Chapter-V
Postmodern Society . . .
Classical Music
In the Land of Europe.
Vikram Seth

An Equal Music (1999)

Time of Action 1990's

(A) Characters
   (a) Major
   1. Michael Holme- Son of a butcher from small town, Rochdale, North of England- 38 years old, a musician working as a Second violinist in “Maggiore Quartet”, London-falls in love with Julia MacNichol-
   2. Julia MacNichol- 32 years old, musician in love with Michael but 9 years back married to a Banker, James Hansen from Boston, United States of America, Maria Novotny is her professional name.
   4. Luke (Lucius Hanson) 08 years old son of Julia and James
   5. Professor Carl Kall- Professor of Music at Vienna
       He is from Sweden.
   6. Mrs. John (Cecilia)- Formby An old lady, lover of music, a violinst and owner of 270 year Old Italian Violin, Carlo Tanoni Circa 1727

(b) Minor Characters
   1. Dr. MacNichol- Formerly Professor of History, Oxford father of Julia
   2. Mrs. MacNichol Mother of Julia. She is from Austria.
   3. Marie A friend and class-mate of both Julia and Michael at Vienna
   4. Nicholas Sparse- A music critic
5. Eric Cowan-
   An Agent of Musical concert

6. Eric Sanderson-
   A dealer in musical instruments and a repairer

7. Cedric Glover-
   Nephew of Mrs. Formby. He has two daughters.

8. Keith Warm-
   Solicitor of Mrs. Formby from Varms & Lunn Solicitors,

9. Helen-
   A musician in Maggiore Quartet

10. Piers
    A musician in Maggiore Quartet

11. Virgine
    22 years old, student from Nyons, France. Taking Music Tuition from Michael. She has sexual relation with Michael.

12. Tricia-
    A prostitute of London

13. Mr. & Mrs. Holme-
    Parents of Michael Holme from Rochdale
    Mr. Holme is a butcher from by profession.

14. Joan-
    Auntie of Michael. She lives at Rochdale

15. Alex Foley-
    Second Violonist, who left Maggiore Quartet five years back

16. Petra Dant-
    Bass player in Trout

17. Kurt Weigh-
    The second cellist in String Quintent

18. Lothar
    Performs the Introductions at the concert

19. Tabias Kahn-
    A serious violinst.

(B) Pet (Animal)

- Zsa Zsa-
  A pet cat owned by Mr. & Mrs. Holme, parents of Michael

(C) Locale

1. London

2. Rochdale
   Michael’s hometown in North England.

3. Manchester
   Royal Northern College of Music, Manchester where Michael studied music

4. Vienna-
(D) **Violin**
- Carlo Tononi- 270 year old Italian Violin (of Mrs. Formby) Circa-1727

(E) **Western Classical Musicians**
1. Bach, of 18\textsuperscript{th} Century A.D.
2. Schubert, of 19\textsuperscript{th} Century A.D.
3. Mozart, of 19\textsuperscript{th} Century A.D.
4. Beethoven of 19\textsuperscript{th} Century A.D.
5. Brahms
6. Haydon

(F) **Music**-Concert Performance is given by **Maggiore Quartet**, London.
   I. Art of Fugue
   II. Trout

(G) **Musikhochschule**-Music School at Vienna.
Chapter-V

In this chapter, Vikram Seth’s third novel An Equal Music published in 1999 is critically analysed and interpreted. It consists of 381 pages. The title of the novel is taken from famous English metaphysical poet, John Donne’s (1572-1631) poem Valediction.

“And into that gate they shall enter, and in that house they shall dwell, where there shall be no cloud nor 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.

JOHN DONNE (p. nil)

The epilogue reveals the motto of the novel as well as the novelist’s psychological insight. It portrays in true sense, a world of music, where the characters, mostly musicians are seen always humming the tune or the “half tuneless tune” of one of the Western musicians such as Schubert, Mozart, Haydon, Brahms, Bach and Beethoven. The ecstasy of the world of music is presented in John Donne’s above-mentioned poem. The strong imaginative power, coupled with his longing for rest and peace in God after his spiritual struggles, comes this serene state blessed with “equal light”, “equal music” and “equal eternity”
It also reminds T. S. Eliot’s **Four Quartets** which is the joint title of his four poems i.e. **Burnt Norton, East Coker, The Dry Salvages** and **Little Gidding** which in reality refers to different moods harmonised into a whole. Nandana Dutta Comments:

> “An Equal Music”, if title epigraph and tenure are indicators, is about, the achievement of equipose-in music and in the self’s relations with the other ‘Harmony’ ‘balance, equanimity and calm are established as elements of a grand narrative hovering over the discords of the novel’s thematic.” (1)

Rosary Royer and D. Dominic Savio rightly remarks that:

> “An Equal Music” 1999, by Vikram Seth, suggests a harmonious world of music, music manifests cultures refined status. Seth chooses to deal with, in Asam Mars-Jones words, Europe’s supreme cultural achievement-classical music (30) two dominant themes of the novel are love and music but one tends to question whether love predominates music. Music has rendered the prerogative of circumscribing the world that the text has to dwell upon. Limiting the boundary, the author has narrowed down to England’s aesthetics, which, no doubt, needs an exploration into the world of musicians.”(2)

The novel is dedicated to Phillips Honnore, with whom, Vikram Seth on a very wet day saw someone staring his own image in water of Serpentine River in Hyde Park, London. As they wondered about the man,
Philippe suggested that he might be a musician and thereby he got an idea for writing a novel.

FOR PHILIPPE HONORE

Perhaps "this could have stayed unseated.  
Had our words turned to other things 
in the grey park. The rain abated.  
Life would have quickened other strings. 
I list your gifts in this creation.  
Pen paper, ink and inspiration,  
peace to the heart with touch or word,  
Ease to the soul with note and chord.  

How did the walk, those winter hours,  
Occasion this. No lighting came. 
Nor did I sense when touched by flame, 
Our story lit with borrowed powers 
Rather, by what our spirits burned,  
Embedded in words, to us returned." (p. nii)

Love and music are the two operating themes of the novel, which runs simultaneously, and sometime merge with each other. The novel is divided into eight parts and 177 sub-parts is actually based on a music pattern and to understand and fully appreciate a reader must have, which demands a complete knowledge of structure, range and history of Western Classical music. The chapters of the novel are marked like musical score sheets. 1.8-4.19-7.25 etc. The eight parts of the novel correspond to the eight notes in Western Classical music. Octave contains eight notes, which are tonic, supertonic and tonic notes. If the tonic note at the beginning is sharp that at the end it is to be flat. Just as each note in an octave is distinct and all of them together make a unified whole, so are the eight parts of the novel.
The writer in his Author’s Note expresses his love of music and his anxiety to write a novel about music and gives the details of those musicians, persons, music teachers and many others who helped him. He mentions all those persons in the note given at the end of the book. Vikram Seth acknowledges that:

"Music to me is dearer even than speech. When I realised that I would be writing about it is I was gripped with anxiety. Only slowly did I reconcile myself to the thought of it.

Friends and strangers have helped me in this work string players, often those in quartets themselves ... other musicians both players and composers makes repairers and sellers of instruments those ...music-teachers, critics, musicians’ agents and managers, executives of record companies, managers of halls and festivals; ... those who understand the world of the deaf medically like the many doctors who have advised me, or educationally in particular my lip-reading teacher and her class, or from personal experience of deafness.

