superbly narrated, and are seen reflected in Mahesh Kapoor’s conflict and indecisiveness in leaving the congress. Abdus Salaam’s ironic and leisurely narration, of the All India Congress Committee meeting chaired by Nehru, to Mahesh Kapoor is a representation of the widely shared point of view about Nehru’s indecisive and emotional handling of affairs. The Home Minister, N. Agarwal and his contempt for Nehru’s inclusive politics is another point of view that persists in contemporary India.

As an MLA, Begum Abida offers historical justification for the feudal lifestyle in the legislative council, and argues that those Musicians whose livelihood was dependent on the system for patronage would suddenly find themselves “left high and dry” [ASB 281]. She does not however touch upon the social and sexual exploitation of women like Saeeda Bai.

A Suitable Boy pictures India just three years after the partition: the bloodshed and horror that followed the division of the country and the largest human migration in history are fresh in the nation’s memory, as are the scars on Kedarhath’s hands and his family’s uprooting from Lahore and subsequent economic insecurity. The events in the novel are set in the ominous shadow of partition, and
Hindu-Muslim tension is ever present in a slow simmering that can erupt in a flash at any real or imagined provocation.

Seth portrays the all too real possibility of communal violence. The Raja of Marh plans to build a temple next to the city’s main mosque in order to house a lingam, or sacred phallus, that, it is claimed, once stood in a temple on the same spot. The lingam is now at the bottom of the river but if the Raja succeeds in raising it, the Muslims in the mosque next door will find that when turn to face Mecca in the West they will be bowing to the lingam. This plot has a resonance with the real incident that occurred in Ayodhya in 1992. Ayodhya is actually referred to by the name in the novel.

However, not all the incidents that threaten conflict are resolved so peacefully, one of the most violent events of the novel taken place on a day when, through some strange chance, Moharram, Dusshera and Gandhi Jayanti coincide. Elaborate arrangements are made by the anxious administration to stall possible confrontations between the mourning Shia Muslims and the joyous Hindus celebrating the reunion of the exiled Ram with his brother Bharat. But in developments that are entirely plausible and must have happened in several Indian cities during several religious processions, there is a clash between on Tajia procession and the Ram Lila. Seth’s description of the riot where the narrative switches the point of view back and forth between the Hindus and Muslims, portrays effectively and the pity of inter-religious violence, which is a mockery of the true religious spirit.

On election campaign with his father, Maan sees his friend, Firoz with Saeeda Bai, and his passion for her turned into Firoz’s killing. Such passion in the public sphere leads to the sort of religious riots. Despite all Mahesh Kapoor’s hard efforts to initiate social reform, he is ultimately defeated in the general election. He chooses to contest from the rural constituency of Rudhia and his political opponent is Waris Khan, once the Nawab’s loyal retainer. Waris has been transformed by political ambition into a base politician and gives
Maan’s attack on Firoz has communal undertones used in order to convince the local Muslim population that they must reject Kapoor, because of Maan’s attack on Firoz. Fundamentalism is pitted against secularism and the progressive politics of Kapoor. As Pico Iyer wrote:

A Hindu crosses religious lines to befriend a Muslim, and later stabs him for reasons that have nothing to do with their religions.” Their friendship, and the reconciliation of their fathers, is a small triumph. [20].

At partition in 1947, when the land mass that had been British India was divided into India and Pakistan. Even after the huge exchange of populations, and although Hindus are by far in the Majority, India still has a sizeable Muslim minority. Pandit Nehru, Prime Minister at the time the novel is set, believe that religion had no part in the affairs of state and that Muslims were as integral to Indian society as Hindus. The last vestiges of Nehruvian secularism seemed to be ripping away from the body politic of the nation.

The novel that engages with religion in the public sphere, seriously and effectively, offers the spirit and framework of Nehru’s secular vision of India as the only sane alternative to religious nationalism and the politics of hate.

Seth pictures some areas of cultural syncretism achieved by years of mutual trust, and ties of friendship and enjoyment in the arts, for instance in the world of music. Mahesh Kapoor, the person who represents values of secularism in the novel, invites Saeeda Bai, the Muslim Courtesan, to sing at the traditional evening function at his home, Prem Niwas, during holi. The Minister, one must remember, refuses his wife permission to have the Ramcharitmanas recited in the house during Dusshera. Saeeda Bai, who entrances the mixed audience comprising of a large number of Hindus and a few Muslims with her talent and voice, also sings a number of traditional Holi songs, which are devotional Hindu poems about Krishna.
Ustad Majeed Khan, the renowned classical singer. As he begins to meditatively, hum, the words of the composition ‘Jaago Mohan Pyare’ that, he has been teaching the Ministers daughter; he forgets everything except the music and the narrator remarks,

It was very far from his mind that the words were addressed to the dark god Krishna, asking him to wake up with the arrival of morning, or that ‘Bhairava’ - the name of the raag he was singing ….was an epithet of the great god Shiva himself [ASB 297].

Seth has described his novel “as a plea for tolerance” [Woodward 32]

The 90s in Indian politics was beset by communal tension over the Ram Janmabhoomi campaign and caste tension over the Mandal Commission report. ‘Mandir’ and ‘Mandal’ were the twin planks on which the right-wing fundamentalist parties rode the wave of support in the early 90s. Mahesh Kapoor, who is looking at the changed caste composition of his old constituency in Misri-Mandi, exclaims,

“Caste! Caste! You may think. It is madness, but you can never ignore it” [ASB 810].

Caste factors dominate as much in contemporary electoral politics as they did then. In fact, electoral processes have arguably entrenched the cast consideration deeper in Indian politics. The question of caste in rural India is moreover, in the context of land reforms, it acquires dimension of class: the landed as against the landless. Kachcheru is poor, powerless, passive and isolated as against the rich and powerful landed located in Rasheed’s family. In contrast, in the urban region of Brahmpur, the Jatav are presented as a community with agency. Their plight is as miserable as that of Kachcheru’s. In fact, the urban squalor and filth of untouchable colonies where the cleaning and processing of leather is carried out are vividly portrayed.
The Jatav community of shoemaker, as their spokesperson, has chosen Jagat Ram. They are demanding a right to participate in the Ramlila procession held during the Dussehra festival. He recalls a world of cruel caste-discrimination, he opposes [though he does not dare to voice it] that the castes should continue in their hereditarily ordained professions. He sees Gandhiji’s belief in the ‘dignity of labour’ as “a misleading condensation” [ASB 1038]. Gandhiji, who “believed that people should continue in their hereditarily ordained professions; a cobbler should remain a cobbler, a sweeper a sweeper” [ibid. 1039]. He does not see any merit and rationality in the argument that one should continue the profession of his father. There is nothing worthy in cleaning lavatories and standing in a foul-smelling tanning pit. He expects a social change. For Jagat Ram, the victory for the constitutional provision abolishing untouchability lay more with Ambedkar than it did with Gandhi “who rarely concerned himself with such legalism” [ASB 1048].

When Haresh invites Jagat Ram for his wedding, Jagat Ram initially refuses to attend the same, for within the temporal context of the novel,

The two worlds did not mix. He knew it; it was a fact of life. That a Jatav from Ravidaspur should present as a guest at a wedding, at the house of or Kishen Chand Seth would cause social distress [ASB 1334]

He eventually does attend the marriage, but witnesses the celebration from the margins. Haresh, who is considered ‘Suitable’ for Lata by her mother because of his caste, is involved in the ‘polluting’ shoemaking profession. Haresh’s uncle considers he has “lost caste by working with leather” [ASB, 577]. Haresh who believes in work and quality mixes with workers from all castes in the factory, makes shoes with them and invites a lower-caste driver to sit down in his home. In such a way Kachheru and Jagatram, as a contrasting pair in the novel, make a telling statement about caste in the public sphere of rural and urban India.
The domination of upper caste people is brutal at countryside. Their ruthless oppression and cruelties are gruesome. An eighteen-year-old lower caste youth, who spent couple of years in Brahmapur city, returns to his village in harvest season. One day, he cycles around the village singing film songs, asks an upper-caste woman some water to drink. That night a gang of men ties him to his bicycle and “forced to eat human excreta, his brain and bicycle had then been smashed to bits” [ibid. 1038].

Kedarnath, a shoe merchant who received wounds inflicted on his palms during partition, represents the generation that has survived the trauma of 1947. He has lost everything in Lahore in communal violence and set up himself in Brahmapur in the polluting, carcass-tainted shoe trade. Kedarnath takes Haresh to the poor Jatav streets at Ravidaspur who lives in disgusting and unsanitary conditions. Seth elaborates the surroundings of Jatav:

Far more unsanitary, with sluggish sewage trickling along and across the lines. Picking their way between flee-ridden dogs, and crossing an open river on a rickety wooden bridge, they found their way to Jagat Ram’s small, rectangular, windowless brick and mud workshop [ASB 203].

There are occasional interventions of marginalized communities in the novel that question the New India’s socialist promises of the fifties.

Not all is perfect with the institution of the family. Within the family, there are also areas of repressed sexuality and darker passions. On a visit to Lucknow to her mother’s first cousin, Lata has a traumatic experience when her aunt’s husband, Mr. Sahgal, makes crude sexual advances to Lata at night. The middle-aged well-known lawyer has cruelly victimized his own daughter Kiran, who does not speak about her violation, and has turned neurotic. He describes his wife as being “like Sita-the perfect wife”, but takes pleasure in showing off
photographs of his wife and daughter in distasteful poses. Although Lata narrowly misses being molested her, she does not discuss this dreadful traumatic experience even with Malati. In daylight, he remains a respectable member of the family. Lata cannot speak to anyone about it because of the code of ‘honours’ and silence that anything associated with sex is not discussed. When it did occur for the first time at the age of twelve, she was told she must not talk to anybody about it for “Sita and Savitri didn’t talk about such things” [ASB 593].

In such a way, in the private sphere of the institute of marriage and the family, Seth’s point of view is traditional and even conservative. In A Suitable Boy, there is no gap between the representation of the nation and the conviction that it is meaningful and desirable, though it is in the context of the time, still on incomplete project. Seth operates within accepted ideas of the nation and writes creatively in exhaustive comprehensiveness to show various functioning-political, social and cultural institutions such as legislative assemblies, the electoral procedure, the courts, the chambers of ministers and officers, schools and universities, cinemas and the economic worlds of trade and commerce. He shows these institutions operating through the lived experiences of people in order to show a great breathing, networked political system moulded and worked upon the hammer and tongs of noisy, and at times vituperative public debate.
3.2. The Golden Gate [1986]:

The Golden Gate [TGG] was published in 1986. This novel created a literary storm that won Vikram Seth literary acclaim in the form of Sahitya Akademy Award in 1989. Seth wrote it while working towards his doctoral dissertation at Stanford. It took Seth almost thirteen months to work out the manuscript. The narrative of The Golden Gate comprises 594 sonnets all written in iambic tetrameter [including the acknowledgement, table of contents and author’s autobiographical note which are made up of a sonnet each], and follows the fourteen line stanza pattern of Eugene Onegin. There are thirteen chapters with an average of forty-five sonnets with seven rhymes instead of the usual five.

The novel gains a post modernistic trend through its form of tour de force the modern age exemplified a reaction against romanticism, against emotional exuberance and impression of feeling. T.E. Hulme, Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot were the three main responsible in bringing a new kind of poetry with new rhythms, new diction, new expression of feelings and new attitudes to life and poetry. These poets brought in the dirt, squalor, and the nasty smell of modern life. The introductory paragraph sets the tone of the novel “to make a start more swift than weighty…” [Seth V. 1]. The words ‘more swift’ suggest his deliberate choice of the poetic medium against the weighty, i.e. the prose medium. Moreover, in using verse as the narrative mode the novel incorporates not only linguistic features but also the formal structural pattern. The poetic form is not only the outer garb; it governs the total vision of the novel also. The novel is about young, intelligent, upper-class professionals, ‘Yuppies’ of san Francisco. The American reviewers who acknowledge

The text as an ‘American product’

Recognize its ‘American qualities’, and
Read it as being very much ‘American in

Intention’ and a ‘quintessential Californian novel’

[Bobb& Digirolamo 152-55]

So, Seth spares no effort to portray an intimate Californian life style.

