1 INTRODUCTION:

The third chapter of this research work focuses on the Indian novelist in English Vikram Seth, who has been known as a citizen of the world and a cultural traveller in more than one study. The work of Vikram Seth can be seen in a variety of eclectic and traditional forms and the locations of his poetry and prose move across the world, making literary homes of distant lands and cultures. His selected novels have been examined and evaluated closely in order to reveal and find out cultural elements and transnational aspects in them, these novels are: An Equal Music and A Suitable Boy.

1.1 Vikram Seth: Autobiography and Influences

Vikram Seth was born in an upper middle class family in Calcutta on June 1952. His father Premo Seth was an executive of Bata Shoe Company and his mother Leila Seth, was the first woman judge of Delhi high court. Being highly educated, his parents influenced Vikram Seth in a number of ways. As to the influence of English language and literature, both studied these subjects during their university days. His mother’s influence was responsible for shaping his mind. As his mother Leila Seth in her autobiography, On Balance, writes, “We were very particular about Vikram’s education and we spoke English at home and we did not allow Vikram to speak any other language but English” (2003:10). Vikram Seth’s mother tongue was Hindi while his mother’s was English. He was trained under his mother’s perfect observation, which later on made him the most successful novelist in the contemporary Indian novel in English. As a result, “Vikram spoke the queen’s English at the age of four” (Seth Leila. 2003: 106). Seth’s childhood was spent in Patna. His parents admitted him into the prestigious and elitist Doon Public School in Dehra Doon, where children from the economically sound families were generally admitted. The great influence on Vikram Seth in the boarding school was by his housemaster Mr. Gurudayal Singh who taught him geography. This teacher encouraged him to appreciate western classical music and allowed him to listen to his records. As he was interested in the literary creation, he took initiative for editing the Doon School Weekly. As far as Vikram Seth’s interest in poetry is concerned his mother says, “I had instilled in him a
love of poetry and one of the books, which he took over, was the albatross ‘Book of Verse’” (Seth Leila. 2003:152).

At the age of Eighteen Vikram Seth was sent into England for his higher education at Kent where he studied English literature and German language as it was a requirement for Oxford University’s entrance examination. Vikram Seth started his Ph.D. in Economics in the Stanford University of California (USA). His research topic was “On the Economic Demographies of Seven Chinese Villages.” He visited Nanjing University of China during the year of 1980-82. Vikram Seth was interested in becoming a creative writer. His teacher Timothy Steel encouraged him in writing *The Golden Gate*, which was dedicated to him.

Vikram Seth’s interest in translating books gave an opportunity to him to learn many languages. The languages he commands include: Hindi, Urdu, German, English, Chinese and few other European languages. He also was well acquainted with several Indian languages like Bengali, Punjabi and Hindi. Thus, as a novelist, Vikram Seth experienced different cultural encounters. His first novel *The Golden Gate* is purely Californian, while second, *A Suitable Boy* is purely Indian, and his third novel, *An Equal Music* is European. Thus, his three novels are transnationalizing about three different places and cultures of different countries. A well-known critic Makrand Paranjape has rightly observed, “Seth is an international writer who has been both an NRI and RNI. (Resident Non-Indian) but whether he has ever been just an Indian is rather doubtful” (2001:23).

In the present work, an attempt is to investigate and examine the novels in order to reveal and find out the cultural elements and transnational aspects reflected in the selected novels of Vikram Seth. His creative work is both, the modern and the traditional in forms at the same time. The location of his poetry and prose move across the world. The literary work in verse and prose as well as his travel writing has made him truly international literary figure at the contemporary academic and cultural level.
1.2 Literary Work and Review:

Though Seth is more popular as a novelist, he is basically a poet who began his literary career with poetry. His poetic work *Mappings* (1981) was originally privately published, it is a collection of mostly personal poems, which are largely pensive and thoughtful as they were written when he was a student in his twenties. Vikram Seth’s another literary work is *From Heaven Lake: Travels through Sinkiang and Tibet* (1983), it was his popular success and won the ‘Thomas Cook Travel Book Award’, for the best travel writing. Another collection of poems Seth has published is *The Humble Administrator’s Garden* (1985), it is with this collection of poems Vikram Seth came into prominence and was awarded ‘The Commonwealth Poetry Prize for Asia’. *Beastly Tales From Here and There* (1993) is a collection of poems, which runs into four volumes. *The Golden Gate* (1986) is a novel in verse about the lives of a number of young professionals in San Francisco. The novel is written entirely in Onegin Stanzas after the style of Pushkin’s *Eugene Onegin*. It is about love and loss of Californian Yuppies, Seth was lapped in America and Britain, because a novel in verse had not been attempted since Pushkins’ *Eugene Onegin*. It is Vikram Seth’s poetic novel established him as a writer with a difference and also won India’s ‘Sahitya Academi Award’ in 1988.