Many people talked to me about the world of these characters, a few about the characters themselves. ... I would thank three musicians—a pianist, a percussionist and a string player—who helped me, in quite different ways, to go where imagination alone could not have taken me: ...(p.nil)

It is not surprising to note that Vikram Seth has taken great care, pain and has done some research and consultation before writing a novel. It is most possible that after completing the “first draft” of the novel, he might have consulted large numbers of friends, strangers, music critics, musicians, music teachers etc. and all those persons connected with music and its performance. Later on he might have finalised the draft of the novel so as to achieve what Vikram Seth says:
"To get a sense of what it might be like to live, to have lived, and to expect to continue to live in the zones that lie at the intersection of the world of soundlessness with those of heard, misheard, of half-heard and of imagined sound." (nil)

A contemporary Indian English novelist, Vikram Chandra is of the opinion that:

On one level, an equal music is a story about love; the love of a woman lost and found and lost again. A chance sighting on a London bus, a letter that should never have been read, a pianist with a secret that touches the heart of her music; from a multiplicity of details, Vikram Seth creates, once again, a living breathing world that enchants and grips the reader. This is also a book about music and about how the love of music can run like a passionate theme through a life. Above all, it is a book to savour and re-read. "Vikram Seth has created new territory for Indian authors writing in English. An Equal Music is quite fascinating. It’s technically brilliant." (3)

An Equal Music, is a well-designed novel which unfolds the tale of a British musician, 37 years old Michael Holme and his gradual recovery of self. It portrays his intense love for music and his deep 12-years old emotional attachment with 270 years old Carlo-Tanoni Italian violin and his infatuation for a woman he loved and lost and after 10 years again found her and finally lost forever. The novel is based on a parallel structure of love and music. Julia suggests the theme when she remarks.
“Making music and making love its-a bit too easy
an equation.” 136 (5)

Nayar and Dhawan remarks that:

“Love is fulfillment of the sensual: the music that fingers senses bodies together Seth’s emphasis on the theme of characters who are ALIVE suggests that the most satisfying human role is that of a sensualist... Seth is truly an Epicurean of the senses, as an equal music admirably illustrates.”(4)

The novelist endeavours in the realm at personal intricate relationship, intrigues, interaction, reaction and Music is the major theme, which unites not only individuals but their souls also. It also reveals the novelist’s understanding of life in totality and he presents positive and realistic attitude towards life and attaches significant value to human relations a feeling and fine Art of music. The action in the novel moves between England, Austria and Vienna. The story is narrated from the point of the hero, Michael, a musician and it so gets the language of musician. It is substantially a technical novel and a reader chiding Western Classical Music cannot fully understand and appreciate it. It presents an in-depth study of non-glamorous side to music making. Michael sums it up-years of training long hours of rehearsals and pathetic pay. In modern times there is steady deterioration of Western Classical Music Culture in schools, colleges and popularity of Pop Music is increasing among the masses. Pradeep Trika rightly points out the other themes of the novel are:

“Memory and desire, return and flight, form the major motifs developed and sustained through the novel. Another sustained theme is the chamber music, its audience, the passions of its players, the heavy cost of its instruments and so on. In her letter to Michael, Julia confesses.”(5)
In the case of Quartet or any other Western Classical Music “The proximity to each and only to each other which more often than we recognise, constrict our spirits and makes us stranger than we are. Perhaps even our state of exaltation are akin to dizziness that comes from lacking air” (76)

The novelist celebrates the classical music of the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century. Bach died in 1750 and Schubert in 1828. Mozart preceded them and Beethoven died in 1827. The musical range does not step outside these limits. The invocation of music continues till the end of the novel. Both love and music play on the emotions and as such the novelist weaves the two themes together and presents the passion consummately obsessive love lives spent trying to reach perfection. For Michael and Julia music is not merely a vocation, it is their avocation and it has the strength to tie them to each other beyond the boundaries erected by society because their love has its own music making as its foundation. For Michael, Julia is not only the love of a lifetime but she is the very essence of his music though their love is purely on physical level but it vibrates with a touch of transcendence. Julia inspite of her dual loyalties, is as powerless and helpless as is Michael to resist sinking into love.

Vikram Seth has borrowed the idea for writing a novel from Greek legendary story of Eurydice and Orpheus. It is a love story. Orpheus who was a god in Greek mythology. He was the greatest musician. He was in love with a beautiful woman, Eurydice and wanted to marry with her but on the wedding day, while Eurydice was playing with the children, she stepped upon a black snake in the grass. The snake bit her and slowly she began to
be very sick. She died soon after this. When Orpheus learnt about the death of Eurydice, his sorrow knew no bounds. He became very unhappy and felt extremely lonely. He never played on his golden harp and never opened his lips to sing. He was almost dumb with despair.

Orpheus wanted to retrieve his lady love with the power of music from the Land of the Dead, which is in the Underworld, called Hades. After making a long journey, he reached the gate of the Land of the Dead. When the dog saw Orpheus, he raised his three heads and opened his three mouths. He grounded his teeth at him and growled terribly. When Orpheus came nearer, the dog stood up and got ready to fly at him and tear him into pieces. Orpheus’ sweet music-lulled the dog to sleep and he entered the Kingdom of the Underworld, Hades. Then he walked on and on till he came to the Palace.

Golden Harp’s melodious music pleased the palace guards and they let him go. The King of Underworld, god of Hades was very angry to see him because only the dead persons could enter the Land of Dead. Orpheus played on his harp and sang more sweetly and gently than ever before. Hades, became very happy as his anger was transformed into love. He agreed that Eurydice would follow Orpheus to the earth and stay with him there if he did not look back until she has reached the earth. Orpheus agreed to the condition but he could not fulfil it. When he was near the earth, he became impatient and could not control himself. He turned round to have a look at Eurydice and lost her once again forever.

Orpheus lost his beloved again due to lingering doubt and weakness. Orpheus, nearly regained his woman with the power of music but his joy was short-lived and in the end Orpheus lost his Lady-Love forever!
The novel is close to the bone the personal and public life of musicians in a quartet. The strains of continuous rehearsals and of performance, where virtuosity is a pre-requisite, musical whims, moods, preferences between the members of a chamber music ensemble every detail minutely. In brief, it is an intricate and intimate story and rich with Western classical music, art, humour, and emotions besides ravishing refinement of technique and the truthful portrayal of a small enclosed personal as well as social world of musician. A member of the musical group, Helen says that: “This morning when I was making coffee I suddenly realised how boring musicians are. All our friends are musicians and we aren’t interested in anything except music. Were stunted. Totally stunted. Like athletes.” (172)

It is not only the love story of Michael Holme and Julia McNicoll but there are love stories between humans and music which played in bit as interesting as such that music usurps love’s place as main motif of the novel. The characters not only love each other for the music they make but also their passion for and their devotion to their music outlast their travails and escapades by far. An elderly woman, Mrs Formby’s love for music gives a boy of small town his profession and ultimately the cherished 270 year old Carlo Tanoni violin. Schubert is ugly but kissable nonetheless for the music he has made. Michael’s relationship with his violin has been realized with a rare insight and not only Michael but also all other musicians empathise majorly with their respective instruments.

Michael Holme, is the butcher’s son from Rochdale, England, who pursues the career of a musician despite parents’ strong opposition. He
studies music under the famous Professor Carl Kall in Vienna. Here he falls passionately in love with Julia McNicholl, a student of music from England, who is ambitious to become a concert pianist. Michael starts having rows with his teacher and finds the environment not congenial but very oppressive. He nearly reaches a point of nervous breakdown and leaves the place abruptly. Julia tried to convince him to face the bitter realities of life all bravely. She is completely shattered by this strange act of Michael. His Professor Carl Kall, who had expected a very bright career of Michael, his favourite student, is deeply hurt. When Michael returns to normal life and tries to contact Julia, he finds that her doors are closed to him forever.

