Chapter-VI
Conclusion
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In 1980’s Indian English novel entered the era of the postmodernism with Salman Rushdie, Shashi Tharoor, Amitav Ghosh, Arundhati Roy, and Vikram Seth appeared on the literary scene. Vikram Seth is a versatile literary genius. So far his three novels, a biography and collections of poems besides a libretto and a biography are published. He belongs to the school of Social Realism, though there are many novelists who employ the narrative technique of Magic Realism.

The present study is an attempt to trace out the elements of Postmodernism and Social Realism in the fictional corpus of Vikram Seth. In 1986, he produced a novel, divided into 13 chapters in 594 sonnets entirely in rhythmic verse entitled The Golden Gate. He has read Alexander Pushkin’s novel Eugene’s Onegin (1831) and was inspired to write a novel in verse. In Pushkin’s novel, Eugene, a handsome young aristocrat, “a superfluous”, is loved by Tatyana Larina, a beautiful provincial girl but it is not reciprocated. Eugene in a duel kills another man and leaves the place. Later, Tatyana marries a Prince. When Eugene returns to St. Petersburg and meets Tatyana again and falls in love with her but she rejects him. When there was time and chance to love, he has not loved and now he want to love but she is gone—such is the fate of the hero!

It is a tragic love story of 26 years old, John Brown, a high-tech computer executive, who works in nuclear research, leads apparently materialistically comfortable life but it is deprived of real happiness, pleasure
and peace of mind. There is vacuity, ennui, discontentment restlessness companionlessness and lovelessness in his life. He is in search of love as an antidote for loneliness. The story revolves around five characters in different combination.

His ex-girl friend, Janet Hawakaya is of Japanese descendent, who is sculptor by profession and is a drummer in punk band *Liquid Sheep* and her ambition is to attain fame. John and Janet meet in a hotel and she places a personal advertisement for a companion on behalf of John. In response, there are many letters. He selects three women and meets them and finally his choice is Elizabeth Dorati, a 27 years vivacious, blue eyed, well-rounded blonde and a daughter of Italian immigrant vine grower. Later John and Liz live together in a house. Liz has a pet cat, Charlemagne. She is Roman Catholic Christian and ex-Stanford Law attorney. They move in apartment. Their love life goes on smoothly but then comes in between them, Philips, a Jew, 28 years old, who has left the job of nuclear engineer in Dataronic and now devotes himself to Anti-Nuclear Movement. He has married in the past with Claire, a Christian, who deserted him for another man. He has a six years old son, Paul. Phil has homosexual relationship with Edward Dorati, younger brother of Liz. The friendship between Jan and Phil develops and she distances from John.

Finally, Liz marries Phil. Liz gives preference to marry a ‘father like person’, who has an experience of married life. Vikram Seth wants to say that only such relationship between man and woman survives which is based on mutual trust, understanding and adjustment. Liz decides to marry a man, who has experience of marriage and has fathered a son. Liz in reality loves John
but marries Phil. Her decision is based on reasons and not passions. Ed also discontinues his homosexual relationship with Phil. This is a social reality that homosexuality is prevailing in American society. Homosexuality is at rampant in today’s American society and it is a bitter social reality which cannot be denied. Vikram Seth has brought out this unique feature of American society very forcefully in the novel.

Again, John is alone and his friendship and love with Jane is revived. Now there is complete understanding between the two and they move into sexual relationship. On June, 10th, Jan’s exhibition of sculpture of bronze, plaster, wood and stone at Marcus Ladd is held. It is a great success and the Art Critics praised her works of art. Jan arranges a “get-together party” at her residence. On Friday night there is traffic jam and Jan while returning in a car to home she meets with a fatal incident and dies instantly. Later on John comes to know that a baby is born to Liz in Sept. She names the son, John. In his life again there is loneliness. He discovers that Jane has always loved him. He finds love in his own heart and he overcomes all the barriers which he has erected all around those friends, who loved him.

The lives of Americans from California State, popularly known as “Yuppies” of the 1980’s are presented with their serious ruptures, cracks in life and society. Their lives appears happy but there is vacuity, ennui, paralysed irresponsibility, boredom, nervous restlessness, passivity in their lives due to high-technology and particularly T.V. Culture. They are unable to invent or produce new thing or do any creative work. The modern high technology and present American ‘culture of consumption’ have great impact on the society and this hyper-modernism has greatly changed the structure of
society. These social realities of the modern American Society are portrayed by the novelist as an insider. The main story of John and Janet is narrated in terms of love, separation, reconciliation, and revival of love and final loss. It is a critique of the seductive materialistic hypermodern society. The novelist conveys the solution of continuation of ages old “family” institution strong family bond, man to man contact in person and respect for other’s point of view or others’ opinions, tolerance and communal cohesiveness to combat the perils of hyper-individualism.