_The Golden Gate_, the title of the book is very symbolic. It symbolizes the futility of young lovers of San Francisco who realize the impermanence of their lust and love at ‘The Golden Gate Bridge’; they are made aware of the vacuity and meaninglessness of their passion. It reveals to them that the beautiful, enticing, cosmopolitan world is just a cover, a veil that conceals the absurdity and the loneliness and vanity of man.

_The Golden Gate_, novel of manners from a very specific and limited perspective narrates the conjoined stories of five main young characters. They are John brown, Janet Hayakawa, Phil Weiss, Liz Dorati, and Edward Dorati. They are in their twenties. These young characters introduced so far are sexually related to at least one member of the group, and, in the characteristic feature of a typical comedy or novel of manners, a few of these characters also have changing sexual partners within the group. For instance, John has relations with Janet and Liz; Liz with John and Phil; and Phil, a bisexual with the siblings Ed and Liz.

John Brown, with whom the novel begins, is a highly successful computer scientist and works for a software company linked to nuclear arms. He is healthy and handsome but finds himself unaccountably sad & lonely. In deep despair, John seeks out his former lover, Janet Hayakawa, who is a sculptor and a drummer in a band called ‘Liquid sheep’. And in order search a suiter to John, who is lonely now she gives a marriage advertisement in newspaper. Amongst numerous responses, he finds an intriguing response by Liz Dorati.
They arrange to meet, fall passionately in love and, before a week are out.

The first two chapters of *The Golden Gate* introduce Janet, John and Liz, and quickly describe the search for a lover and the fruition of the search. Third Chapter, in a matter of thirty-seven sonnets, introduces the recently divorced Phil Weiss, his absent wife Claire Cabot, their son Paul and their immediate friends and neighbours, who form a kind of extended family. The last ten sonnets of the chapter take a sudden leap in time, moving ahead to a concert hall a few months later. This concert hall serves as the setting for a meeting between Phil & John, Paul’s former university friend. Phil even tells a fairy tale for his son Paul, which looks forward to be Beastly Tales, Still in the future. Phil has given up his software job in Datatronics by taking into consideration the disaster of nuclear to the world. He now campaigns against nuclear arms, and this campaign forms a crucial strand in the story of Chapter Four.

Edward Dorati, Liz’s younger brother, is the fifth important character of the novel, owns a pet iguana. Ed is a homosexual and a devout Catholic: these two strong impulses are disastrously at war within him; and though his affectionate sisters Liz and Sue adore him; neither understands their brother when he is in his ‘godly mood’. He is having the homosexual relation with Phil.

Liz listens, to Phil’s plea for nuclear disarmament and the lawyer in her is interested; and disastrously, for the future of the John and Liz affair, Liz’s pet cat Charlemagne, decides to stake a claim for his mistress and declares war on his contender John. The next two chapters trace Phil and Ed’s growing intimacy, and the increasing acrimonies between John and Liz courtesy towards Charlemagne and between John & Phil courtesy towards the nuclear campaign: the march against pro-bomb politics as he is in his dislike of Liz’s cat. This section packs in neat argument between the right wing politics of John and the liberal humanist position of Phil.
The seventh chapter is devoted entirely to the protest march against the bomb, eighteen sonnets of which form Father O’ Hare’s impassioned speech. A description of the heterogeneous group of protesters with their different placards, united against the Lab’s policies. The protest march is conceived in a Gandhian manner where, the campaigners peacefully break law, court voluntary arrest. Liz, her pet cat in a pram, supports the cause and her unexpected presence and help is instrumental in strengthening the basis of her relationship with Phil.

Phil is always presented against a backdrop of the natural environment, in the midst of a group of like-minded friends, who like a large family enjoy rituals such as olive picking and picking Sunday morning community breakfasts, and stand, by one another in times of crises. A certain warm and fecund energy characterizes Phil.

In chapter Nine and Ten John is painted with a darker shade of gray: not only does he not like cats and not support anti-bomb causes, he is rigidly intolerant of sexual difference and gender equality. He humiliates Phil & Liz when faced with the knowledge of Ed’s homosexuality, unintentionally fostering warmer relations between them.

Chapter Ten however, sees John at his intolerant Best. The setting is on the Dorati vineyard at thanks giving. A midst the peace and fertility of the land John proposes to Liz & smugly of action she happens to stumble on the knowledge of her mother’s terminal illness soon after. Thrown into shock, Liz goes blindly in search of her when she is confronted by John’s jealous questioning of Phil’s letter that has just arrived. That no surprisingly, triggers the end. John, who has been called sternly to book by Janet for his ‘pig speak’ and general views on women in the very first chapter, is seen to be an unrepentant male chauvinist after all.
The last part of the novel narrates in quick changes at scene marriage, death, birth and rejuvenation. Liz marries Phil in haste. Liz is driven by the need to make her mother, who has been longing for her children to marry and have babies, happy before she died. It is a traditional church wedding amidst family & friends, with the bride in white, children and cats gorging on the tiered wedding cake and confetti raining down on everyone. John cast into rage and depression, takes to skulking around singles bars after dispatching a nasty letter to Liz telling her off. He has lost lover in Liz and a friend in Phil.

Now Janet, John’s former lover tries to re-establish her lost love with John in his loneliness. In addition, John’s heart again comes alive with love for Janet. Moreover, after few days Janet puts up an exhibition of her work. She yet invites Phil and the pregnant Liz to a party with the sole purpose of effecting reconciliation between John and Phil. In a night of prospective shocks, John finds himself hosting the party alone, waiting for Janet to arrive thinking that she is late as usual. However, the bad news of her death in a car crash arrived. Janet who has taken a lift with Phil’s friends Matt and Joan [their son chuck is Paul’s friends] is killed along with them. Finally going through her desk one day, he finds her own letter sent to Anne T Friese and realizes that Janet had loved him all the way through. This proof that she loved him, and seeing through his evasions, knew his love for her is redemption. Janet’s absence once again leaves John forlorn and distressed but he feels guilty that he never expressed his love for her.

Each, of these five central young protagonists in the novel “Is defined within the parameters of profession, personal ethics, eccentricities, and family and social connection” [Mishra 15]. By the end of the narrative, all of them have interacted at some level or the other with each other. The characters attitudes to love reveal their attitudes to life, to issues that are outside or beyond the ‘private’ question of romantic or sexual love.
John Brown is the character with whom the story of the novel open. “There lived a man. His name was John. / Successful in his field though only / Twenty –six, respected, lonely….” [TGG 3]. Twenty-six year–old John Brown is a graduate of Berkeley. He is a successful but extremely lonely computer executive in Silicon Valley. John is employed in the High–Tech Computer and Electronics Industry and works in the area, of Nuclear Research. John is a successful young man, who has ‘everything but love’, to use an oft repeated Cliché. However, when John does find love, it seems to come fairly low in his list of priorities.

There is indeed nothing heroic or godly about john as he represents the common aberrations of common person in the fast-paced rural, cosmopolitan society evident not only in California but also in everywhere. It is the same sordid tale of the ambitious but an unhappy man of today. He is respected for his professional acumen as he has risen in his job at a very early age, but he is lonely, the antithesis in ‘respected’ and ‘lonely’ is unmistakable. It serves to heighten the theme of ‘existential anguish’.

Regarding the term ‘existential anguish’, the critic Ashok K. Jha contends that The Golden Gate acts

As a phenomenological preoccupation with the state of whole society obtaining in the behaviour of a handful of people. Such a preoccupation is existential rather than ideological in a narrow extent. [62]

It implies that johns anguish and loneliness is universal as symbolized by Californian life, John has to fight for his happiness and existence, learn about his follies and accept his fate. He is indeed alone in such a world where no one can look up to someone for guidance and for spiritual sustenance. John an Englishman represents the author’s indictment of a capitalist and consumerist life entrenched in conservative political opinions that evince a rigid inflexibility in understanding another person’s point of view.
Life is a continuous journey and only those with humility and empathy have a propensity to be happy. John’s existential anguish is accentuated at the ‘Golden Gate Park’ when a Frisbee at the thought hits him, “If I died, who’d be sad...who’d weep, who would be glad?” [TGG 3]

He tries to divert his mind to other things but alas, his loneliness torments him so much that he cries for help. John is described in this manner: “….his voice is low. His mind is sound. / His appetite for work’s abnormal” [ibid. 4].

The antithesis in ‘low’ and ‘sound’ cannot be missed out. Sonnet 1.5 penetrates more deeply into his gloomy and melancholic state of mind and there is no one in his family who can support him during his solitude as his mother is dead and the father has retired in his native home, Kent and he hardly ever responds to his letters. A sense of self-pity envelops him. With no spouse or sibling, he regards himself as a ‘link less node’ [ibid. 6]. Moreover, low self-confidence in John; therefore, he needs the support of his friends even in personal matters like the choice of a life partner. Lack of family & friends have bred an inferiority complex into his personality. He wishes to alleviate his loneliness by listening to ‘Old Beatles and Pink Floyd’, which are old, and sad music albums. He is in peculiar situation; money does not amuse or excite him anymore and the more thought of a girl fills him with frustration since he has not been successful in having one so far.

He pines for a partner and rings up Phil but get no response so he rings up Janet Hayakawa, his former beloved. He is apprehensive of enduring their former love. He remembers that because their interests were not alike, both were apprehensive of leading their lives together. Jane was an artist while John, being a part of corporate world, was ‘a slave to the chip’ [ibid.8].

Central to the plot is the advertisement for a companion for John, for which John seeks Janet’s help to help him find his beloved.
The author mocks the concept of courtship that has taken a reversal of roles in the modern age. The gender misappropriation undoubtedly points to absence or lessening of sexual virility in the heterosexual male of today and to the unsurpation of the popular male dominated position of women. It reminds me of a heading we see in recent ‘Times of India’s, Sunday Magazine Newspaper, ‘Women on Top’. The pun in ‘top’ is amusing and significant for the change in the intellectual as well as sexual image of today’s educated woman; Seth in his novel refers to the change that had begun much earlier in the west. Moreover, Janet dispatched a lonely heart’s advertisement to the Bay Guardian & it is like this:

Young handsome Yuppie, 26

Straight, forward, sociable, but lonely,

Cannot believe that he’s the only

Well-rounded and well-meaning square

Lusting for love. If you, out there,

Are friendly, female, under 30,

Impulsive, fit and fun, let’s meet.

Be rash. Box … [TGG 2.3]

Janet sees this advertisement as a means of solving John’s intense loneliness as he verges on “the brink of thirty Dom” [ibid. 1.35].

By doing so, it is possible to argue that Seth is deliberately using semantic constructions to emphasis the helplessness of his protagonists as solitary beings, outside a binding relationship of a
wider family. Moreover, another part of this advertisement is like this: “Solvent, sexy thrilling, thrifty / seeks a bosomy brunette…” [TGG 20]

The irony with an undercurrent of humour is enhanced by the use of alliterative words ‘solvent, sexy’, then ‘thrilling, thrifty’ and later in ‘bosomy brunette’. Seth, the literary genius is full of surprises. The words are impinging for the artistic as well as literary implications. The desperation of this unheroic hero is indicated who being psychologically crippled is, in search of a woman who is able bodied, wise as well as shy. There is a pun in the word ‘bosomy’. It implies that she should be thrilling in bed and in life. Seth truly adheres to the twentieth century poetic diction, which is a criterion of good poetry.

Nair explains that while the putative genre label of marriage advertisements may be superseded by terms such as ‘heart search’ and ‘person-to-person’ in personal columns in American & British newspapers and magazines, the underlying commonality of purpose of such advertisements is “to seek companionship”. In the western context, though, the purpose of such advertising need not always necessarily be for a long-term relationship [ibid. 227-54].