He settles down in London and joins the Maggiore Quartet as a second violinist and does find means of livelihood and attains some fame but he is never able to forget Julia. Chance brings them together after ten years in London. He is now 37 years old. Julia is married to an American Banker from Boston called James Hansen for nine years. They have a seven-year-old son, Luke. Both are unable to resist the power of their past and the love and sexual relationship is revived. They continue to meet furtively and exchange Faxes in German. Her father was a Professor of History at Oxford and her mother was an Austrian. For sometime everything seems golden.

Julia joins the Quartet for a concert in Vienna to perform Schubert’s The Trout. Michael and Julia get a chance to relive the intimacy of the past in Vienna where they first met and fell in love. They make love and had even sex. It is adultery, betrayal and an infidelity. Julia accompanies the Maggiore Quartet as pianist to Vienna and Venice. However, Julia’s marriage and loss of sense of hearing again pose a problem in their
relationship. Julia is Roman Catholic Christian and a woman of conscious. She feels guilty and realises her betrayal to her husband and keeping in view that in her married life there is security, protection and stability and her husband is very considerate and compassionate, ultimately decides to leave Michael and lead a stable life with her husband and son. Michael is left alone as loneliness is his fate. The only silver lining is the tie of music. He listens to Julia's concert performance as a deaf pianist and is enthralled by the music. The novel ends on a optimistic note.

Michael Holme is the hero of the novel. His character is three-dimensional and the novelist has portrayed his character with the use of psychoanalytical technique, monologues and flashback. When he was 27, he had been to Music School in Vienna to learn music. He fell in love with Julia McNichol, a talented piano student. Then one day he had petty quarrel with Professor Carl Kall. The teacher was a very dominating person and he was of the opinion that Michael was capable of a solo career in music. He disliked Michael's spending his time on chamber music. He insisted that Michael should be guided by him and shouldn't be too self-willed. Gradually, Michael feels annoyed that instead of learning from his teacher, he was unlearning. It created an unbridgeable gulf between the music teacher and the student. In fact, when he came apart at the concert, it was because of his not being able to prepare well but because Prof. Carl had said that he would be unsuccessful. The climax came when one winter morning Michael's third finger created a problem. Prof. Carl Kall reacted to it with impatience:
“It was as if one of the potential diamonds on his crown was proving itself to be merely carbon. Convertible to its ideal form only under intense and continuous pressure. He applied it and I crumbled.” (81-82)

Michael had rebelled against parents’ wish and left Rochdale for Manchester, similarly he leaves Vienna for London. Julia tries to convince him to stay and see the nobility of spirit in his music teacher. Michael views Julia’s defence of Prof. Kall as an unbearable betrayal on her part. He walks out on her, abandons his studies and returns to England, where he becomes a fugitive and settles in London.

After some hard years of struggle, he finds a place in the Maggiore Quartet as second violinist. When Professor Carl writes to him after ten years, he too admits that Michael played well and was sorry for being rather rough with him. But the greatest vacuum in his life once again is of Julia. He is never able to forget her and she is always present in his mind during the last ten years. He feels continuously nostalgic and contemplates that: “The last time was when I was a student in Vienna ten years ago. I return there again and think- Was I in error? Was I unseeing? Where was the balance of pain between the two of us? What I lost there I have never come near to retrieving.” (5)

Then he lived the next ten years with the painful burn of loss of Julia. Anyhow he somewhat settled in life in a bearable aloneness because of his innate love for music. Michael is also able to track down a recording of the Opus-04 issued in 1977 under a Czech label. He is on his way home in a bus after getting the record that he by chance 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 the bus. It reveals his hypersensitivity in his reaction to the incident. When he sees her in another London bus he visualise about Julia: “With my eyes as with ears: when someone else was playing on the radio and everything said to me that it was her? Her gold-brown hair, worn longer
now, her grey-blue eyes, her eyebrows, her lips, her whole well-loved face, there could not be two such faces in the world. She was no further from me than the seats on the other side of the bus, but she could have been in Vienna. Her expression—it was Julia’s expression—even the tilt of the head when she read, the way she smiled, the absorption.”—“When could I read in her eyes? Puzzlement-alarm-pity? Could I read love? In that woman’s eyes could I read love?” (44)

Michael recollects his first meeting with Julia in Vienna. He says:

“I met Julia two months after I arrived in Vienna, in winter. It was not a winter concert. She played a Mozart sonata. I told her afterwards how entranced I had been by her playing. We got talking about ourselves, and discovered we both came from England—different England, though, since her father taught history at Oxford. Her parents had met after the war: like us, in Vienna. After weeks of struggling in Germany it was such a pleasure, such a relief to speak English again that I babbled on much more than usual.

From the moment of our first meeting I could think of nothing but her. I don’t know what she saw in me other than my almost desperate longing, after a night of making love, we tried making music together. Together with a cellist—Julia’s friend and classmate Maria—we set up a trio, and started performing wherever we could in and out of Vienna. (80)

Then from the golden world of the past happy memories, he returns into the real world. He says that: “I close my eyes in shock. My satchel is on my shoulders but my hands are empty. I have left my record in the taxi. Of Eros I sit-down and weep” (43)

Michael sees in himself “a volatility, a sense or resistance roughness, impulsiveness, even at times, of dark panic, almost brainsickness”. While Julia wants to move on with her own life, Michael bury himself in the past, having monologues with himself, with his violin, with musicians and composers long gone. He realistically portrays his own state of mind and says that “I am consumed by past love its genres long embedded, half-
contained, have grown virulent again...I am eaten by futile pity. I make too much of much” (247)

He is volatile, highly emotional, impulsive, whimsical, hypersensitive, rather eccentric and moody person like any good musician. There are large numbers of instances, which reveal his fickleness. He is hypersensitive man and in any incident of anxiety there is moments of dark panic in his life. When there is a musical performance of the Trout in Vienna, there comes such dark moment. The novelist narrates the incident:

“Applause rings out for the Trout/ Applause and even cheers. This from staid Vienna --- But where am I now?

“Michael.” I start at her voice troubled.
Urgent. They are standing, they have been standing for a while. I am still sitting. I stand. I cannot return.

Julia’s voice “Piers, would you keep his violin aside? Michael hold on to my arm--- The creaking steps, the applause. Everyone is smiling. I cannot stand straight. I turn and make for the corridor, alone.

Her arm around my shoulders. Piers’ voice frightened, taking charge. “I think that’s enough. He’s ill. Let him sit down--- What is it, Michael? What is it, for heaven’s sake? Helen, give him a glass of water.” (240)

There was possibility that he may suffer from the claustrophobia. There is another incident, which relate to other panic attack. When Julia
goes back on a pledge never to perform the **Art of the Fugue** to anyone other than himself, Michael ruthlessly disfigures the score of the First Fugue that she had painstakingly copied with a dark brown ink, and presented to him for his thirty-eighth birthday. He says that: “Late at night, thirst wakes me and then I cannot sleep. By my bed lies the book inscribed and scored by her. With water on my fingers I move along my part. Page after page I hear my smudging notes. The stuff dissolves the heads and stalks blur into mire, the water in my glass grows turbid brown. The wetness seeps into neighbouring voices on to the pages not yet traced and bleared. And if in worn-down Braille my fingers touch my name, that once you wrote; and look, I cannot read it any more”(347)

The novelist mirrors the working of Michael’s mind and his intense suffering but in poetic vein. He is fond of humming some lines from the one of Schubert’s last song:

> I see a man who stares upwards  
> And wrings his hands from the force of this pain  
> I shudder when I see his face  
> The moon reveals myself to me

Schubert’s these lines are very suggestive and reveal the mental agonies of the hero. Michael states many panic attacks. In one such incident that occurred on his sixth birthday at his native place, Rochdale while playing a game of **hide and seek**, he hid in a fridge. The door of the fridge automatically 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. This incident of childhood left indelible impact on his mind. He tells Julia that it is one reason why he lives where he does at Archangel Court and pays a mortgage beyond his reach.
There is another incident which reveals his hyper-sensitiveness and he develops self-pity. He reverts to the solitaries of his earlier life. There are indications that his futile self-pity is gradually leading to a nervous breakdown. He is obsessed with finding out what the animal in the painting by Capriccio is? The artist, whose work Julia had taken him to see in Venice. He stalks Julia in order to tell her that what they had thought it was a dog, was originally a stoat.