When this novel was written at that time there were two Super Powers viz United States of America and Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (Soviet Russia) and there was rivalry between the Capitalist Bloc and Communist Bloc for superiority in military and every walk of life and leadership of the world. U.S.A. was ambitious to retain its hegemony in nuclear power game. The novel reveals America’s arrogance as well as vanity. One major motif of the novel is “World Peace”. America is proud of the fact they have more arms and armaments and particularly Nuclear Weapons and they can wipe out human race from this planet in a day!

Father O’Hare’s arguments against the Nuclear War are very convincing and he makes a powerful plea for World Peace with his strong rational and moral arguments. The speech of Father O’Hare is a fine piece of an oratory. There is a Anti-Nuclear-War Peace Protest and hundreds of protesters are arrested by the police. Later, the police produced them before the judge in the court and they were sentenced to ten days’ imprisonment in the jail. Liz appears as defence lawyer in the court on behalf of the protesters.
The prevailing social realities such as house-warming parties, wedding parties, wine making, picnics, weekend jaunts, sumptuous breakfast, art exhibitions, gestalt groups, protests and relationship with their pets are truly mirrored. New information technology keeps man “in touch” with family and friends in a shallow sense and in reality obligate the need for individuals to move personally towards each other. The significance of man to man contact in person cannot be undervalued and it cannot be replaced by mobile or Fax or another means of communications of modern technology. It has resulted into discontented, disembodied, disoriented, uneasy and unpleasant kind of life.

The title of novel is symbolic. The bridge is a symbol which connects the modern world, i.e. The Present World and the future world i.e. A Brave New world with its postmodern culture.

There are various postmodern elements in the novel. Vikram Seth employs creative union of two genres—verse and novel. He uses the traditional stanza sonnet form for writing a novel. There is an element of inter-textuality, such as references to The Bible, Shakespeare’s King Lear and Margaret Mitchell’s Gone With the Wind and other non-literary references like Bach, the Beatles, films, cartoons etc.

The Golden Gate presents contemporary American society fully equipped with high technology. Americans apparently are leading happy and comfortable life but in reality it is discontented, lacking harmony, real love, companionship and peace, all are very realistically presented. The need for loving partner in human life with qualities of understanding, adjustment and
even sacrifice is pointed out. There is a plea for strong family bond and need for person to person contacts beside tolerance and flexibility in dealing with other persons in the society. The free sexual relationship and homosexual relationship which are prevailing in the society are also portrayed. The novel is full of social realism and there are also elements of postmodernism in it. It is a tragic love story and in the end lovers are separated for ever.

In the heyday of Magic Realism, a school of Social Realism is still flourishing. A Suitable Boy was published in 1993. There is one main plot, having several story lines with different sets of characters in sub-plots but internally connected. The novel has loose structure because of its bulky size, divided into 19 sections and 477 small chapters. Like the first novel it, has also the theme of renunciation of passion over reason.

It presents a story of Indian progressive society in making. There are characters from different strata of society, episodes, discoveries, sudden revelations, unexpected turns of fortunes, strange coincidences, poems, songs, long lost wills, and Urdu Gazals.

It is a story of four extended families—the Mehras, the Chatterjees, the Kapoors and the Khans. The central motif is again a quest for life partner. The other diverse political theme is confrontation between the two factions of ruling Indian National Congress Party led by Nehru and Tandon which preceded Free India’s First ever General Elections; the problem of abolition of Zamindari (Land Lord) System; the language problem and the social themes such as recurrent of Hindu-Muslim Communal riots and the Temple-Masjid dispute, inhuman treatment of lower castes people and their pathetic
plight, the love of cultured persons from noble families and common lot for melodious Urdu gazals, the role of “Tauwaif” i.e. courtesan in highly cultured Indian Society and Urdu as a symbol of Hindu-Muslim composite culture and love for Indian classical music and popularity of social Hindi films. Mrs. Mehra’s search for ‘a suitable boy’ for her daughter Lata, is the major theme, which runs throughout the novel, remains a connecting strand from the beginning to the end in the back-drop of post-Independence India. The novel encompasses a wide socio-cultural-political-economical realities and even academic life.