Liz Dorati responds to the advertisement both falls in love and meets on a winter Sunday, are in bed by Thursday but part before the summer is out. However, as they move into an intense sexual relationship, they miss their hunger for conservation that had earlier brought them together. Physical consummation / passionate relationship become the point of departure. Love is not merely “the friction of two skins” [TGG 2.56], and “Love can be less than appealing / If everything’s just great in bed / yet nothing’s shared inside your head” [TGG 9.36].

Liz realizes, that love is not enough, in fact, that “there’s to life than love” [ibid. 10.27]. That need of friendship and understanding, and the lack of it in her relationship with John is underscored as she
receives a letter from Phil, which sends John into dizzy fury of jealousy.

John obviously is a loser; dejected and desolate. He feels insulted. He feels his ‘virility’ i.e., his sexual potential has been undermined. He is unable to comprehend the reason of his rejection by Liz. In order to compensate for his virility, he starts visiting bars in search of ‘cute chicks’ [ibid.11.30]. His involvement with those girls gives him a sadistic pleasure.

Now, John’s revives the old relation with Janet, John’s earlier feeling for Janet is both passionate and hence transient, and by mutual consent they feel “their union would constrict / their separate lives” [TGG 1.11]. They agree to part and shelter their friendship from all passion. Passion is thus, seen as a force that destroys even as it binds. Seth gives another chance to revive John’s love relation with Janet, which had ignited six years back in Janet’s heart.

Janet, in a gesture characteristic of her kindness and affection for John, seeks him and unobtrusively draw him out of his loneliness. She wonders why she doesn’t dislike him since she knows

Politically he’s close to Nero

For tolerance he scores a zero

Despite his catacombs of books.

Am I Just turned on by his looks? [ibid. 11.42]

Concluding that she likes him because he loved her once, she briskly embarks on a strategy to save John from himself. Now, it is of a different quality from both the love shared with Liz as well as the first time they were together. Of their prior relationship was based neither on friendship nor on companionship, which is the firm basis of
this new relationship. Therefore, Janet gives him a chance to unite. Janet, being a good human being and a considerate friend feels it is her duty to unite Liz and Phil with their estranged friend, John. She throws a party at her home & invites everyone, all her friends, Phil, Liz and John. However, her plan dies with her when she together with Matt and his family members meets a fatal accident. Only their son Chuck and the driver survive the accident. Janet’s absence once again leaves John forlorn & distressed but he feels guilty that he never expressed his love for her. She loved him unconditionally, asking for nothing in return. Janet becomes richer as she is able to reunite the three friends. She becomes richer ironically for the Press too, which had always evaded her and her music. It reports the news of her death as ‘young, Artist Mown Down in Her Glory.’

They even pester her parents to reveal ‘Relics’ of their distinguished daughter. Janet’s works of art are referred to as ‘relics’ i.e. possession of a holy person that is deemed fit to be treasured after one’s death. Seth manages to incorporate all the harsh facts of life with great ingenuity and with great artisanship; not even a single reference remains an ordinary one.

Seth demonstrates how the nuclear weapons doctrine has woven itself into the fabric of John’s nationalism, and has established its own legitimacy. John stoutly defends the United States policy of nuclear armament by pointing out at the ills of the Soviet system – its totalitarianism rights [TGG 6.42-4.5]. He presents an apologia of the endeavours of the United States on behalf of ‘free world’. Moreover, he hates homosexuality. As Rowena Hill puts it,

[Whether]- - - - beyond the authors Conscious intentions, John’s loss of everything he cares for, his depleted condition at the end is not a kind of punishment for some of his attitudes, his scorn of those who fight for nuclear disarmament and his condemnation of homosexuality. [87]
In this way, young John’s passionate love, opposition to anti-nuclear policies, Jealousy and lack of mutual understanding with women, his alienation from public contacts, his hatred towards homosexuality whether he not ready to give chance someone to improve their mistakes, these all has brought loneliness into his life. John has moved on in life, but due to his proudest and self-centeredness he has no one to share a cup of coffee or a meal with. Seth contrives an end to the story, which is traditional, combining the beliefs of all great thinkers and writers: Indian or Western. He seems to say ‘as you sow, shall you reap’. John errs like other characters but he refuses to learn from his mistakes.

Janet Hayakawa, is a Japanese immigrant, is single, like John, indulges in her job excessively, and plays the drum to resurge her loneliness. Similar contrasting images are evidenced in her character;

“Stress and pleasure’, ‘toil and leisure’ [TGG p. 9] have been coined together to describe Janet’s routine. Janet’s stresses and toils in order to get leisure and pleasure; a stark irony of cosmopolitan life is evinced here.

Hence, Janet as a drummer is, believed to be fearsome, she is “well-known and feared throughout the city” [Ibid. 9]. Moreover, the Liquid Sheep that is the music band is “unlinkd alike to tune or dirty” [ibidem.]

This implies that both the important components of music are missing, tune as well as the musicality of the song. Besides, her actual profession is that of a sculptor; she works with bronze and iron. Seth again brings a rounded character in Janet. Overtly she is iron-willed but underneath she craves for identity and attention through music and sculpture.

The emphasis on traditions, [although modified by modernity] is expressed through the art of Janet Hayakawa as well. Janet’s art, we
are told, is ‘too traditional’ [TGG 1.14], and is rejected by the critics who speak for modernity, the dangers of simply rejecting something on the basis of pre-conceived ideas or tastes is illustrated at a simplistic level by the turnaround of those same critics, who praise Jane’s work fulsomely after her death.

Janet functions as a semi-peripheral character for the most part, although, it is her act of placing the personal ad on John’s behalf that actually instigates the action. She is also responsible for the coming together of Ed and Phil, when she overhears a drunken comment on women made by Phil and attacks him:

From where Jan leaves them, rooted, staring.

He leans in foggy shock on Ed.

Then in a voice drunk and despairing:

“I’m plastered! That was it I said?

“Nothing you meant. You’re right. You’re plastered.”

“I’m going…home…” “Unless you’ve mastered

The art of driving straight when drunk,

Once you’re behind that wheel, you’re sunk!

I’ll drive you home. Come back tomorrow

To fetch…” “I live near Stanford, Ed.”

“Oh… well, in that case, share my bed…” [TGG 4.29]

Janet hovers around the margins of the other relationships, helping, commenting, and being the confidante for John and Liz even
when she is herself abandoned by those in love. It is Jan’s friendship that, helps John through his miserable state after his break-up with Liz, and just as Jan had steered him to a relationship with Liz, this time too, she is the one who helps him find true friendship and companionship.

Janet hurts when John turns to casual sex and one-night stands in his depression, post-Liz.

John’s nights are free, Jan’s days. Their meetings,

On weekend afternoons are rare.

And yet, the pattern of their greetings,

The counted hours that they share,

Drive him from his embittered brooding

Against the cosmos-all, Excluding

His erstwhile friends [ibid. 12.1].

Janet, however, is better off, she has companions as her cats, which are “twin paradigm of lazy action” [ibid. 20]. They provide an antidote to her stressful and colorful life.

Janet is also at for not revealing her true emotions to John while, she is helping him in finding a partner and madly pursues him, unmindful of the consequences of her efforts. She frantically trying her best to conceal her pain and suffering beneath the carapace of a sculptor and a musician. Moreover, when John and Jan [re] discover their love for each other, it is of a different quality from both the love shared with Liz as well as the first time they were together. Of the prior relationships was based on neither friendship nor on companionship, which is the basis of this new relationship. However, no matter how true or solid John’s relationship with Jan might be, he cannot be fully
healed, and therefore cannot be part of an enduring relationship until his bitterness and alienation are swept away. Until John forgives his estranged friends, and makes love the basis of his life, rather than anger or hate, he is doomed to non-completion.

Yet, tender is as their lovemaking,

John gives his voice no leave to own

What his hand’s touch, what his lip’s quaking,

Unknown perhaps to him has shown

More forthrightly than declaration; [ibid. 12.12]

Janet functions as a Christ figure in the redemption she offers to John. She is fully aware that he has to overcome his anger with Phil and Liz, and in an attempt to engineer his reconciliation with his old friends, she invites them to a party at her home. As they arrive at the party, John realizes that this was setup by Jan. Before he can actually reconcile with them, however, he receives the news of Jan’s death, and retreats once again into his loneliness.

In such away, John and Janet come together but due to their different professional acumen both decides to part, because their likes and dislikes was different and base of their earlier relations was physical appetites. Seth again brings a rounded character in Janet. Overtly she is iron-willed but underneath she craves for identity and attention through music and sculpture. Janet stresses and toils in order to get leisure and pleasure; a stark irony of cosmopolitan life is evinced here. She restages her loneliness by paying drums.

Liz Dorati, the third important young character is 27 year old, is a lawyer, a graduate from Stanford and the daughter of an Italian immigrant family. Her brother, Ed Dorati is also successful financially,
but is unable to resolve his personal contradictions vis-à-vis his Catholic beliefs and his homosexual preferences. She is the one of the three girls whom John shortlists to marry & she is the best of all; she admits, “I’ve not yet known romantic heaven” [TGG 2.27].

She is inexperienced as far as romance is concerned. She is decidedly better and her flow is the universal flow of young, ambitious women who in their busy schedule do not have time and energy left to consider the most important issue of life; i.e.; selection of a suitable life partner with whom they can settle down for life. Seth is critical of today’s carrier oriented women for whom a successful career comes first than anything else.

Liz represents the unfeminine, modern woman. However, she is simple, candid, humble and intelligent, the hallmark of the wise and prudent person who can establish the right values for others to emulate. This aspect also tends to reinforce Seth’s intrinsic traditional approach; Liz is mature and intelligent she will gradually and shall experience love with the person she will marry. The anxiety of her mother is inevitable for, “Mrs. Dorati might disparage her children [Liz, Ed, Sue] for / Proving such a fruitless crew” [ibid. 2.31]. The word ‘fruitless crew’ implies the fruitlessness of all her children who are too busy to think of marriage and procreation.

John and Liz are apparently in love .They arrange to meet, fall passionately in love and, before a week is out, “the loving pair has bit the apple / of mortal knowledge” [ibid. 2.55]. Moreover, their diction has become sugary and dumb. They share a short-lived attraction, which is soon destroyed by personal prejudice, politics and a pet cat Charlemagne. [Charlemagne was a famous writer in 12th century who, along with his knights was famous for his heroic exploits and as his name implies that, he is not an uncommon companion] and the cat, Charlemagne was with her in sad and boring moments and would most loyally and affectionately purr to her loving strokes.
John and Liz are apparently in love. However, being complex and weak, John poses certain problems to Liz. Since he lacks compassion and understanding, he becomes intolerant towards Charlemagne. His insensitivity to Charlemagne is a serious lapse, perhaps more serious than his insensitivity to the ‘gay’ relation of Ed and Phil. Liz cannot overlook this fact and is seriously monitoring John’s actions and reactions as a life partner.

John, on the other hand has to face the consequences of his intolerance, impetuosity and impulsiveness towards the homosexual relations between Ed and Phil. He is unable to conceive the possibility of “malformed and sickening lust” [TGG 9.14]. In addition, asks in utter disgust, “what do two men do together” [ibid. 9.15]. He is not able to understand the basic fact that ages after ages, man will keep on making efforts to be sensible and free from human weaknesses. However, he is not god and no human can ever be perfect. Moreover, we are all living in a society where we are learning each day a new lesson, we are also learning each day a new lesson, we are also learning to live with each other’s limitations and partaking in each other’s pains and pleasures. John, being a part of this throbbing society will only be a loser if he remains proud and self-centered.

At Liz’s insistence on trying to see reason in the affinity of the two, John blurts out savagely. He tells her. “You’re just as bad – and your gross cat” [TGG 9.19]. Such an accusation sets the stage of their future. The paradox of beast in man is inadvertently suggested. Moreover, “Seth is critical of the pride present in him and like Swift, he considers it the greatest sin” [Sinha 199].