"Michael has deep love and intense emotional attachment with the 270 year old Carlo Tanoni violin. The intense feeling with which he plays his violin in Vivaldi’s church, the piety, makes it an instrument with its own being. Seth evocatively describes the deep emotional attachment between man and instrument “with the back of my hand I touch its back, its belly. Long we have lived together.” (56)

Michael agonises over life without his violin and says that: “I love it, and it responds to me, but it belongs to Mrs. Formby by at her wish, it could be taken from me and life upland, unloved, unsparing in a cupboard for years. Or she could die soon, and the violin be swallowed up in her state. What happens to it in the last two hundred seventy years? Whose hands will follow mine?” (56)

The impending loss of the violin further adds to the turbulent state of Michael’s mind, which is on the verge of breaking down under the “ungiving pressure of thoughts”. There is another occasion, which reveals his sensitiveness and deep attachment with the old violin of Mrs. Formby. Soon after Julia leaves him, Michael hears of Mrs. Formby’s death and
realises that he has just a few months left with his companion of twelve years. He contemplates:

"I've spent more time with it than with any living soul, but, well, it's still not mine. And I'm not its"

(27)

When all seems to have lost, he descends into a personal hell, a registered letter from Rochdale arrives. It is not to be feared about the claim for custody of the violin. On the contrary Mrs. Fromby's solicitor informs Michael that she has indeed bequeathed the violin to him. He receives the letter from Keith Warms, the Solicitor who have executed the "Will" of Mrs. John Formby [Cecilia Formby] that Mrs. Formby left an Italian violin (Carlo Tanoni- Circa-1727) to him free- from of tax. He says:

"What possessed you to reposses me of it, you who were close to death and lacked clear speech? Is it the violin alone you want to give me, or must I learn some Lesson from the world?" (361)

After Mrs. Formby's death, he has to deal with her nephew, Cedric Glover, who accuses him of dispossessing his three daughters of a better future. He sees the sale of the 270 years Old Italian violin as a possible source of income to meet the expenses of his daughters' education and threatens to challenge his right to the violin. He suffers only a momentary twang of guilt. Michael is very sensitive, he feels:
“I am filled with terror and then they’re his wretched daughters; can I really rob them of what is there by right and live in peace?” (363)

He contemplates even to return the violin but soon he feels that violin is more than an instrument to him. He thinks that: “I half choked, half cried along but I could not escape from its grip or my descent. The violin, like some bewitched broom played on an in obsessed and if it had not been for a car alarm for below on the real street chirping through the casing of my dream, I would have descended forever into endless night.”

Finally, the violin returns in his life again. He starts taking lessons, has long walks, and plays the extra fiddle in an orchestra. He allows the outside world from which he had once been landed to intrude onto his music while playing. He begins to lose concentration and suffers small panic attacks lasting a few seconds each when his hand and not his mind is on the notes before his eyes. He begins to suffer a different kind of deafness. He thinks:

“There are a hundred kinds of deafness. The more tense. I am, the less I hear. So it makes sense to put one’s acts in order.” (354)

Michael has sexual relation with many women. He is a Christian but he has disregard for Christian morals. In the name of freedom, rights and equality between both the sexes and loose hold or no hold of family head, the moral corruption is at rampant in European Society. The other important factors responsible for sexual abuses and illicit sexual
relationship are because of the loosening hold of religion and disintegration of family. Besides loosening control of family head, other important, factor is the impact of Sigmund Freud’s views on sex on the common people. He admits that:

“I had slept with other woman before and she [Julia] had a boyfriend once but I was her first love, as she was mine.” (83)

Though he is 38 years old but so far he is still unmarried. He is a sensuous and a lustful man. He is settled in a metropolis city, London and he lives alone. He is working as a musician in Maggiore. Besides playing violin, he is taking music tuition of the students. Virgine is his student but he is successful in establishing sexual relationship with her. Virgine is from Nyons, France and had three ex-boyfriends with whom she is on good terms. He had sexual relationship with her. He says:

“She is sixteen years younger than I am. ... But having began what we have continued ... she and I have been together for more than a year now.” (06)

When Julia comes again in his life, he distances from Virgine. Later, Virgine asks him “You’re sleeping with some one else, Michael”? He replies negatively. Then she asks, “Then why aren’t you sleeping with me.” The conversation between Michael and Virgine reveals the sexual relationship. When Julia returns in his life he neglects her because he is frequently having sex with Julia. Again there is conversation between them when Michael neglects her she inquires:
"You really not-sleeping with someone else, Michael?"

Then why aren't you sleeping with me? Who are you sleeping with "? Who is she?---
Are you sleeping with some one?---"

(125-165)

It is evident that he is impolite and rough in his treatment with women in love. He is callous in his break-up with Virgine. Later Micahel is emotionally and mentally disturbed. He visits a prostitute for sex. He is lonely and mentally disturbed, so in his desperate loneliness, he picks up prostitute called Tricia but before going to her, he enquires and gets full information about her on phone that

"Tricia she's an English girl, long blonde hair, blue eyes, very nice legs, clean shaven, 36-24-36"

"She's... twenty-six" (355)

After getting the required information about her, he goes to her flat and he finds that "She is about 35, attractive, practised, sweet. All that I have with- held for months force itself through me." After sex, Michael had---"The shower I boil the skin off myself steam all this away---"I am sick at heart, sick to the heart." " (356)

Later on he continues in the mood of depression, loneliness, frustration, and suffers from mental agonies. In reality his inner self is completely shattered and he is on the verge of complete disintegration. In such a state he says that "I come across these lines I halfrecall from my schooldays it must be twenty yeas ago."
"But never either found another
To flee the hollow heart from paining
They stood aloof, the scar's remaining,
Like cliff, 's which had been rent asunder;
A dreary sea now flows between.
----But neither heat, not frost nor thunder
Shall wholly do away I ween,
The marks of that which once hath been." (369)

Later on Michael finally resolves:

I do not visit Tricia again. A sexless clam to this
favour have I come." (369)

By chance he also comes upon a personal letter written by Julia to her husband, James. He reads it and reacts very strongly like a thief, who entered a house to find in it goods stolen from his own. He is emotionally disturbed and mentally tormented that she wrote a letter expressing her deep love for her husband, James just a few hours after making love with him. He is full of feeling of jealousy which is so strong that he becomes physically brutal in love making with Julia. He also becomes callous with his tongue in his talk with Julia. Michael narrates the incident that:

I hardly felt it was love I was making to her I
was not in my mind.
"My tongue is as brutal as my teeth she
stares at me and cries out-a horrible sound of rage
and hurt ...She begins to cry almost with
fury"..."The bruises remain on her shoulder." (292)

Julia reacts very strongly in rage and she has disbelief in his taunts. Julia finally decides to cut-short her stay at Vienna and returns to London. Michael's love for Julia however, is not characterised by balance harmony
and tranquillity marked by that “one equal communion and identity” as mentioned in John Donne’s *Valediction*.