It is a postmodern novel which is an amalgam of history, facts, fantasy, nativism, realism and romance. It presents the political power games, political conversions, the religious disputes, the loss of old values, the cultural decadence, cricket matches, communal riots, Mandir-Masjid dispute, the first ever experience of democracy, pathetic conditions of poor farmers and lower castes, the plight of the untouchables, Jatavs. In fact no stone of social India is left unturned.

Every major character is busy in search of something or the other. Mrs. Rupa Mehra and Mrs. Chatterjee are in search of “suitable boys” for their daughters, Meenakashi and Arun for love-affair, Meenakashi and Billy Irani for sexual pleasure. Kakol for flirtations, Harish and Simran for love and marriage Mahesh Kapoor- L.N. Agarwal for political power and superiority, Mrs. Chatterjees for snobbery, Prof. Mishra and Pran for academic rivalry and Mann Kapoor for lustful love of Saceda, a Tauwaif (courtesan singer).
The theme of love and marriage has perennial interest. Lata, the heroine is an undergraduate student at Brahmpur University. She is not beautiful but smart and active. Lata first falls in love passionately with Kabir Durrani, a fellow Muslim student, cricketer and son of a professor. The name is symbolic which reminds 14th century famous Indian Muslim Sufi Saint poet, Kabir, who is symbol of Hindus and Muslims unity. Lata and Kabir were unable to marry because the inter-religious marriage would not work and Kabir’s ambition to join Indian Foreign Service.

Lata rejects Amit Chatterjee, a poet because she thinks that a poet is a dreamer who can never make a responsible husband. Harish is the third man to enter into Lata’s life. He is socially awkward but sincere, hardworking, egalitarian, and demands no dowry. He is in a shoe-making business and symbol of emerging member of new capitalist class in India. He comes into her life after a good deal of research by her mother. Haresh is not handsome. Lata trusts a man, solid like welted shoe. Lata’s attitude towards Kabir is rather complex. She is not sure that she is doing the right thing in rejecting Kabir.

Lata lacks the heroic spirit to plunge into adventurous and riskful life of Kabir’s passionate love. Lata is an Indian woman, entrenched into ages old traditions, beliefs, customs, superstitions with some virtues of patience, compromise, adjustment and even sacrifice. Lata is under heavy psychological pressure and hence she is forced by the family and social restraints to suppress her love for Kabir. In fact, Lata sacrifices her love for Kabir on the altar of “arranged marriage”!
The conclusion of the novel is very significant to understand the suitability of the "suitable boy" which Lata selected and got married and helps the readers to guess her future marital life! Vikram Seth is a social realist and his novel mirrors different aspects of the Indian society. The writer believes that love is a different thing and marriage is a different and he has no faith in modern "love-marriage" and he prefers reason to passion.

The novelist firmly believes that an Indian-"arranged-marriage" brings a sense of affection, security, economic stability, understanding, adjustment, tolerance in the couple and these qualities are pre-requisite for a life-long success of marriage.

Vikram Seth does not believe in the truth that the life of a couple after "arranged marriage" is rather dull, mechanical, monotonous, boring, deprived of real bliss of love, curiosity, eagerness, anxiety, ecstatic pleasure and fulfilment of natural instinct of love including sex and as such there is no true marriage of two minds. It is a reality of life that in majority of cases, the most important decisions in one’s life is taken by heart and not by mind! He has no faith in "Wisdom of Heart"!

Since ages in India many evils such as ignorance, illiteracy, poverty, blind faith, superstitions and rigid-caste-system are eating like vermin the body of Indian Society. He mirrors faithfully the pathetic plight and inhuman treatment given to lower castes people in cities such as Brahmpur and in rural areas. It is the bitterest social reality of India. He presents the social evil of 'untouchability'. In Hindu society caste hierarchy is very rigid and it is hereditary. The ruthless oppression and cruelties inflicted on the lower castes
are gruesome. Vikram Seth realistically portrays a tragic and ghastly incident of low caste youth of a village, who was tied to his bicycle in the night and forced to eat human excreta. His brain and bicycle had then been smashed to bits for a minor reason. It also expounds the views of Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar on untouchability.