Moreover, she is now driven towards Phil & regarding passion, both Phil as well as Liz shares a similar opinion. Phil attributes John’s behavior to lack of family love. Phil realizes, “Passion’s a prelude to disaster” [TGG 11.20]. Liz endorses the same view. After all, both had experienced that passion only leads to more desire, to more expectations. It hardly leaves any breathing space between the lovers,
which are essential for a successful and lasting relationship. This is better explained in Liz’s reflection on John, “Love by itself’s a tightening tether / Habit-forming drug, a crutch...” [TGG 11.13].

Liz suggests that love makes a person helpless, dependent and a handicap. The lover becomes an incapacitated as a drug addict or as a lame person on crutches. Liz cannot remain bound or tightened to her partner all the time. She would appreciate her man for providing security but he should also give her space to breathe and think freely.

Ultimately, she marries Phil because she feels that she owes it to her mother, who has a terminal disease, to perpetuate the family, and she chooses Phil because, as she says:

.....I’d far rather

Marry a man who’s a good father

Than someone....I too don’t feel sure

I can trust passion any more... [TGG 13.32]

Seth here envisages Austen’s abiding faith in the love fully combined with the knowledge of self and esteem for the partner that is implied in her version of the pedagogic relationship. Indeed that is important that there is mingling of mind as well as hearts and bodies to give a joyful and a fulfilling experience. Liz has begun making judgments about Phil as a complete person. He is good father too, and Liz decides it is better to marry someone who is a good father, as it will give greater security and stronger bonding with him rather than John, Seth ascertains this fact in his entire three novels, irrespective of the sensibility the novel portrays.

Moreover, she is being driven towards Phil for another important reason. He quite openly and fearlessly speaks for Lung less
Lab, for peace and humanity. Seth meanwhile was witnessing a similar situation on domestic front.

She is a best example of today’s young, ambitious women who in their busy schedule do not have time and energy left to consider the most important issue of life; i.e.; selection of a suitable life partner with whom they can settle down for life. Seth is critical of today’s carrier oriented women for whom a successful career comes first than anything else. She gradually comes to know that romantic passion leads only to destruction. Passion only leads to more desire, to more expectations. It hardly leaves any breathing space between the lover, which is essential for a successful and lasting relationship. Liz suggests that love makes a person helpless, dependent and a handicap. Her husband must give space to think her independently, he should be caring, and must be a good father and should be able to shoulder marriage duty. Therefore, she left passionate John and marries Phil.

Twenty-eight year-old Phil, is John’s former roommate, was a successful nuclear engineer in Datatronics in Silicon Valley. However, he quit because of the connection of his work with the building of nuclear armaments. Phil replies passionately to John’s question about giving up his job:

---- John, takes a look around us.

Imagine that the first bombs found us

Just as we are –as here we stand,

A glass of liquor in our hand.

Thereby the door is Van Gogh’s painting

Of sunflowers. Here are all our friends.
And suddenly our small world ends,

And our vile dust is swept up, tainting

The hills, the vineyards, and the seas

With irremediable disease. [TGG 4.19]

His ‘self-accepting Psychic bounce’ and ‘moral vision’ compels him to opt out of the eat race. He devotes him-self to the anti-nuke movement as a ‘peacenik’ [ibid. 4.25]. He has a six year-old son called Paul and is recovering from the traumatic experience of his erstwhile wife Claire leaving him for another man. Phil’s relation with his erstwhile wife Claire seems blissful when it lasts. However, Seth indicates, through the short-lived romantic relations of his novel, that erotic / romantic love is often transient:

Sometimes we’d light a fire,

I at the keyboard, and you’d sing…..

Like the old days in the Bach

Where we first met. Remembering

Those evenings with the darkness coming,

Your voice, the whispering flames, my humming….

While, like an unequal metronome,

Paul thumped the floor….I think our home

Was what I’d always longed and prayed for.

What crept into our happiness?
What made you leave me, Claire? I guess

Disfiguring is what dreams are made for.

Our rings were not soft gold but steel? [TGG 3.18]

The rings encircling their fingers, like love encircling their lives, were not made of steel, rues Phil, but of soft gold. No wonder then it did not last. However, Seth provides a hint to explain why this relationship did not work: it was not based on the foundation of a strong familial network. Claire Cabot is rich and well placed and her family frowns upon her marriage with Philip Weiss, from a class lower than hers. Claire’s Protestant family had never approved of her marriage to” a good atheist Jew [ibid. 3.17]. It is the lack of family acceptance that contributes to the break-up of Phil and Claire’s marriage. He has a son from Claire called Paul.

What Phil want now is “----to live / without this emptiness –to give / A little love / get a little” [ibid. 9.35]. Phil has a brief homosexual affair with Liz’s brother Ed, but he eventually marries Liz [who has given up on john] at the end of the story. Dorati family [and most notably Mrs. Dorati’s desire for a grandchild] exert a pressure on Liz to form a traditional bond of marriage. As a tension had grown between John & Liz, she had been drawn Phil.

Phil had loved his wife Claire passionately but left him for another man. Their son Paul lives with him and Phil is a perfect father. Liz admires him for that and understands his desires for a more sober relation with a woman this time. She feels the same way about Love and has begun to love him. It is obvious that she has found in him what she had looked for from the beginning.

The only romance in the novel, which truly sustains is marriage of Phil & Liz, for it supports familial relationships. Similar in their
views and opinions, respect and affection mark their feelings for each other & not passion. Phil even confesses to Liz,

    I now yearn less for heart attacks,

    Passion’s angina, and loves blindness

    Than company and warmth and kindness.

    Perhaps I’m harder to disarm,

    And cherish courage more than charm--- [TGG 9.39]

When Liz’s father, worried about his daughter’s rather quick decision to marry Phil, enquires if she loves him,

    ............ Liz, I believe

    That you’re aware of what, you’re doing.

    I’d hate to see you sad, or ruing

    The day that you became a wife---

    You do love Phil? “Not in your life!”

    Liz giggles: “Oh, Dad, don’t look gloomy---

    I like him, though. [ibid. 11.12]

Liking someone is more important and sustains better than loving someone. A little later Liz reflects,

    .......whether

    It’s love or not means nothing much.
Love by it self’s a tightening tether,

A habit- forming drug, a crutch…

I like Phil, and he likes and needs me. [*TGG* 11.13]

Seth’s profoundly anti-romantic stance is in keeping with the novel of manners which takes an objectives perspective on social mores and institutions. His partiality for the family is a part of these concerns.

In the end, Seth reaffirms the values of family. Phil and Liz are married, the basis of their [enduring] relationship being friendship and understanding, rather than passion. They have in their family, Phil’s son, Paul, Chuck, Jan’s cats, and Liz’s cat, all living together in amity.

Phil thinks: “it’s so abrupt, it’s numbing.

Last August, it was Paul and me-

And now it’s two, plustwo, plus three:

Seven! And soon an eighth is coming…

Hope it’s a girl. It would be good for the boys too…

[*ibid. 13.32*]

In this way, Liz and Phil’s large family gives the indication of an understanding and a compatible couple that believes in helping others. It completes the picture of a balanced and a happy couple whose sense of duty and empathy will go a long way in ferreting out a better society. The relationships, which survive, are those based on understanding, and even compromise. The relationships that began on the ‘modern’ note of sexual or romantic passion have disintegrated, whether it is that of Claire and Phil, Phil and Ed or Liz and John. The
only romance in the novel, which truly sustains is marriage of Phil & Liz.

Liz’s younger brother, Edward Dorati is twenty-three year old. He is the fifth important character of the novel. He works in an advertising firm and owns a pet iguana. Ed Dorati is also successful financially, but is unable to resolve his personal contradictions vis-à-vis his Catholic beliefs and his homosexual preferences. Ed too, represents the loneliness of an individual who is unable to reconcile his personal [or political] beliefs with a practical functionality in society.

Ed is devout Catholic, with homosexual tendencies. However, his inability to see another side of his religious beliefs or to reconcile his two faiths drives him outside every fulfilling relationship, and leaves him utterly alone at the end. In fact, it is Ed Dorati, more than John Brown who seems to receive the ultimate indictment from Seth. Ed constantly places himself as the ‘other’, the ‘outsider’ in every relationship he is involved in, by choice or by birth. He is ‘painfully shy’, and finds it difficult to talk with anyone. It is Ed who asks to be introduced to Phil and Liz at John’s housewarming, but once the introduction has been effected, is “reduced to numbness” [ibid. 4.22].

Conscious of an estrangement with society, Ed is equally an outsider in the Dorati family, which is the only functional ‘real’ family in the narrative. He does not attend his sister Sue’s music recital at Stanford, and both his sisters find it difficult to understand their brother, “when his designs and words are skewed / by what they term his godly mood” [ibid 4.23].

Ed’s religious beliefs are what primarily serve to draw him apart from most people, including his lover, Phil. Unable to give up either his homosexual preferences [which he sees as a direct contradiction to his beliefs] or his faith, Ed flounders between the two poles of his life, finding fulfillment nowhere. Phil finds it strange that a loving God would object to love between two human beings, but it is this very inability of Ed’s to see people as simply human beings that
forms the most harsh [although covertly stated] indictment of his character. Ed is someone who has neither the commitment to back his values, nor the strength to abstain from his desires. He repeatedly returns to Phil, to their relationship, only to burn in self-flagellation and hate after.

The character of Father O'Hare, the priest who is the spokesperson for the anti-bomb protesters is an effective counterpoint for the religious values of Ed. Father O'Hare sees no contradiction in his faith and a love for all human beings, a value for all relationships, undiluted by political colour or race. Having made a choice as to where his beliefs lie, Father O'Hare sticks to that commitment, and stands up for what he believes in, unlike Ed, who doesn’t have the courage to confront even his own demons.

Ed constantly posits himself as an ‘other’: when he first argues with Phil he says to himself, “Fall for a bi, and you’ll get burned” [ibid. 5.10], separating himself through labels from the person he has fallen in love with, Ed wallows in his loneliness and in his belief that he is doomed to be alone. He cannot adapt himself with any group, with the heterosexual, [since he is homosexual], with the bi-sexual, or even with the homosexuals:

I’ve been around gay bars- that scene

Where if you’re handsome, people paw you

I guess you’ve never had them claw you

As if you were a hunk of meat…. [TGG 5.18]

Ultimately Ed is alone, in a definitive and inescapable way, still hovering on the margins of a family group, an ‘Uncle Ed’, which we are told is “a name he hates” [ibid.13.44], still resistant to the family:
Dinner is strained tonight. Ed’s father suggests Ed work at the vineyard next year. But Ed replies, “I’d rather follow my own nose. Dad…” [They’ve sparred about this in the past, though lately his father’s arguments have greatly increased in frequency and thrust] [TGG 13.42]

Due to his preference to homosexuality, the only character left out of everything in the end is Ed. At the end of the novel, Ed is left with neither friend nor partner. It seems strange that poor Ed should meet the fate that he does. Moreover, Ed’s obsessive guilt keeps him entangled within emotional knots of his own making. Thus, families and procreation are important in Seth’s novels and it is difficult to accommodate homosexuality in such a framework.

Seth brings up the issues of divorce, separations that have become the order of today’s fluid society. He implies that when relationship will undergo deterioration due to loss of values, the result could be guilt-ridden people, indulging in malformed relationships. Rubin explains how in the 1980’s both the United States and Canada underwent an extensive sexual repression in the political, not the psychological sense. According to Rubin:

Even the ‘Liberal’ San Francisco has not been immune…Queer bashing has become a significant recreational activity for young urban males. They come into gay neighborhoods armed with baseball bats and looking for trouble, knowing that the adults in their likes either secretly approve or will look other way. [6]
Seth portrays his two homosexual characters [Edward and Phil] with a great deal of sympathy, he is yet aware that it is not a socially accepted mode of sexuality. The author seems to be critiquing the hold of religious dogma, which twists natural sexual tendencies into something unnatural and deviant. Twenty three year old Edward Dorati, who as we have seen, is the younger brother of Liz, is a homosexual. “Intense, athletic, / silent” [TGG 4.25], He is caught in dilemma. His Catholic upbringing has taught him to view his sexuality as a sin and the religiosity of his nature is at war with his sexual inclinations. Unable to shake off his intense experience of guilt or ignore the natural biological demands of his body, Ed’s is an unstable and brooding personality. He confesses to Phil,

The point is that my body is

Not mine alone…I don’t disdain it...