He learns to live in “a sexless clam” and moves away from being “a self-centred bastard”. He begins to hear again “Creaking, rippling, shifting, easing, crackling, sighing: this is not something I have heard before. It is a soft sound, easy, intimate.” A year after he set eyes on Julia Piers re-invites him back to the *Maggiore*. But the final homecoming is in Michael’s decision to return to family, and his hometown. 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, my home”. On a visit to hometown, he places a white rose on his mother’s grave. As he plays the unfinished fugue form the *Art of Fugue* in memory of Mrs Formby, his spirit regenerates itself. He breathes freely more. He feels:

“My hands are not cold, nor my mind agitated. I

*am in no dark tunnel but in the open moor.*” (379)

Michael had courage to go to listen to Julia at Wigmore. The novel ends with Julia playing the *Art of Fugue* to a packed hall, her husband and son in the audience watch her from their seats in the balcony listen to her music. It is a beauty beyond imagining-clear, lovely, inexorable, phrase across phrase, phrase-echoing phrase, the incomplete, the unending *Art of Fugue*. It is an equal music. He had made his peace with himself and walks away grateful for having had the privilege of hearing the excellence of Julia’s music. Michael concludes:
“Music, such music, is a sufficient gift. Why ask for happiness; why hope not to grieve? But more importantly, he also adds his realisation:” it is enough, it is to be blessed enough, to live from day to day, and to hear such music-not too much, or the soul could not sustain it- from time to time”

(381)

The perception of an unheard “equal music” paradoxically bring the concept of “unstruck” music” of famous Indian mystical and metaphysical poet, Kabir, (1398-1518) whose poetic works express an ecstatic synthesis of Hindu and Muslim Sufi traditions: The poet, Kabir says:

“There falls the rhythmic beat of life and death: Rapture well forth and all space is radiant with light. There the unstruck Music is sounded, it is the music of the love of the three worlds. There millions of lamps of sun and of moon are burning; there the drum beats and the lover swings in play.”

(32,61)

The “hamartia” in the character of hero, Michael is “rashness” in action. His other weaknesses are impulsiveness, emotional behaviour and over-sensitiveness. He lacks moral values. He is aware of the fact that Julia is married to James nearly a decade ago and she has a 7 years old son, Luke. Even knowing this harsh reality of life, he revives ten years old love. It is not Platonic love but intense physical love. He is conscious of the fact that his
sexual relation with a married woman is nothing but adultery and a sin. Miss. M. Rosary Royar and G. Domini Savio rightly point out that:

Vikram Seth “Constructs on antitype of people so insightfully that personalities stand far apart in the human spectrum. Michael in many points is the disjunction of Julia. Similarly, Alex, Lover of Piers, bewitchingly allures people to himself against Tabias. Alex the once second violinst in the quattet is an excellent player but he is flexible. He is a cheerful man, full of energy, easy-going, fond of attention, quick to make Jokes or recite humorous verse, very gallant towards women and quite possibly attracted to them too (74). If Alex is flexible, Tabias Kahn a powerful. Concentrated serious violonist (75) has set ways and so holds that there is a correct way of making music and a wrong one. Tabias rules over Piers that he who has not been rigid in his musicianship becomes obsessed with the holy writ of theory (75). None dares to with the holy writ of theory (75). None dares to think of an imaginative idea because it is an abomination to him. Conditioned thus, the quartet has a lifeless lucidity. Piers has gone against his grain in playing that the constraint seeped its way into the group Tabias’ influence rather dominance over Piers makes Helen analyse that Tabias does not have a personality but just a mind in the grip of powerful and serious ideas and she wonders what her antithesis of Alex’ (75). The group undergoes torment till Piers frees himself from his almost demonic hold.” 6

Julia McNicoll, 22 years old is a student of music learning under Professor Carl Kall at Vienna. She also hails from England. She is the heroine of the novel. Michael Holme describes her in true colour that: She was five years younger than I was- a regal student, not some one there as a sort of graduate appendage attached to a particular teacher. In many ways, though she seemed older. … She had been brought up in a world unreachably different from mine where art and literature and music are
absorbed ... it was she who became my best teacher and for this as for everything else I gave my heart into her hand.

She taught me to enjoy art she improved my German enormously, she even taught me bridge. She showed me things about music simply through her playing; ... I later realised that even about music I had learned more from her then from anyone else, for what I learned from her I was not taught.

*She sometimes went to church, not every Sunday ... She had an acuity, a gentleness unlike anything I was used to.*" (81)

Julia is a woman of conscious and she always remembers that she is a married woman but continued to love Michael passionately. Often her conscious stings. In her letter to Michael, Julia confesses that:

"*Music is a language... where one improves one's skills with tune and effort.... As for making music since I do play chamber music still. I have learned to judge from the bow. The fingers the change of posture... I do want to share my life and my music with you... I don't see how out love can reach any rest of full expression... I can't live two lives. I am afraid of hurting everyone. All of us. I don't know how to proceed---or even retreat.*" (152-154)

Michael is unable to read the message between the lines. He replies in emotional frenzy, not ready to accept her polite denial to continue their relationship. He breaks up with Virgine in order to retain his loyalties to Julia but soon grows skeptic about this relationship.
Julia’s strong passion is love but it is irony of fate that like her love for Michael is like her love for music which is also deaf for herself. She turns deaf but she keeps it secret. Her husband is very kind, compassionate and gives her all required medical treatment, courage and moral support and she is able to play music. She describes how her psychological trauma began three years ago and the tremendous support lent to her by James, who got her to play music again. Julia says, “Music is the heart of my life. For me of all people to be betrayed by my ears was unbearable” (150) Julia thirsts for music is unquenchable. She tells to Michael that she had been. “So hungry to speak of music-and to play it with someone who understand me as I was before-I before all these changes in my life”. (137)

There is long conversation between Luke, Julia’s son and Michael. Luke informs that: “Mom asks me to practise piano he says at last. “I tell her I’m going to be pilot so its a waste of time but she doesn’t listen at all.” (142). It is evident that new generation of Western countries is not interested in their classical music. Erica Cowan tells Nicholas Spare that

“There are two mafias in music, the Jewish mafia and gay mafia...” (57)

Later Julia in a letter to Michael writes that:

“Music is the heart of my life. For me of all people to betrayed by my ears was unbearable---- ” “It was a strange transition from the world of sound to the world of deafness- not soundlessness, really because I do hear all sorts of noises only usually there the wrong one. I was so afraid to lose my music, and I was so afraid for Luke, left with a mother who couldn’t even hear him cry.” (151)
She in reality suffers from auto-immune-ear disease. She describes her pathetic condition when she turns deaf. She says that: “I should concentrate both on my music and trying to come to grips with my, well my condition. So I threw myself into the foreign world of the deaf: preventive speech therapy classes lip-reading classes with hours of practice before a mirror; even a bit of sign language-, which I’ve never really used. ( ) Julia states that: “Really, Michael, now that you know I’m deaf you had better amend your remarks so that you don’t pierce me so neatly to the heart.”

(153)

On reading the letter Michael contemplates that:

“Why when music is slipping away from her, has she chosen to re-involve her life with mine?” (156)

Michael gives reply instantly to Julia and mentioned that:

“I can’t live without you; it’s as simple as that. And Julia don’t you need me too? - not just as a friend but as a fellow musician?” (154, 155)

Michael’s 38th Birthday Party’ is arranged by Julia. She made reservation and invited him in the evening at the restaurant. James was not in the town. This personal social event is described by in the novelist in detail.
There is a lengthy conversation between them. He contemplates about Julia and James that: “How often do they sleep together? Has they met before she went to Venice with Marie?---why has she chosen to play the Maggorie now? For Vienna?----is it his life with her I’m jealous of.”(187)

They talked about this and that. Then when Julia says: “But you like reading Donne. ‘Donne, the Apostate our nuns used to call him’” Michael replies: “It doesn’t mean anything, Julia I like reading him precisely because I don’t care about what’s behind him. I find him relaxing late at night.” Julia is shocked and says: “Relaxing”

Then Michael comments: “I like his language I mull over his ideas. I don’t care about his scriptural arguments.... I can never understand why people make such a fuss about the God thing,” I add brutally.”(154, 189)

At his Birthday Party, Michael’s mind is full of thoughts. During the conversation, she rightly and very frankly points out the weakness of Michael without hesitation and reservation:

“You just aren’t stand authority, Michael in any from,” says Julia. “You hero-worship but you can’t stand authority and God save your heroes if they turn out to have feet of clay.” (154, 189)

Then Julia says:“It’s not that, Michael. It’s too clear that we’re not just friends.”(189) They enjoyed the Birthday Party and then they walked out of the restaurant and returned their home.
Then in a detailed letter to Michael, Julia explains that she is suffering from an auto-immune disease of the inner ear. It is really remarkable to note how Julia has managed to hide her illness from an unsuspecting audience. On reading the letter, Michael is able to understand why Julia has chosen to re-involve her life with his. Michael admits that: "--- am I for her a static mark, a reversion to the days when was for her an actual sense not nearly an imagined beauty?" He further says that: "Though she [Julia] talks about her family she never touches on how exactly or where she met James and how he wooed and won her----."