It also mirrors Hindu Muslim relationship. The relation between the Kapoors and the Khans are very cordial. Even Mrs. Mehra has many Muslim friends but Lata's love affair with Kabir, a Muslim ends in tragedy! The friendship between Mann Kapoor and Feroz is an ideal one. Indian social milieu is very peculiar and the society is complex and hypersensitive to religious matters and Indians very easily succumb to communal hatred.

In respect of characterisation nearly half characters are true to life but remaining characters are rather flat and sketchy and not fully developed except Lata's character which is presented with some psychological insight. The interaction between the characters and the people in the society reveals the characters. The novelist has not used the modern psychoanalytical technique of stream of consciousness in portraying the characters.

Indian society is multi-racial, multi-lingual, multi-religious, multi-cultural, divided into innumerable castes, sub-castes, classes and as such it has its own peculiar problems. The recurring features of Indian society is communal riots or dispute over a place of worship, family feud over land acquisition and communal feud or vendetta over the superiority of caste or religion has been a routine conscience tug of war and social conflict.
There is much about history, society, culture and politics and there is fine blending of historical facts, fantasy, realism and romance. Seth is a social realist and as such he mirrors various aspects of Indian society.

It is a postmodern novel and as such there are elements of intersexuality. There are references to Shakespeare and his play Twelfth Night, James Joyce and also Jane Austen’s novel Mansfield Park, Holy Quran and Hadith, Imam Hussain, the grandson of Prophet Mohammad, Manu and “Manusmiriti” and also “Bhagvad Gita”, Hindu Magic Book The Tantras of Owls and Dutch Sexologist Dr. Van De Velde. Urdu poets, Iqbal, Dagh, Ghalib, Vali Aurangabadi, Meer, Anees and Mast etc.

A Suitable Boy is set in the backdrop of Nehru era, when the country was moving from transition to modernity. It presents the social realities of Indian life besides political, cultural, academic and lingual situation and familial relations. The novel mirrors social life realistically. There are elements of postmodernism too, embedded in the novel. In the present novel the lovers are separated at the end. It is a tragic love story.

Vikram Seth’s An Equal Music (1999) is a novel of 381 pages which unfolds the tale of a British musician, Michael Holme, 37 years old and his intense love for a woman, who is separated from him due to rash action and then after 10 years again by chance he meets and loves her and finally loses her forever and his gradual recovery of self and his emotional attachment with 270 year old, Carlo Tanoni Italian violin.
It reveals musicians’ personal relationship their small enclosed world, their manners, whims, behaviour, their intricacies, their interactions, reactions, likes, dislikes and nuances. Music binds not only the musicians as individuals but also binds their souls.

The action in the novel moves between England, Austria and Vienna. The story is narrated by Michael, which means it is presented from musician’s point of view. It is purely a technical novel and only those readers having thorough knowledge of Western Classical Music can understand and appreciate it. It is an in-depth study of non-glamorous side of music making. Today in the West there is a steady decline of Western Classical Music culture in schools, colleges and among masses but the popularity of pop music is increasing.

Vikram Seth has borrowed the idea of writing a novel from Greek legendary story of Eurydice and Orpheus. Orpheus was a god in Greek mythology and was a great musician. He was in love with a beautiful woman, Eurydice but on the wedding day she died. When Orpheus learnt about her death, the grief overtook him and he never played on his golden harp and did not sing.

Orpheus wanted to retrieve his beloved from the Land of the Dead, i.e. Underworld, Hades. After a long journey, he went to Hades. The sweet music of Orpheus’ golden harp moved the heart of god Hades and he was very much pleased and 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 restless and impatient and could not control himself. He turned round to have a look at Eurydice and lost her once again forever due to lingering doubt. So it is a story of a musician who nearly regained his lady-love with the power of music but in the end he lost her forever!

The theme of love and music runs simultaneously. The novel's eight parts corresponds to the eight notes in Western Classical Octave. The invocation of the music continues till the end of the novel. Both love and music play on human emotions and the themes are interwoven together. For the hero and the heroine, the music is not merely vocation, it is their avocation and it has the power to unite them beyond the boundaries erected by the society. For Michael, the heroine, Julia is not only the love of life-time but she is the very essence of music though their love is on purely physical level. Inspite of her dual loyalties Julia is as helpless and powerless, as is Michael to resist sinking into tangled beauty of their love.