But it’s Gods instrument…My bliss

Is in his will...And its perfection

Resides in love, whose chief projection

Is to give life. All other use

Falls short of this. It is abuse

Even if lovers feel, they’re loving. [TGG, 4.25]

Phil, on the other hand, is a bisexual. He is also remarkably free of conventional religious way of thought. Attracted by “vulnerable people” [ibid. 4.48], a liberal in his approach to sexuality. Phil’s divorce and the painful experience of incompatibility with Claire [ibid. 8.9] lead him to his friendship with Ed. He finds nothing blameworthy
in either his or Ed’s sexual tendencies. With a “shaking” voice, he answers Ed,

But what was wrong or odd

With last night’s loneliness between us?

Given a God, if he had seen us

And he just loving –kind,

Why should you think that he would mind?

My touch, your trembling, our caresses….

If anything, I’d say he blesses

The innocent bodies that express

So forthrightly such happiness. [TGG 4.53]

Phil’s openness in sexual matters cannot digest Ed’s obsessive questioning of their sexual bonding:

Why Ed? These aren’t middle Ages.

This is twentieth century.

What facet of our love outrages

Your puritanical purity?

Your church itself is strict or lenient

According to what’s most convenient … [Ibid. 8.31]
John’s incomprehensiveness, shock and disgust at receiving the news of his best friend Phil’s relation with Ed, is a critique of the dominant views on sexuality. There are thus three major perspectives on homosexuality in the novel: John’s disgust represents the dominant conservative faction; Phil’s passionate defense of sexual difference shows the liberal view; and Ed represents the religious perspective.

Ed is God fearing and even if he has made a mistake, he intends to atone for it. He is also Ed and Phil still, have chance to save them from destruction; Seth the moral teacher gives them an opportunity to atone for their sin. He explains to Phil how he felt disgusted with the men at ‘gay bars’ and hence would not like to be one himself. Soon he realizes that attraction has to not only physical but spiritual as well. However, if one were to examine the development of Edward’s character, it is intriguing to how Seth positions his only overtly homosexual character in the novel. Ed’s passion for Phil is at war with his religiosity and is thus fated to end. Whereas Phil says:

How long will you keep contemplating

The universe in Gothic font?

Ed, you just don’t know what you want.

That’s what is so exasperating.

One day we’re lovers, and the next

I’m gagged with sacramental text. [Ibid, 8.31]

True to dictum, if things start going badly they can only get worse. Now their relationship is doomed to a breakup because Ed’s insistent guilt corrodes acceptance and love.
Now Phil’s desire for Ed is replaced by his relationship with Liz. Moreover, both fulfill their social obligation of propagation. The norm is thus, restored when the couple gives birth to the mandatory grandson. Seth reverts to gender roles as they are created in relation to the social institutions of marriage and family, and both conventionally involve both sexes. According to Misra, Seth first presents homosexual love in a positive light, and then making it unsuccessful, he “Underscores the barrenness of a society which now appears to be superficially modern” [17].

In such a way, Seth intends to explain that with the desires and ambitions mounting day by day, man face utter confusions in materialistic world. In their failure at making life meaningful, they end up in the arms of another man.

Seth devotes considerable effort to the issue of nuclear proliferations in the seventh chapter. He contextualizes his debate in the heated debate between Phil & John. Seth demonstrates how the nuclear weapons doctrine has woven itself into the fabric of John’s nationalism, and has established its own legitimacy. John stoutly defends the United States ‘policy of nuclear armament’ by pointing out at the ills of the Soviet system-its totalitarianism, lacks of democracy and suppression of human rights [TGG 6.42-4.5]. He presents an apologia of the endeavours of the United States on behalf of the ‘free world’.

As Arundhati Roy openly accuses the United State of attempting to retain its hegemony not only in the nuclear power game, but globally at large when she states:

These are people whose histories are spongy with the blood of others. Colonialism apartheid, slavery, ethnic cleansing germ warfare, and chemical weapons- they virtually invited it all. They have plundered nations, snuffed out civilizations, exterminated entire populations. They stand on the worlds stage stark naked but entirely unembarrassed, because they know that they have more
money more food and bigger bombs than anybody else
they know they can wipe us out in the course of an
ordinary working day. Personally, I’d say it is more
arrogance than hypocrisy. [14]

While, Phil as is one of the main characters of the novel, gives
up a job to show his revolt against “the space and missile race” [TGG
3.6]. He argues passionately against Johns position, and for
disarmament, his stance is apolitical. He speaks in general terms of
mankind’s failure to take responsibility for the destiny of the universe
and to understand the implications of nuclear warfare. He, however,
does not take cognizance of any nationalities other than American and
speaks of a kind universal blanket of goodwill. Phil calls for peace and
human compassion, but fails to critique the attempts of the United
States to retain hegemonic control either in the nuclear arms race or in
today’s ‘global’ culture based on capital, especially in the brave new
worlds of the Silicon Valley that are mushrooming worldwide.

The anti-war non-violent protestors are celebrating “fall’s
somber equinocial entry” [ibid. 7.4]. This suggests that it is perhaps
Hiroshima Day. There is a carnival atmosphere as the sixty years old
Father O’ Hare delivers a 24-page-long passionate [and
knowledgeable] plea, and appeals to his audience to transcend their
petty concerns and to unite in the movement against a possible nuclear
abyss.

What is our will in life? To race

As, lemming- like, making is racing

To liquidation, or to face

With what small strength we have the massive

Machine of omnicide, impassive
Oiled by inertia and by hate

And the smooth silver of the state? [ibid. 7.18]

The effects of radioactive fallout will seep through the earth and all living things will die. Father O’Hare calls for ‘moral clarity’ to counteract the machinations of the state, which is primarily responsible for the nuclear armament race.

Ten hostages is terrorism;

A million, and it’s strategy.

To ban books is fanaticism.

To threaten in totality all culture and

All civilizations,

All humankind and all creation

This is a task of decorous skill.

And needs high statesmanship and will. [ibid. 7.31]

Liz’s speech on innocent flora & fauna [7.45] has Echoes of the plight of the animals of Bangladesh in Beastly Tales.

If we die

We humans, that is – it may serve us

Right for our silliness and hate.

But what we cannot vindicate
Is killing all the other fauna

That have developed on the earth

On field or floe, in every corner.

From Maine to Thule, from Minske to Perth,

They’ll die. [ibid. 7.45]

In this way, Seth, through his protagonist Phil, critiques nuclear armament from the position of a liberal humanist and takes care to keep certain aspects of the question unaddressed. John & Phil have an intense argument about the problem, which includes a debate on Russian Politics.

John extols American polity and Phil’s answers do not take sufficient cognizance of the role of US Politics in nuclear proliferation. It has been suggested that Seth is careful not to antagonize his American audience. [Pandurang Mala102]

Moreover, perhaps this is so. However, the attempt of nuclear proliferation seems satisfied to express concerns about the possible end of the world, the future of the environment and the legacy that generation ahead will inherit. There is little examination of the obscene amounts of money spent on defense outlays in the developed world, forcing the developing countries, with their impoverished populations, into untenable economic positions in the mindless and senseless race of nuclear proliferation. Nor does it take into account even a rudimentary understanding of American foreign policy since the Second World War.
3.3. An Equal Music [1999]:

Vikram Seth’s *An Equal Music [AEM]* is a novel written by an Indian with nothing Indian in it, and set in England with English characters. A novel was described in publishing and literary circles as an international best seller. The novel had received nomination for Booker’s award and eventually won Crossword Book Award in 1999. Malashri Lal appreciates Seth’s stint in this novel feat and says that Seth’s contribution lies in “enlarging the freedom of the Indian writer by opening new territories of imagination” [298].

An equal music places Seth in a tradition of modern fiction writers who have successfully combined a love story and the love of music as a part of the narrative—more particularly western classical music. Seth has an all-white cast embodied in the world of western classical music. The choice of Wigmore Hall that “sacred shoe box chamber music” is symbolic of the upper class British gentry that he caters the music to; it is a well-researched book about music & the white washed office of London and Vienna. Seth explains about his idea of writing this book:

Walking across a London Park on a very wet day Seth and his companion Philippe Honore [to whom he dedicates the book] see someone staring at his own image in the water of the Serpentine River in Hyde Park. As they wonder about the man, Philippe suggest that he might be a musician, and thereby the idea for the novel took root [Vidyasagar 1999].

“Music to me is deeper than speech”, remarks Seth in the author’s note at the end of the novel. He adds: “when I realised that I would be writing about it I was gripped with anxiety. Only slowly did I reconcile myself to the thought of it”. Seth’s keen interest in music is evident in his earlier creative writing. There are references to both pop and western classical music in *The Golden Gate*. Seth studied the Khayal under Pandit Amarnath at Shri Ram Bharti Kala Kendra, while
on short visits to India [Mukerji 34]. His familiarity with Hindustani classical music comes across in those sections of *A Suitable Boy* that take the reader through the intricacies of ragas.

In his descriptions of the ghazal performances by Saheed Begum, Seth captures the intimate interaction between the musician and audience, so central to a performance of that genre. Seth has spoken on how his interest in western classical music initially grew during his days as an undergraduate student in England [in ibid.]. Later, he developed a fondness for Schubert while he was working on *A suitable boy*. In *An Equal Music*, the world of Hindustani Sangeet / vocal music of *A suitable Boy* make way completely for the European classical music circuit of Bach, Beethoven, Haydn and Schubert.

Seth assumed the novel, *An Equal Music* [*AEM*] as a musical analogy, inspired by Bach, the famous musician in the eighteenth century, and his *Art of Fugue*. The art of fugue is essentially violent and vibrant, going on between the centripetal and centrifugal forces. From this fire, like a fabulous phoenix arises a new entity: an elastic, resilient mould. The inflections that are produced are continuously interacting, the intonations are each time new and at no time the fugal form doesn’t repeat itself; it always springs up like Venus from sea foam, a new. *Art of Fugue* thus evinces a fresh dewy composition that is each time electrifying, innovative and a vibrant form of art that is flexible, and an intelligently articulated structure.

A well-crafted novel, *An Equal Music* [*AEM*] is the tale of an emotionally volatile musician, Michael Holden, and his gradual recovery of the self. The narrative deals with Michael’s passionate relationship with his music; his deeply moving 12-year-old attachment to his 270-year-old Carlo-Tanoni violin; and his intense love for a woman he loses twice over.

The novel is structured into eight parts and several subparts–is based on a musical pattern that demands a thorough knowledge of the
history, range and structure of music. The novel is narrated in present tense, enabling the author to show the immediacy and the insistent presence of the past in Michael’s thought.

Michael Holme, the narrator and main protagonist, is a violinist based in London. He is late in his thirties and is a member of a string quartet called Maggiore and supplements his income as the second violinist of her group by teaching a number of rather unwilling students. When the novel opens, he is having a love affair with a student, Virginie, a young French girl, but that relation does not last for more than a year.

Ten year ago as a student in Vienna, he has been deeply in love with a young pianist Julia. Their initial interest in each other is soon kindled into love. They become lovers and find that they can make music together. Together with a cellist, Maria, they set up a trio and perform whenever they can. This time for Michael has been “a waking dream” [AEM 80].

However, he reacts badly to a professor called kall [teacher], Julia defends their teacher, and Michael feels betrayed by Julia over which Michael left Vienna & Julia. He flees to London where he lives like a fugitive. Moreover, Julia is gone from his life. Shocked by his sudden departure and silence she refuses to answer phone calls or letters and disappears from his life.