In spite of the fact that Julia is married and she is Roman Catholic Christian, she betrays her husband and again establishes sexual liaison with Michael. Julia's affair reminds the passionate frenzy of Amrita Bedi for her muscular fiancé whose physique and amorous activity she loved him more but dispassionately, uninterestingly loving with her friend painter, Sher Gill. Michael contemplates:

"Adultery and sin: Ludicrously, there are no gentler words. But Julia cannot accept all this brimstone: gentle herself she must believe in an understanding God. All this is foregone to me incomprehensible even. But have I forced her into more than what she wanted? Should we have. Continued making music together, else to re-create the bonds of stimulation and so long lost? Would there then have been no guilt? Could she have reconciled herself to having two husbands each for a different world?" (169-70)

In Michael's presence, she becomes restless, uncertain; afraid and guilty. Julia's religious faith is the base of her strength and confidence. As a mother, she speaks of the need for stability for her son, and have another
child, to provide him emotional security. She feels that: “Luke needs someone to share me with, or he’ll grow up to be as selfish as I am.”

There is a lengthy description of meeting between Julia’s husband, James, and Michael. Julia invites Michael and it is “get together” social event. “At last she sends a note: Will I come to lunch in two day’s tune? It suits James, the end of the week the day of rest, ---. (209) He visits the house of Julia. He says that: “I have an ache that pulses behind my left eye. The bells ring the one from the church near me tolling G. it is the day of my lunch at Julia’s. I shave with care. These eyes are full of doubt.” (208) His mind is full of thoughts. He contemplates that: “But why should he know about our past? I am one of her musical friends no more; a colleague from long ago from the city where he met her. She would not tell me of her courtship,”

Michael meets James and he describes him that: “He is shorter than I am and broader. Clean-shaven, blue-eyed like her pale-hairdo. Luke’s dark hair must be a throwback. His accent is Bostonian unconcerned to anglicise itself.” (209) He thinks about James and feels that: “He, then, is “darling”. I am a guest: suffered or honoured, it makes little odds. My hostess is the exquisite Julia and James, a delightful couple...made for each other, yes even their monograms match....a charming addition to our little community here- though he’s American as you probably know.” (211) After his detailed conversation, Michael forms his opinion about James. He says that: “Her husband is a perceptive man, a man of wit and substance not my presumed image of an East Coast Banker.” (213)
Michael observes keenly and minutely the house of Julia. He says that my eyes falls on a wedding photograph, a picture of Julia’s father holding I suppose the infant Luke. Photograph, paintings, books, carpets, curtains, cushions—a populated room a life as solid as a rock. James Hansen laughs. “Now that’s interesting.” He says. “I can see why expertise pays off in banking. But in the arts it could be a disadvantage. If you don’t have any sense of discrimination you enjoy many more things”

“You don’t really believe that,” I say.
“No, I don’t,” he says evenly.” (210)

On looking James he thinks. Michael says to himself that: “Is this the man who is married to Julia? It is this man who sleeps with her every night? What am I doing exchanging pleasantries with him?” (211) After the conversation, he takes lunch with Julia and James. Later he returns home.

Julia cannot come to terms with living in “dual worlds, which chafe each other,” 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. She has not informed James about her visit. Her mind is full of feelings of betrayal and guilt for making love in the Scuola de San Georgia Church.

She continues to live in the hell of lust with Michael but soon she realises that the rekindled love and sexual bliss cannot last for long. Soon Julia admits that sexual relation with Michael is a sin and she comes to final
decision that her present and her future are her family. Michael is the past and she cannot continue to live there. In the end she, feels that:

"I, of all people who have a
Before and an After should have
known that you can't relive your life".

(325)

Finally, Julia, therefore, breaks off the relationship with Michael. Her choice to opt for her dependable businessman-husband with no musical ear, James over the volatile, whimsical, moody, passionate and rash Michael. So she decides to return home a few days earlier than planned.

The novel presents not only a small, enclosed and exclusive social life and even private personal life of musicians living in big cities like London, Vienna, Venice etc. but also the social life of a small town in the North of England, Rochdale. He describes the changes that have taken place during the last three decades in the town. He becomes a social critic. He is shocked to learn that the peripatetic music teachers provided by the local education authorities have been cut back. The novelist points out that: "Then came the planning blight: the replacement of human slums by inhuman ones. The marooning of churches in traffic islands the buildings of precincts where once there were shops. Finally two decades of garrotting from the government in London and everything civic or social was choked of funds: school, libraries, hospitals, transport." (71)
During Michael’s talk with Luke, he is unable to satisfy Luke with the answer to his question “What is the difference between a dancer and a duck?” the right answer, according to Luke, is “One goes quick on her legs. And the other goes quack on her eggs.”

There is a realistic depiction of the hometown of Michael’s boyhood. It portrays a disadvantaged childhood in a decaying and industrialised landscape and the uprooting of human settlements. The ill and ageing father fixated on the family cat with the characteristic pathos-inducing loneliness of the very old age, the gradual ebbing away of the life-blood of the town—all of it is skilfully delineated. His family is one of the many affected by the rapid march of industrialisation. Once when he was a boy, Michael was lying on the Pennine uplands listening to the larks. He also sketches a fine portrait of the music-loving and benevolent Mrs. Formby, who bequeaths Michael her 270 year old Carlo-Tonani Violin, all are realistically presented in the novel.

Michael returns to Rochdale on three occasions. The references to his childhood are important because he longs to take refuge into his past and as such his past is largely responsible for the present state of mind. He was the son of a butcher and his parents had saved all they could but they were unable to send their only son to a University. His mother’s earnest desire was to send the child away from Rochdale. The only escape was to give a good education. When Michael is nine years old, Mrs. Formby takes him to see a concert conducted by “the small and ailing Barbiolli”. He recollects his childhood days at Rochdale.
“Into my mind comes an extraordinarily beautiful sound. I am nine years old. I am sitting between Mr and Mrs Formby in a state of anticipation. On the seats all around us are people ... a group of men and women, many of them bearing amazing instruments, gleaming and glowing. A small frail man enters to applause such, as I have never heard before, ...He brings down a stick and a huge and lovely noise fills the world. More than anything else I want to be part of such a noise.” (67)

As Michael was from a small town in England, he was not speaking “standard language”. His parents wanted to uplift their son. They were from the working class and they were butchers by profession. He remembers his days of childhood and parents’ ambition and their expectations from him. His accent of English was not of standard and the parents wanted to send him to University for higher education and then the profession but Michael was interested in Music and wanted to be violin player!