Michael Holme is an emotionally volatile musician, eccentric and a man rash in action. He studies under a famous music Prof. Carl Kall at Vienna, in Austria, Europe. Here he falls in love with Julia McNicoll, a British student of music. Their love blossoms and they enjoy music, love and sex. Michael quarrels with Prof. Kall and finds the environment uncongenial and oppressive and he leaves Vienna abruptly without even informing Julia, which results in their separation. When Michael returns to normal life to contact Julia, he finds that Julia has gone from him forever. Later, Michael settles down in London and plays second violin in Maggiore Quartet. He attains some fame but Julia is ever present in his mind. Chance bring them
together in London after ten years’ separation, he suddenly spots Julia in another London bus.

Michael is now 37 years old. Julia is married to an America banker, James Hansen from Boston, U.S.A, for nine years and they have a seven years old son, Luke. When Julia is selected to work for Maggorie, Michael is overjoyed. Julia’s father was a Professor of History at Oxford and her mother was a Austrian. Julia is permitted by her husband for a concert in Vienna to perform Schubert’s The Trout. They move from London to Vienna and they get an opportunity to relive the past of love. Everything seems golden for some period. Julia is suffering from an autoimmune disease of inner ear.

Julia arranges Michael’s 38th Birthday Party at a Restaurant. She also invites Michael for lunch at her residence and he meets James. Michael is a moody person like any good musician. There are instances of anxieties, which reveals his fickleness and moments of dark panic as he suffers from claustrophobia.

Julia lives in the hell of lust with Michael when her consciousness awakens, she realizes that she is committing adultery and sin. Finally, she opts for dependable husband, James over the moody Michael and her denunciation of passion for family, stability, security of future life, social order and breaks off relations with Michael. She leaves Vienna earlier than planned. Michael is again alone. Finally, he hears Julia playing music which is “an equal music”. There is metamorphosis of Michael’s character which enable him coming to terms with his past, making the present bearable and the future promising.
The title of novel is taken from John Donne’s description of a state of being. There shall be “No cloud, no sun, no darkness, nor dazzling but one equal light, no noise, nor silence but an equal music---One equal eternity”. It is a music which attains complete harmony and gives bliss and the unheard music in Julia’s head matches the sound of her playing. Michael’s love for Julia, is not characterised by balance, harmony and tranquility but marked by that “one equal communion and identity”. “Music is a food of love” as well as “Music is a food of Soul”.

It also portrays contrasting portraits of life in urban and rural area in England. It gives realistically presents contrasting pictures of social realities of past and present Rochdale, which is fast changing due to rapid industrialisation. It also portrays the institution of prostitutes prevailing in London.

There are postmodern elements in the novel. There is use of intersexuality. There are references to the poetry of metaphysical poet, John Donne. There is intersexuality in the novel employed at the moment of high emotional intensity of the hero, Michael. There are Biblical references to portray the Michael’s state of mind as well as Man’s existential dilemma in the postmodern age.

In brief, An Equal Music presents the small social world of the musicians. The theme of the novel is also a basic human need for loving life partner, who has the qualities of understanding, patience, tolerance and adjustment, is forcefully brought out. It also brings out the role and significance of love and music in the life of musicians. Two things are
invented by man himself i.e. Mathematics and Music to reach and fathom the depth of Insoluble. It is full of social realities and there are elements of postmodernism also.

All the three novels present the theme of love and marriage and its significance in man’s life but Vikram Seth prefers reason to passion. In all the novels lovers are separated and end in tragedy.

Vikram Seth’s latest book Two Lives (2005) is an enigmatic love-story choreographed by the personal history of his uncle Shanti, a dentist and Aunty Henny, a Jew from Germany. It is life history of two ordinary individuals in extraordinary situation in the backdrop of II World War in Nazi Germany, when Adolf Hitler was executing his plan to annihilate Jews not only from Germany but Europe in 1930’s and 1940’s. A non-European and non-Jew i.e. an Indian poet-novelist, an outsider, Vikram Seth realistically presents the tragedy of Jews. It is a biography and memoirs but intimately historical, stretching from pre-Independence India, Third Reich to the holocaust of World War-II. The book is genre defying. It was not meant to be cathartic but in the end it is.

Vikram Seth is in fact a citizen of the world and he is an international writer but he is deeply rooted in Indian soil. In brief, Vikram Seth makes a sincere attempt to supersede the restrictive boundaries of nations and distinct cultural registers through a philosophy of “Universal Humanism” and has great concern for humanity.

Vikram Seth’s novels are post-avant-garde and he performs the duties of post advance guard of human race.