However, Michael does possess some insight into his own character. He realizes later that if kall was inflexible in his demands, his younger self had been adamant as well. A few possible reasons for Michael’s high strung & emotionally volatile temperament go back to his childhood in Rochdale. The repeated attacks of claustrophobia and depression, which he suffers as an adult, are connected by the novelist to his childhood trauma.
Once again, after ten years gap, Michael sees Julia in a concert by the Maggiore at Wigmore Hall in London. Julia presents herself to Michael almost as if there was no gap of years between their last meeting and this one. Now, she is being married to a banker, James Hansen, and their son Luke. Though Julia makes a late appearance in the novel, their physical and emotional intimacy, even if strained at times, is quickly regained. At the end of part, three of the novel Michael learns to his immense shock, from Luke’s inadvertent words, that Julia has become deaf.

Both caught between conflicting loyalties, Julia feels betrayed and retaliates by inviting Michael home to meet her family: husband and son. We see a sample of Michael’s incapacitating dark volatility at this meeting. Moreover, she thinks guilty in her renewed relationship with Michael. Nevertheless, even with these interesting things happening to Julia, neither she nor their great love seems to really come to life.

Unhappy with her acts of deception and shocked by Michael’s brutal intrusion into the privacy of her marriage, she makes up her mind and departs from Venice [while on trip to Venice]. Michael’s rough and proprietary marks on her body alert her and the reader to his possessiveness and unpredictable swings of emotion. A few sections later Julia informs him that she can no longer meet him. She tells him that her husband knows about their affair and she is overcome by remorse about hurting him.

Michael’s reactions are typical: he cannot fathom the references to Luke or the anguish about her marriage. He can think only of his loss of her, twice over. The anxiety of losing his beloved violin besets him. Only the daily demand of the rehearsals with the Maggiore keeps him going: “we meet; the four voices, and enter a braid” [AEM 335]. His hand gives him trouble so that the message from the brain no longer reaches it and his fingers cannot play. Mrs Formby [Michael’s mother] dies of a stroke. Michael grieves for her and for the violin that
must now be reclaimed. Lonely beyond endurance he solicits the services of call girls.

When the letter arrives from Mrs Formby’s solicitor, Michael is prepared mentally for the wrenching separation of the Tononi. However, in a singular reprieve from capricious fate, he learns that Mrs Formby has left the violin to him, free of tax. This glorious act of love, which has “repossessed” him of the violin, gives him life and with “troubled joy”, he is able to perceive the world yet again; the beauty of nature is visible to him once again [AEM 361]. The final decision to listen to Julia at Wigmore Hall, playing the “art of fugue” is a sign of maturity. With the experience of the music, “it is a beauty beyond imagining clear, lovely, inexorable, phrase across phrase, phrase echoing phrase, the incomplete, and the unending “art of fugue”. It is an equal music” [AEM 380], Michael has made his peace with himself and is in harmony with. Michael has learnt to trim his own expectations and discipline, desire in an act of unselfing, which music makes possible.

The novel is in the first person narrative, and Seth explains why he chose to write in this mode. First he understood that it was “notoriously difficult” to write about an acceptable art form in an expository way, and therefore the only means to get into music through works was to describe the thoughts of someone actually a musician himself. The use of first person narrative becomes a device to get to the language of music through the point of view of musician. Second by, the idea of telling an intense love story in the first person held a greater appeal to him [in Kohli xiii].

Thirty-seven years old Michael Holden is a second violinist in an English quartet called the Maggiore. Much against his parents’ wish, Michael proceeds with his chosen life. In Venice, he learns music under the tutelage of Carl Kall and he falls in love with Julia and the music that breeds their relationship. Seth seems to have deliberately chosen Venice, the ancient city that bred art in its finest and purest
form. Symbolically, this is the place where Michael, his teacher Carl Kall and Julia meet and later are separated. His teacher has high expectations from him and expects him to deliver a solo performance. However, Michael is self-willed and in spite of knowing the fact that he owes to him for ‘the voice in his hands’ [his skill of playing violin], he disengages himself from both. When Julia takes the maestro’s side, they have a bitter quarrel. Julia accuses Michael of being unable to stand authority. “And god save your heroes if they turn out to have feet of clay” [AEM 190]. Michael views Julia’s defence of kall as “an unbearable betrayal on her part” [ibid. 82]. Julia, familiar with his unpredictable mood swings tries hard to restore their affinity. He walks out on her, and after losing contact for over two months, she decides to forget everything and tries wedlock with James Hansen. He abandons his studies and returns to England to rise in profession, the essentially urban cosmopolitan evinces the existential issues of desperate, unhappy people struggling for existence where he becomes a fugitive. He is alone. It has been ten years since Julia and he parted, while now, he is going along with a student Virginie. Apart from playing in the quartet, Michael supplements his income by teaching the violin to rather average music students. He is also sleeping with one of them. Virginie is French and is sixteen year younger than he is. He does not intend to share the rest of his life with her, but has gone along in the relationship for more than a year. He reports,

> Every time I sleep here I wonder what I am doing with my time and hers….She wants it to, and I go along with it, through lust and loneliness suppose; and laziness and lack of focus. [AEM 6]

The problem of existentialism is reiterated; it irrevocably reminds us of the decadent western civilization that T.S.Eliot, in his great masterpiece, *The Waste Land* had sketched. Some very unforgettable images come alive, for example,

> When in the loneliness of man’s spirit
Death is life and life is death, [125]

And

When the evening is spread out against the sky

Like a patient etherized upon a table [ibid.13]

Indeed, everything is mechanical in the present cosmopolitan life. There is hardly any alternative left than to let things happen as they come. Michael is middle aged and the everyday struggle for a humble lifestyle hardly allows him to think about a life partner or anything required for a settled life. The dreary life moves on; it is devoid of zest and focus. Michael undoubtedly is trying to assuage his loneliness through sexual gratification with someone he does not love.

The feeling of loneliness and ennui seems to have gripped his entire disposition. The boredom of daily drudgery is reinforced effectively through the repetition of first person, ‘I’, in this paragraph and short sentences that could have easily been avoided. This kind of sentence structure accentuates an improper thought structure, which goes very well with his internal monologues.

Michael still clings to memories of Julia McNicholl, a talented pianist whom he had loved intensely as a student in Vienna. In section 2.18, Michael recounts the reasons for their break-up. In retrospect, he realises that here was some truth in Julia’s accusation that he had been very “self-willed”, and unable “to shift a musician’s message from his playing, not his speech” [AEM 16]. Michael admits to himself that “it was as much my younger self, unyielding, unwilling to exchange a mentor for a dictator, or to sidle past a collision” [ibid. 18].

When he tries to re-establish contact with Julia much later, she refuses to call back or write, and he realises that he has lost her through his sudden departure and long silence. Michael has to live for these ten
years with the painful burden of his loss. His life settles in “a bearable aloneness” only because of his music [ibid. 56].

In the opening section, the ‘flowery’ and ‘delicious pouncy’ Virginie confidently asserts that Beethoven haven’t trios [Opus 1 No 3] into a clarinet string quintet in [minor]. The incredulous Michael is determined to track down opus 104. This quest leads him to the library in Manchester where he is able to locale a miniature score. He is also able to track down a recording of the opus issued in 1977 under a Czech label. It is on his way home after his successful mission, that he suddenly spots Julia for a few fleeting moments. She is seated just five feet away in another London bus. Rather dramatically, he pursues her bus in a taxi, but she is gone by the time he catches up with her bus. The first indication of Michael’s hypersensitivity is his reaction to the failed pursuit. He sits “under his arrow of Eros, and weeps” [ibid. 43]. Because-due to his hypersensitivity towards her he were lost her for ten years.

Michel returns to the small town on three occasions. The references to his childhood are important because Michael desire to escape his past is largely responsible for his present psychological state of mind. The son of a butcher, his parents had saved all they could to send their son to a University. His mother desires that her only child escape life in Rochdale by mean of a good education. When he is nine years old, Mrs Fromby takes him to see a concert conducted by “the small and ailing barbiolli”. Awe struck, Michael decides that “more than anything else I want to be part of such a noise” [AEM 67], and begs Mrs Fromby to teach him to play the violin. His refusal to go to university leaves his parents “bewildered and betrayed” and “depraved of a happiness that they were due [AEM 22]. Michael opts for music school in London & moves into a small- enclosed rarefied world of classical music. In Manchester, he has to survive unsupported by an academic grant, and cannot help him financially. In the meanwhile, Rochdale becomes a victim to industrial planning: “it is a town with its
heart torn out” [AEM 71]. The council places a compulsory purchase order on his father’s butcher shop and the shops gives way to a parking lot. His mother exhausts herself trying to nurse his father from a bronchial ailment, working as a dinner woman in a school, and fighting a legal case [ibid. 27]. Michaels has to live with the guilt of letting his mother down. Apart from his father [now widowed], his aunt Joan and Mrs Fromby, Michael has no other ties with Rochdale. He is determined to cut off links with the “distressed and constrained town” [ibid. 22] now that he has moved into “an urbane world far outside his ken” [ibid. 23]. Yet he wonders why he mourns for it so angrily [ibid. 72].

He puts off visiting his Rochdale even after his upset and lonely father tells him about the death of his twelve-year-old cat, Zsa-Zsa. Nor does he make the time to visit Mrs Fromby in hospital, or to attend her funeral. Soon after Julia leaves him, Michael hears of Mrs Fromby’s death and realises that he has just a few month’s lefts with his companion of twelve years [Tononi] “I’ve spent more time with it than with any leaving soul, but, well, it’s still not mine. And I am not its” [AEM 127]. The intense feeling, with which he plays his violin in Vivaldi’s church the pieta, makes it an instrument with its own being. Seth evocatively describes the sensuous relationship between man & instrument. Michael agonises over life without his violin and can’t bear the thought of it lying “unplayed, unloved, and unspeaking” [AEM 56].

The impending loss of the violin in only adds to the delicate state of Michael’s mind, which is on the verge of breaking down under the “ungiving pressure of thoughts” there are instances of anxieties that reveal his “fecklessness” [ibid. 24]. He is given to “moments of dark panic”, when things seem to be closing in [such as the attack in Vienna at the Musikverein after the performance of the trout, 5.11]. There is a reason for his fear of claustrophobic. He relates these panic attacks to an incident that occurred on his sixth birthday. While playing a game of hide & seek, he hid in a fridge. The door clicked shut and he
couldn’t get out, until someone happened to come into the room. He was brought out in a state of suffocated terror. He tells Julia that is one reason why his lives where his does at Archangel Court, and pays a mortgage beyond his reach.

As self-pity gnaws away at the centre of his being, Michael reverts to “the solitariness of his earlier life” [AEM 168]. There are warning signals that his futile self-pity is gradually leading to a nervous breakdown. “A day passes, then another. I buy bread and milk. I eat, I drink, I bathe, and I shave. Exhausted by wakefulness, I sleep, I teach. I attend rehearsals...” [AEM 60] Michael’s psychic life is brought in. J. Issacs remarks about the application of stream of consciousness technique,

The time obsession of the modern age is conditioned by the increasing space of living, by the widespread sense of the Transience of all forms of modern life, and more particularly Perhaps, by the rapidity of social and economic change [6].

The time shift as expressed through the stream of consciousness technique has been evinced in the form of interior monologues and Michael’s existential anguish.

Michael has been suffering from claustrophobia, since he was nine years old. The phobia gives him a feeling of being closed and suffocated and it engulfs him later. Perhaps, it has developed in him a fear of being controlled, coerced or intimidated by someone. Something, that could have resulted in his parting from Carl Kall. Michael knows his limitations; he is not an easy person to get along. He had in him volatility, a sense of resistance, of scepticism, roughness, impulsiveness, even at times, of dark panic, almost brainsickness. At times just before a performance is to take on stage, he gets so tensed that Helen, the cellist, has to give him coffee to relieve him of it. Similarly, there is Bill, the pianist who starts coughing before and after the show and invariably, all these musicians begin to sweat.
After ten years Julia enters the narrative only towards the end of part two, at a performance by the Maggiore at Wigmore hall, “the sacred shoe-for of chamber music” [AEM 86]. Michael learns that she has been married to an American banker from Boston called James Hansen for nine years. They have a seven-year-old son, Luke.