In the later part of his life when Michael settles in London and achieves some fame as a musician, he recollects his childhood days. He says: “Besides, as a boy, I was quite happy in Rochdale. Our house was not too far from the edge of town, and once I got a bike I could cycle out towards the moors... in the open countryside. I would lie there for hours sometimes my bike parked quite safely at the isolated inn of Owed Betts below. ... Sometimes when the sun came out after a drizzle there would be a whole scrum of skylarks,”(28)
He points out the reality that inspite of 600 acres of the park in London there is no natural silence. He compares the natural silence of small town Rochdale with that of London. He says that: “In London high up though I am, there is no natural silence. Even in the middle of the 600 acres of the park, I can hear the traffic all around and often above. ... I ... walk over to the sunken garden near the Orangery. ... Among the water lilies the fountains play obscuring any noise that the hedges have not dampened.” (10) Michael describes the present conditions of his native place and says that:

“The handsome town hall presides over a waste- it is town with its heart torn out. Everything speaks of its decline. Over the course of a century, as its industries decayed, it lost its work and its wealth. Then come the planning blight: the replacement of human slums by inhuman ones, the marooning of churches in traffic islands the building of precincts where once there were shops. Finally two decades of garrotting from the government in London and everything civic or social was choked of funds: schools, libraries hospitals, transport. The town, which had been the home of the co-operative movement, lost its sense of community. The theatres closed. Every one of five cinemas closed. The literary and scientific societies shrank or disappeared. I remember my despair when I heard our bookshop was going to close. We now have a few shelves at the back of W. H. Smith’s.” (70-72)
Michael remembers his parents, their pet cat Zsa-Zsa, Aunte Joan, the hometown Rochdale, his shop, his business, his education at Royal Northern College of Music, Manchester and he gives contrasting portraits of past and present of Rochdale. Michael recollects that his father

"... rarely leaves Rochdale now. Very occasionally he goes to Manchester. London makes him jittery. ... But he has never got over my mother's death. ... It was more than our shop it was our home.... ... My father his work and purpose gone, fell ill with a series of bronchial ailments, ... exhausted herself. Though it was he who was ill, it was she who died-quite suddenly, of a stroke.

After a few further years of dithering. ...
Where Stanley Holme, butcher once practised his trade there is now only asphalt. It is a car park."

(27-28 )

His parents living in Rochdale had a beautiful cat called "Zsa-Zsa". There are reminiscences of childhood days. Michael remembers that: "My father sits with Zsa-Zsa on his lap and dozes off. He has been feeling a bit under the weather the last couple of days. ... Holly and mist decorate the small front room but there has been no Christmas tree since Mum died. The house is full of cards. (62)

Michael describes his parents' Butcher's Shop during his childhood at their hometown particularly. "... Christmas was a complicated and busy time almost everyone wanted to collect their turkeys at the last minute-or have them delivered. As a teenager I would help with the deliveries.---the huge wooden refrigerator- more a wardrobe then a fridge covering an wall of the cellar was packed full of pink carcasses ----"
Michael recollects an incident of his childhood days when he was only six years of the age. This terrific incident left indelible influence on his life. Again he remembers his happy childhood days when he was. He says:

"When I was just nine years old, our rowdy chattering sweet-paper crinkling paper aeroplane-throwing class was taken to a School concert. It was my first experience of live music. When I visited Mrs Formby the next day I told her all about it, what I particularly remembered was a piece about a lark- "The Lark Ascending" I was enchanted I had noticed a couple of violins lying around among the many marvels of the house and I knew Mrs Formby used to play the violin, but I could hardly believe it when she told me she used to play that piece herself. "I don't often pick up the violin now she said, "but I like to read you the poem that led to that piece, "And she read me the lines by George Meredith thatched inspired Vaughn William's. It was strange fare for a nine-year-old still stranger as I watched Mrs Formby's face the ecstatic expression in her eyes magnified by her thick glasses." (70)

He has a strong desire to possess the 270-year old Carlo-Tononi violin and as such he visits his hometown to see Mrs. Formby. He remembers that: "I have driven Mrs Formby up to Blackstone Edge and beyond ... We talk about the music-the quartet is preparing. When I tell her of the planned recording, her face lights up "Michael the violin, I am afraid it's no good. Blood is thicker than water and..." I nod. "In fact my blood is a bit too thick. Hypertension. Though way, I don't see. I am a clam enough person." "I do hope you're all right." "Yes, I'm fine I might live to be a hundred. Well as I was saying Michael, I'm not very fond of my nephew, but there it is." "I was afraid of this." "But you come to see me nevertheless." "Will, of course. And besides-" (320)
Mrs. Formby asks him: “Well what are you going to do for a violin?” He replies, I haven’t thought of it. She looks puzzled, he replies “Mrs Formby you must know that I have here,” I say desperately. I always bring it with me when I come to Rochdale. It’s yours, it always has been. But I wonder if I could keep it for just a few more months. Till we’ve completed our recording. I wonder if you could grant me that period of grace.” (321) “Oh, but the trust isn’t set up yet. It’ll be a few months in any case.” “Thank you.” “No Michael, no - don’t thank me. This must be hard.” I nod. “Well, it is better to have loved and lost.” (321)

Mrs. Formby is greatly interested in music and particularly violin. She asks “How are you rehearsing the Art of Fugue--- He tells her about his walk yesterday and the larks and begins to sing the song of skylark. She smiles. Michael describes that: “He rises and begins to round she prompts “He drops the silver chain of sound,” I continue, and we recite it in alternate lines, unerringly. “Till lost on his aerial wings,” she says at last and sighs. I am silent and after a while almost inaudibly she herself murmurs the final line.” (322) Michael’s reminiscences are very significant to understand the working of his mind. He recollects the past and returns back to his hometown. He says:

Rochdale with the heart torn out of it. The claustrophobic market the murdered streets of my.
---Childhood gutted into vertical slums. Not Rochdale to commute from to the city where I work. ... London is a violin jungle. In its heartache. In its business lie it’s varied pickings. It is no longer if it ever was my home.” (377-78)
An Equal Music can also be analyzed on the postmodern dimensions Michael’s, self. His relations with his father contribute to Michael psychic and emotional development in one way or the other. He often talks to his father on telephone. Their conversation lacks intimacy but yet they felt concerned for each other and Rochdale, his hometown deep-rooted loneliness in their lives. Michael visits his father’s house to meet him and mourn the death of their pet Zsa-Zsa.

A modern critic, Lyotard says. “A self does not amount to much but no self is an island, each escorts in a fabric of relations that is now more complex and mobile than ever before”. In the light of above statement, Michael’s self can be properly and fully analysed and can be understand in terms of a table of relations with Julia, Virgine, Piers Helen, his father, his music Professor Carl Kall and others. Though he is a node in a network but in the present postmodern condition it is the relationship that is very significant and not the node as such. Lyotard’s description of the postmodern condition is in fact a description the network of the present society and the manner in which it produces and reproduces for general description. All characteristics of a complex system are found in the present novel. The argument for a multiplicity is an acknowledgement of complexity.

Michael contemplates on his present conditions. It is in fact existential dilemma of man in postmodern age. He portrays:
"In dark outside. And we are exhausted as much with one another temperaments as with the music. But ours is an odd quadripartite marriage with six relationships. Any of which at one given time could be cordial neutral or strained. The audiences who listen to us cannot imagine how earnest how petulant how accommodating how wilful is our Quonset, how petulant how accommodating how wilful is our quest for something beyond ourselves that we imagine with our separate spirits but are compelled to embody together. Where is the harmony of spirit in all this let alone sublimate? How are such mechanics such stops and starts such facile irreverence transmuted in spite of our bickering selves into musical gold? And yet often enough it is from such trivial beginnings that we arrive at an understand of a work that seems to us both true and original and an expression of it with displaces form our minds-and perhaps, at least for a while from the minds of those who hear us-any versions. However true, however original played by other hands." (14)

The conclusion of the novel is as expected and realistic. When Michael hears Julia playing music he feels "It is a beauty beyond imagining-clear lovely. Inexorable phrase, across phrase, echoing phrases, the incomplete the unending art of fugue. It is an equal music". This moment is in fact a kind of epiphany for Michael who ultimately relaxes.