When Julia is chosen to join the quartet for a concert in Vienna to perform Schubert’s “the trout”, Michael is overjoyed. Michael and Julia get to relive the intimacy of the past in the city where they first met, and fell in love. She can’t explain why she has even looked for him in the phone book, but only tells that it is good to see him again, not just to hear him play. [ibid. 93]. She doesn’t stay for long; she does not even given her phone number, but assures him that they would meet. Moreover, she leaves; it is raining. Michael feels “for a moment, her face is lit, too dimly for me to read much on it” [ibid. 95]. The experiences of playing together again and of making love elevate Michael to the height of ecstasy.

Every joyful memory of Vienna comes flooding back to my mind. We play the movement through. I get the sense that Julia is leading me her part is continuous -she has no entries as such where she has to take her cue from me--- her eyes are often on me--- an intentness , an inwardsness that goes beyond Vienna , a lovely subtle directness imbues her music: and, by conduction, mine. [AEM 136]

However, this time too, Julia does not give him her address or phone number leaving him always in an anxiety about future meeting. Towards the end of the part, Michael learns from Julia’s seven-year-old son Luke that she has become deaf. Julia’s mysterious behaviour becomes clear to him, now his anxiety takes a new turn from this point.

In the fourth part, Michael comes to know that Julia is going to join their group for a performance. Lest there be any difficulty for Julia in regard to her adjustment with others, Michael tells his groups all about her deafness and himself joins the quartet in lieu of Piers. There is no formal break off with Virginie. Michael is once invited to Julia’s
house for lunch, and experience the pangs of seeing his beloved possessed by her husband and child.

I have seen Julia the hausfrau before. Son: husband; a huge heavy stove; he then darling; I am a guest: suffered or honoured, it makes little odds. My hostess is the exquisite Julia --- Julia and James, a delightful couple --- made for each other. Yes, their monograms match. [AEM 211]

There is no way to get out of this agony. “Who must follow these prerogatives, these hidden histories of this Chameleon word love?” [ibid. 214]. Michael asks himself. Jealousy and self–pity have added poignancy to his suffering.

The fifth part is set in Vienna where the troupe including Julia has gone. It describes all about their rehearsals and performances. Michael’s passion grows as he finds Julia alone. However, he also notes the difference in Julia that increases his agony.

Come to Venice with me—I don’t know how I have lived without you all these years how feeble and trite my words sound to me, as it they have been plucked out of some housewife fantasy. I cannot, “she says, “I simply cannot [AEM 232].

In his soliloquy addressed to Schubert, Michael lets his emotion loose, and finds fault with his rash decision to leave Vienna for good. Beloved Schubert, in your city I am adrift. I am consumed by past love; its germs long embedded. Half contained, have grown virulent again.

There is no hope for me. I turned away four thousand nights ago, and the path was closed in by trees and branches. I am eaten by futile pity. I make too much of much--- how can I long for what I do not grasp?” [ibid. 242-43]

Michael, yet, long for Julia though he can no more grasp her. She is now someone else’s wife, someone’s mother & she is obliged to
them. An inability to accept this reality makes him desperate, sometime almost to the point of insanity. Despite the outburst of Michael’s frustrated soul, the fifth part ends with a calm and serene note; it ends with the description of their journey back to Venice.

Though we are alone, we do not kiss; we are almost shy. The journey is everything it could be. Soon we are in the Veneto… the two of us stand in the corridor with our luggage and look out over the water. I speak her name softly to myself, and she somehow sensing it or is it chance? Speaks man! [AEM 253-54]

While on trip to Venice Julia has also accompanied the group. At the beginning of this part, the rapture of love is described in details. However, Michael’s tension increases with the thought that all is going to be over. They sit by the side of a canal. Julia expresses her happiness that they are there. Michael says that it is not enough. Filled up with a sense of growing restlessness, Michael almost loses the balance of his mind. When he sees the letter written by Julia to her husband whom she addresses as Jimbo, he feels ill. He feels like a thief who has entered a house to find in it goods stolen from his own house. Depression makes him brutal. That night, in the bitterness of his passion, he bites her brutally and also taunts her, she stare at him and cries out furiously. Michael notes in her eyes rage, horror and disbelief. He is left with shame and regret at what he has done, but cannot appease her.

There is now little hope of repairing the loss. In his self-analysis, back in London, Michael hopes against hope that Julia may turn up. Moreover, his hope belied, he comes to her home and learns that she is going for solo performances. Julia clearly says that she shall not continue any relationship with him. She does not even offer him a cup of coffee. With all his hopes lost, Michael comes back to get himself adjusted to the hard reality. He even compares himself to a dog sitting on the “sneezing prow”
Go then, with the breathing tide, and do not make a scene, and learn wisdom of the little dog, who visits from elsewhere, and who knows that what is, is and O harder knowledge, that what is not is not. [AEM 306]

He even contemplates suicide [ibid 8.14], and in desperate loneliness picks up a call girl called Tricia from a card in a phone booth [ibid. 8.16]. After parting from Julia, Michael gets prepared to part from the Tononi [which was given him on the temporary basis]. When all seems lost and as Michael descends into a personal hell, a registered letter from Rochdale arrives. However, it is not the feared claim for custody of the violin. Rather, Mrs Formby’s solicitor informs Michael that she has indeed bequeathed the Carlo Tononi, circa 1727, to him. He contemplates returning the violin but realises that the violin is more than an instrument, but for the violin, he would have “descended forever into endless might” [ibid. 368]. In gratitude, he asks the spirit of Mrs Formby, “what possessed you to repossess me of it, you who were close to death and lacked clear speech? It is the violin alone you want to give me, or must I learn some lesson from the world?” [ibid. 36] the violin returns Michael to life. He starts taking lessons, has long walk, and plays the extra fiddle in an orchestra. He learn to live in “a sexless calm” [ibid. 8.27], and moves away from being “a self-centred bastard” [ibid. 375].

A year after he set eyes on Julia, piers re-invites him back to the Maggiore. Professionally he is unhappy and Julia is far unhappy, but he is resolute that she will play to the audience. Julia is included in the Quartet, but for Julia, because of her hearing impairment, co-ordination with other musicians is a problem. But Michael, determined to give Julia strength and purpose of life, finally succeeds. In a four-minute section Julia performs exquisitely and Michael is driven to a sense of ‘equal music’. The satisfaction he gets out of it is unequalled; there is no more any regret of losing Julia. He is moved to a sense of that equal music which Donne had expressed and which Seth has borrowed for the epigraph.
And into that gate they shall enter, and in that house they shall dwell, where here shall be no cloud no sun, no darkness nor dazzling, but one equal light, no noise nor silence, but one equal music, no fears nor hopes, but one equal possession, no foes nor friends, but one equal communion and identity, no ends nor beginnings, but one equal eternity [AEM Epigraph]

The verse achieves the end that a fugal composition presupposes the composition that ultimately unites with the divine. The peace and tranquillity that the artists obtain is such, that they are unfazed by any kind of darkness or pain and will sustain them as long as they live.

By paying tribute to the Masters of English Literature such as John Donne and Tennyson, Vikram Seth shows his reverence and at the same time he is able to present a novel imbued with a contemporary theme in the contemporary style.

Literature, in different ages has reflected the basic complexities, anxieties, pain, hatred and pleasure of human beings. One age may pass; yielding place to another but the sentiments remain approximately the same. Poets, novelists, dramatists always endeavour to ennoble man; to help him preserve the basic goodness of mankind, emphasizing that basic humanity must retain itself despite the cloud of unhappiness, darkness and fear enveloping us from time to time. This is precisely the message of John Donne’s epigraph and this is the central message of Seth to his readers in An Equal Music.

But the final home coming is in Michael’s decision to return to family. He even contemplates living in Rochdale itself, and doing a bit of teaching, something linked to his own college. There is nothing to keep him in London. It is no longer, if it ever was white rose on his mother’s grave. As he plays the unfinished fugue from the “art of fugue” in memory of Mrs Fromby, his spirit regenerates itself. He breathes freely once more: “my hands are not cold, nor my mind agitated. I am in no dark tunnel but the open moor” [AEM 379].

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In such a way, Michael has made his peace with himself and is in harmony with the world. The conclusion traces a moral growth: Michael has learnt to trim his own expectations and discipline desire in an act of unselfing, which music makes possible:

Music such music, is sufficient gift. Why ask for happiness; why hope not to grieve? It is enough, it is to be blessed enough, to live from today to hear such music—not too much, or the soul could not sustain it—from time to time. [AEM 381]

Thus, Michael’s joys and sorrows, his triumphs, his despair are brushed into the larger landscape of European artistic heritage. The novel is the composition of several competing losses: loss of lover, loss of hearing, the impending loss of hearing, the impending loss of the violin, loss of the quartet Maggiore, the earlier loss of the shop and the mother, the loss of the record with Beethoven’s composition and finally the loss of ‘Art of Fugue’.

Julia is the daughter of a professor of history at Oxford and an Austrian mother, and she is in many ways the making of Michael, who is from a working class, north England background. Julia has been brought up in a world “unreachably different” from his own, where “art and literature and music are absorbed without effort or explanation,” and she becomes in a sense his second unobtrusive teacher. She teaches him to enjoy art. Improves his German and he learns more about music from her than anybody else [AEM 81]. Their initial interest in each other is soon kindled into love. They become lovers’ and find that they can ‘make’ music together. Together with a cellist, Maria, they set up a two and perform wherever they can. This time for Michel has been “a working dream” [ibid. 80].

However, when Michel a have a quarrel with his music teacher Carl kall, Julia defence her teacher saying Michael that he is unable to stand authority he sees toward her defence “an unbearable betrayal on her part” [82]. And both part for ten years and she enter the narrative
only towards the end of part two, at a performance by the Maggiore at Wigmore Hall, “the sacred shoe-box of chamber music” [ibid. 86]. Now she has been married to an American banker from Boston called James Hanson for nine years. They have a seven years-old son, Luke. They continue to meet furtively and send each other faxes in germen. When Julia is chosen to join the quartet for a concert in Vienna to perform Schubert’s “the trout” Michel is overjoyed.

Once again, after ten years gap, Michael sees Julia in a concert by the Maggiore at Wigmore Hall in London.

Dying, undying, a dying fall, a rise: the waves of sound well around us even as we generate them: Helen and I at the heart and, to either side, Piers and Billy. Our eyes are on our music; we hardly glance at each other, but we cue and are cued as it Haydn himself were our conductor. A strange composite being we are, not ourselves any more but the Maggiore, composed of so many disjunctive parts: chairs, stand, music, bows, instruments, musicians—sitting, standing, shitting, sounding—all to produce these complex vibrations that jog the inner ear, and through them the grey mass that says: joy; love; sorrow; beauty. [AEM 86]

Julia presents herself to Michael almost as if there was no gap of years between their last meeting and this one.

Michel & Julia get to relive the intimacy of the past in city where they first met and fell in love. Julia is persuaded by Michel to join him for ten days in Venice. Michel learns from son Luke about Julia’s painful secret, at the end of part three. Then in detailed letter to Michel, Julia explains that she is suffering from an autoimmune disease of inner ear. This in effect means that the protective systems of her body are treating parts of the inner ear as hostile and therefore destroying them she is gradually going deaf, and lip reading and a concealed aid will continue to help her until the only music she will hear is the music in her mind.
Julia admits to Michel that she had been “so hungry to speak of music – and to play it with someone who understands me as I was before I before all these changes in my life” [ibid. 137]. Michael wonders if this was why she had chosen to re-involve her life with his: “am I for her a static mark, a reversion to the days when music was for her an actual sense, not merely an imagined beauty?” [ibid. 156].