"Music, such music is a sufficient gift why ask for happiness: why hope not to grieve? It is enough. It is be blessed enough. To live from day to day and hear such music-not too much or the soul could not sustain it-from time to time." (380)

The word **fuga** is Spanish which means a musical composition in counter point based on the use of imitation of a short but it is with
differentiated theme. The *punt de fuga* is the point in a drawing done in perspective where straight parallel lines meet. The novel’s ending thus in reality becomes the *punt de fuge*, the point at which in art, straight parallel lines meet due to perspective.

Michael is alone in the end as he was in the beginning but with a great difference. The novel unfolds the metamorphosis of the hero. His thoughts have reached at a final resolution and he is no longer troubled now. Now he has learned acceptance of harsh realities of life and it has brought him serenity. This transformation in perspective enables him to come to terms with his past, makes the present bearable and the future promising. Finally he has realized that to be complete is an advantage not a necessity. But Susan Hosking, forcefully argues that:

*Vikram Seth* “Far from focusing on a representation of ‘English-ness’ offers us a hybrid creation which reflects on both East and West. Michael Holmes quest for meaning fuses something of Eastern Philosophy and practices (The Buddhist Journey towards enlightenment, for example) with an appreciation of Western Classical Music. The mix is light. The musical repertoire of Michael’s quintet is ultra-canonical (Mars-Jones) and the flavour of Eastern philosophy a subtle suggestion-nothing to tax the digestion-but for me, this is the ingradient that makes “An Equal Music” special.”(7)

When the writer narrates about Bach’s great unfinished mysterious *Art of Fugue* or when he talks of Venice or Schubert, it is as if the novel existed in another, higher dimension. The plot of the novel is by no means
particularly enthralling but the style is Style is very significant. The real
colour to the novel is given by technique and style.

The inter-textuality in the novel is “employed at moments, of high
emotional intensity”. The literary or Biblical references seek to create an
objective correlative for Michael’s state of mind when at times he is high
strung and desperate. As the novel draws towards its end and Michael sinks
deeper into despair and his mental as well as emotional sufferings
intensifies. These references become increasingly frequent and are
accompanied by a fragmentation in thought that is reproduced by the
technique of stream-of-consciousness which moves from past to present and
present to past. The half-sane and half-fractured tormented state of
Michael’s mind is frequently mixed up.

The novel also portrays a certain inner darkness. It has a melancholic
strain that manifests itself in the isolation of the characters such as in
Michael’s obsessions, Julia’s deafness, in a lack of common perspectives:
even the humour is dark, serving chiefly to make the parts more poignant by
contrast.

The novel is highly eulogised by the critics and even by the
contemporary writers. An eminent critic A.G. Khan comments:

“... there is lot of inter-texuality towards which the
academicians need not show high-brow attitude. In
fact, the postmodern writing encourages to visit
other sites than the usual literary ones”.(8)
Nayak and Dhawan analyses that:

"Love is a fulfilment of sensual: the music that finges sense bodies make together. Seth emphasis on the theme of characters who are ALIVE suggest that the most satisfying human role in that of a sensualist. --- An Equal Music is also about control---upon the rejection of uninhibited sensuality in favour of stable and perhaps boring marriages relationship---Seth is truly on Epicurean of senses, as An Equal Music admirably illustrates."(9)

Susan Hosking, rightly comments:

"An Equal Music" is more considered repines to contemporary brain-sickness. Obviously more serious and sombre than "The Golden Gate", "An Equal Music" attempts something perhaps impossibly ambitious. Its conclusion suggests transcendence of contemporary pain-allude to something beyond words the consolation of love and music. Which is also beyond words and sound. That requires detachment. "An Equal Music" is a novel of the in-between. It explores the fertile meeting ground between East and West, where philosophies of detachment collide with concepts of desire and romantic love. It speaks out against ignorance and craving, selfishness and intolerance. It endorses the value of people and life over and above narrow categories that would contain and divide them. This is what can happen in a Diaspora." (10)
Pradeep Trite says that the novelist:

"---Also successfully creates "the sense of loss and tragic guilt in---the novel----Reading between the lines, the novel reveals Michael's urge of re-rooting himself as far as his relation with other characters are concerned," (11)

A. G. Khan realistically comments on the novel:

'Love in man's life is a thing apart.
For woman it is her whole existence'

Expressed Lord Byron. However, it would appear sheer sentimentality if married women decided to sacrifice their marital gains merely for an ex-lover. It is not pragmatism; it is accepting the hard facts of life. Music may be food of love but musicians can not survive merely on love. Food is a solid necessity. No san woman would risk the security of a home and hearth in a city like London. Hence if Julia decides to discontinue the illicit relationship, she is aware of the fact that in absence of financial security a woman would be compelled to fend foe herself or be one like Tracia, the prostitute. Especially a mother would not endanger the martial status when the lover does not have a regular source of income. The violin that Michael "owns" is not his own! Michael is over possessive when he brutally leaves his teeth marks on Julia's body to express his annoyance." (292)(12)

S. Holder rightly points out that:

"Perfect music and perfect love belong to the real world and man has to content with glimpses of the ideal-----"An Equal Music" keeps a perfect balance between the details of the realistic world of human psyche." (13)
Nidhi Tiwari analyses the novel in light of Jacques Lacan and comes to conclusion that:

"An Equal Music" is almost unbearably sudsy, a huge disappointment. Both Julia and Michael emerge stronger after their movements from the imaginary to the symbolic order. They reach the innermost depth of music when. "The Art of Fugue" fills the hall. This music will continue and both will give this valuable gift to the world and thus "an equal music will always be created." (14)

Miss M. Rosary Royar and Dr. G. Dominic Savo comment:

"An Equal Music is an ‘epidemic of contrast’ (87) landscape and region, people and their temperament, social systems and discriminations, the world of the living and the dead, music and noise, harmony and disharmony all are unified to present a variegated vistas of life. If the fugue and contrapuntal music form centric to the narrative, there are simultaneously centripetal and centrifuging movements. Events move to the low depth of the existential issues and then spiral upward towards the central concern. Afferent and efferent situations depict the multi-dimensional aspects of society. The structural unity flows divergence and cohesion of anti-types becomes a major technique of the narrative." (15)

Mini Kapoor says:

"An Equal Music" is recounted at a different pitch than The Golden Gate and A Suitable Boy- missing is the warmth, the abundance and breathlessness." (16)

Vikram Seth’s third novel An Equal Music (1999) is not so warmly received by the readers as well as critics because of the fact that it is substantially a technical novel and nearly one third part of the novel is
devoted to the technicalities of music and only those readers who have through knowledge of structure, range, composition, pattern, pitch, beat, tune, harmony etc. and musical instruments and history of Western Classical Music can appreciate and enjoy it fully through the twin theme of Music and Love is of perennial interest. Vikram Seth has borrowed the idea for writing a novel from Greek legendry story *Euridice and Orpheus*.

This novel can be compared with Salman Rushdie's *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* (1999) has also the theme of Music and Love. It also portrays a modern love story which has also symbolic parallel with the same Greek legend. It has a tragic end. In both the novel lovers are separated forever!

Though the theme of both the novels is same but there is a difference in the narrative technique. Salman Rushdie employs the technique of *Magic Realism* but Vikram Seth uses the mode of *Social Realism*. 
Chapter-V

References

All the references given in this chapter are from Vikram Seth-“An Equal Music”


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