Michael buys a book about deafness in order understand Julia’s problem better. He enters into the marvellous wonders of listening as he makes his “first acquaintances with the elaborate chaos that lies behind the tiny drum skins of my outer ears” [AEM 156].

Michael becomes increasingly aware of a world mad with sound: forms rip, trams rumble past vibrating undertook; coffee-cups clink, and over the murmur from the busy bar I can hear the peristaltic cranking of – is if a fax machine or a teleprinter? What does Schubert make of these noises? [Ibid. 229] These all indicates their passionate love for each other.

However, she is gradually going deaf, and lip reading and a concealed hearing aid will continue to help her, until the only music she will hear is the music in her mind. Julia has taught herself to watch other players, movements and to play entirely from memory and imagination. Julia describes how her psychological trauma began three years ago, and the tremendous support lent her by James, who got her to play again. “I did not think at first that I could live through it. Music is the heart of my life. For me, of all people, to be betrayed by my ears was unbearable” [150]. It is remarkable how Julia has managed to hide her illness from an unsuspecting audience thus far [149-151].

Julia’s deafness is an angle that evinces Seth’s courage in exploring the idea of a deaf musician about being under the threat of losing music from a life that is dedicated to music. Basing the character of Julia on famous deaf percussionist Evelyn Glennie, Seth portrays with great sensibility the life of a deaf musician, not seeking to make
Julia’s deafness a metaphor for any other aspect of the novel but to be taken at face value; it is there, just as it is often there in real life. It is more tragic since she is a musician, but resiliently, she allows her musical instincts to guide her back into proper musical functioning.

Seth’s narrative, which could have explored the depths of Julia’s emotional distress in her transition from the world of sounds, music, and creativity to the world of deafness, is constrained by the web of “absence and vacant regret” that a highly strung Michael weaves around his lonely, near Psychotic existence. These all has best expressed Julia’s love for music, deafness & psychological Trauma.

Julia cannot come to terms with living in “dual worlds which chafe each other” [AEM 168] and she is unhappy with her acts of deception. She realises that the records of withdrawal by her credit card will show that she had been in Venice and she has not informed James of this filled with feeling of betrayal, and guilt at almost making love in the Scuola di San Giorgio church [ibid. 279]. She is shocked by Michael’s brutal intrusion into the privacy of her marriage; she makes up her mind and departs from Venice. Michael’s rough & proprietary marks on her body alert her and the reader to his possessiveness and unpredictable swings of emotion. A few sections later Julia informs him that she can no longer meet him. She writes,

I have to learn peace again, for my own sake- and for Luke, and for James…. I have become restless with you, and uncertain and afraid, and guilty, and unsustainably stupidly full of joy and pain- none of which is anyone’s fault but my own. [324]

Her words seem to echo Lata’s words to Malati towards the end of A Suitable Boy decrying passion & Phil’s words in The Golden Gate, “Passion is a prelude to disaster”. Some preoccupations remain constant in Seth, despite the changed forms of his works.
Michel Compels Julia to walk with him in a part to talk things through. She tells him that her husband knows about their affair and she is overcome by remorse about hurting him: “he’s injured. I can see it, and I can’t bear it. In the worst days, when I could hardly recognize myself in the mirror, I saw in his eyes that I was myself. He helped me through.” She reveals that she values James because, “he isn’t volatile – like me. He isn’t moody like me. He made me happy. He kept me sane, he gave me courage” [AEM 327-28]. We have seen earlier that Julia’s distress about her deafness stems also from her fears of being unable to hear or attend to Luke. She now tells Michael that she wants to have another child for, “Luke needs someone to share me with, or he’ll grow up to be as selfish as I am” [ibid. 328].

In this way in Michael’s presence, she becomes restless and uncertain’ afraid and guilty [ibid. 324]. Julia has her Catholic faith, which is one of the “bases of her confidence”. And she comes to a decision that her present and her future are her family. Michael is the past, and she cannot continue to live there “I, of all people, who have a before and an after, should have known that you can’t relive your life” [ibid.325]. Julia’s decision to stick to her family is in keeping with the positions taken by Seth’s female characters in the earlier novels: Liz, Lata and Julia form a continuum.

In this way Carey points out that by using the quartet as a focal point, Seth deals with some of the problems of writing about music,

By putting music back into the people who perform it . . . . You come at the music through their hopes, quarrels, ambitions, loves, professional contacts they have to make with agents, critics, instrument makers, players. . . .[13]

Julia’s craving for music is fulfilled which gives her right direction as well as good diversion from a deepening sense of self-pity. Such is the power of real music that it gives an inner beauty and strength to Julia that overpowers her physical handicap and she in turn
is able to give pleasure and succour to thousands of weary minds and souls. So her feeling of betrayal compels her to reconcile.

Michael is extremely conscious of the relationship between class & the kind of music he plays. He envies Julia for being socially privileged, and therefore being brought up in a world unreachably different from his own, “where art and literature and music are absorbed without effort or explanation—from speech and travel, from books and records, from the very walls and shelves” [AEM 81]. He reminds her that “she did not have to earn her living with her fingers” [ibid. 157]. Michael relates institutional imparting of “a fine tradition of music” to the background of the student, and reflects on how educational cuts will deny training in classical music to grammar school students:

If I had been born in Rochdale five years later, I don’t see how I—coming from the background I did, and there were so many who were much poorer—could have kept my love of the violin alive [ibid. 71].

He reacts angrily to Luke being among the Privileged students: at Pembridge School who are entitled to an education in music, while they are:

Tearing music out of the lives of poor children. Now children, say your LMN literature, musicate, Numerate. Now once again, all together: illiterate, Immusicate, innumerate. These sainted powers will starve you of music as surely as surely as the damned Leave music to these who can afford indulgences. In twenty years no butchers son will be a violinist, no, nor daughter, neither [AEM 346].

Michael is deliberately dismissive of the music at the masses—“the music that cab drivers play” [ibid 32], and popular music of Engel Bert Humperdinck [ibid 36]. That is the music at the world that he, the son of a butcher, had to escape a form.
Even with the theme of deafness there is little attempt made to enter Julia’s consciousness, to represent from within, the psychological trauma of losing hearing and what it must mean for a musician and a woman. The few lines given to Julia talking or writing about her loss quickly jump over into practical logistics of how she deals in day-to-day living. Not that one expects sells pity. But whatever happened to emotions such as horror, anger or grief? It was evident that Julia is neither fully fleshed out as a musician nor is her problem presented with any degree of psychological complexity. Studies that see:

*An Equal Music* located within a patriarchal Western discourse, perceive Seth’s portrayal of Julia as a character under erasure, without agency or independent intelligence, and “in constant need of men to rescue her from the multiple confusions” [Sharma 170].

There have been reviews of the novel that express impatience with “Seth’s persistent implausible reminders of Julia’s gender...... her scent, her hair, her scarves, and her unconveyed desirability” [William MC 1999]. While deafness is an interesting theme in a novel about music it needs to be examined to Seth a denying women entry into the male domain of western classical music or imperilling their creativity-artistic or otherwise-through the portrayal of his rather wooden and insipid heroine with a hearing impairment. So the Class and Gender issue also focuses the attention here.

Seth imparts an authentic picture of the life of Western Classical Musicians along with the insipidness and uncertainty in their lives, in spite of not being a part of it. While explain the odd structure of a quartet, says, “They spend more time with each other than with their families-very often on the road and very often under pressure on stage…” [Seth Authors Note]

The quartet players, accustomed to the torn and strife, disagreements and disputes, become the focal issue in the story. The four players have their own likes and dislikes; they love Haydn’s music.
but aren’t comfortable with Brahms’s, yet they can’t be choosers. In fact, the quartet is once supposed to play Brahms’s music in a programme at the Edinburgh and much against their will, they perform and that too with great aplomb.

The main plot, as the title indicates, concerns the quartet and their struggle with profession while the sub-plot centres on Michael’s obsession with Julia, his estranged beloved whom he suddenly meets after a gap of ten years, and his Tononi that Mrs Formby has lent him.

Seth rightly points out the deepening sense of frustration, helplessness of these musicians who have to perform according to their audience’s choice and expectations in creating music that must essentially be enthralling, soul stirring and which is able to outclass everything. The author raises certain pertinent questions regarding the harmony of spirit which is so essential to produce sublimity of art. Nevertheless, the audiences are obvious and even unmindful of the tremendous pressure and the professional hazards involved in it. Michael voices this while narrating the rigorous exercise put in by the quartet in bringing in uniformity. Malashri Lal opines that there is;

Beguiling elegance about this quietly passionate book; it’s Measured and beautiful prose, this expresses as well as disciplines powerful emotions of both, music and human relationships. Finally, An Equal Music is about the tragic ways in which these human relationships fail to achieve, intellectually the perfection of art. [291].

The critic avers that the novel shows intellectual failure of these musicians to obtain perfection of art, but Seth’s attempt is at shoeing that in spite of being a part of their pervasive grim world, their efforts at trying to fulfil Bach’s dream is in itself a satisfying end for them. When Bach died on July 28, 1750, the Art of Fugue remained incomplete. Seth in his novel evinces a structure skin to that of art of fugue, and the quartet players are asked to play this very composition but when Bach had conceived it, then quartet composition did not exist.
These players thus take up this uphill task and play the composition using innovations what was Bach’s forte, and even succeed.

Michael had established a special link between himself and lark because of certain pieces he had listened from Mrs Formby. Describing the serenity of the placid nature he says: “sometimes a single lark would sing…a whole scrum of larks” [AEM 22].

After leaving Rochdale, the abode of serenity and peace, he comes to London, his workplace. Here he misses the serenity. He complains, “There is no natural silence. Even in the middle of the 600 / Acres of the work, I can hear the traffic all around, and, often / above” [ibid. 22].

In fact, the difference between Rochdale and London is conspicuous in these opening words of the novel: “The branches are bare, the sky tonight a milky violet. It is not quite here, but it is peaceful….the birds are still. The traffic slashes through Hyde Park” [ibid 3].

Seth irrevocably reminds us of D.H. Lawrence, a votary of pure nature, and one opposed to industrialization and mechanical life. Michael ruminates over the slow ruin of the placid nature when he visits Rochdale and is aghast at finding the place derelict and defunct and the city that once boasted of co-operative movement has lost its appeal. The commercialization of the town had slowly led to a decline in art and artefacts. The theatres had closed down; even the literary and scientific societies had shrunk or disappeared. The author is able to focus on the slow ruin and dilapidation of the natural and aesthetic beauty of nature and in the novel; music and the musicians become one of the many concerns of a true artist. Place of Art and Nature in commercialized world depicted here.
In this way, it is observed throughout the Three Novels, that young characters are the representative of social, cultural, political and economic way of life. They have changed somewhat the concept of traditional way of marriage. They are the representative of the value of work, process of change, the injustice of poverty.

New information and technologies encourage users to keep in touch with friends and family only in a shallow sense. Their superficial social life, that has separated from communal contact which has brought loneliness, frustration in their life and hence they search for meaning and an emotional fulfilment. In order to get relieve from tensions, loneliness they lens at different types of addiction; for example drinking, smoking, attending call girls. They are also suffering from claustrophobia. Due to the fast paced life they don’t have time to think about the most crucial decision of choosing the life partner. So the issue of divorce and separation, malformed relations like homosexuality that has become the order of fluid society. Identity crisis is also one of the major issues of young society.

The characters attitudes to love reveal their attitudes to life, to issues that are outside or beyond the ‘private’ question of romantic or sexual love. Characters hypersensitivity also reveals their reaction to failed pursuit. Character’s desire to escape their past is largely responsible for their present state of mind and they lead psychotic existence.

In their passionate love they recognize, they become restless, and uncertain, afraid and guilty. Moreover, at all they denunciates their passion for family and social order is a thematic preoccupation once again repeated in A Suitable Boy, The Golden Gate and An Equal Music. While concluding these three novels we come to know that any lasting relationship cannot predicated on sexual or chemical affinity but must be based on respect, trust and understanding.