There are three prose novels, written by Vikram Seth. *A Suitable Boy* (1993) is his second novel with which Seth attained dizzy heights and won ‘W.H. Smith Literary Award’ in 1994, and “Commonwealth Writers Prize” in 1999. It is of the 1474 pages novel is a four family saga. In other words, the epic novel deals with the post-independence and post-partition picture of social, political, religious and cultural life of changing society of Nehru’s India. The novel opens with a wedding that gives Seth a chance to introduce all these families and several major characters. *A Suitable Boy*, a novel in the realistic genre, Seth uses third person omniscient narration in Standard English that is peppered, when the occasion demands it, with untranslated Hindi, Urdu and Bengali words. It is intended to examine this novel closely to find out cultural elements reflected in the literary work of Vikram Seth, particularly in his epic novel *A Suitable Boy*. There is also transnationality in indirect form, as Vikram Seth was influenced by English novelists of Victorian period, Jane Austen, Charles Dickens and George Eliot for different purpose. Basically the novelist wrote this
novel in English, it indicates that he intends to introduce India and Indian culture to
the world. The novel, in other words becomes transnational in nature, in form as well
as in expression. The focus on this aspect of the novel proves its popularity.

*An Equal Music* (1999) is another love story. It is set in Europe and there are
only European characters involved in this novel. Making love and making music has
become Seth’s central theme. This novel also won ‘Crossword Book Award’ in 1999.
It is a tale of emotionally volatile musician. The novelist gets influenced by the
Russian novelist, Pushkin. Regarding it Mukherjee, Debashish, a critic rightly says:

“Music has been a recurring, preoccupation in Seth’s work. His two
ever earlier novels have a fair amount of it, as does his poetry. The novelist
was trained in music under Pandit Amernath, the renowned vocalist,
and also learned to play the tabla and the flute.” (1999:34-36)

The most recent book by Vikram Seth is a biography or Memoir, entitled *Two
Lives*. It is a non-fiction family memoir written at the suggestion of his mother,
published in 2005. It focuses on the lives of his great uncle Shanti Bihari Seth and
German Jewish great aunt Hanny Caro, who met in Berlin in the early 1930s. *A
Suitable Girl* is an upcoming novel by Vikram Seth, which is a sequel to his 1993
novel, *A Suitable Boy*; Seth has stated that the book will be set in the present, rather
than 1952. Where *A Suitable Boy* finished, and will be what Seth calls a “Jump
Sequel”. [en.Wikipedia.org/wiki/A Suitable Girl.]

The reviewers have placed Vikram Seth as an international writer, who
travelled across the world for different purpose. His literary work focuses on the
Indian issues as well as the international themes. Thus, the contemporary problems
have been discussed in the novels of Vikram Seth. Regarding it a well-known
reviewer GJU Prasad says, “In the fast forming canons of Indian English fiction or
the third world novel, or the English novel or even in the contemporary novel”
(2004:15). Vikram Seth, in his poetry and novels has achieved important position in
Indian English literature as well as a research scholar at the transnational level. In
fact, as noted academic and critic C.D. Narasimhaiah comments, “Vikram Seth has
achieved little in the novel except to display his infinite patience to observe trivia in
upper class Indian society and record it meticulously, to what end only he can tell” (1995:122).

All the features of post-colonial era are present in the novels of Vikram Seth. The novelists of this period have got much freedom in theme and language. The popular and well-known critic Aijaz Ahmed has rightly focused on this point. He says:

“The post-colonial novel is appreciated as an example of syncretic hybridity by post-colonial theorists, so much so that the appreciation borders on the perspective. Homi Bhabha triumphantly holds such hybridity as a symbol of the much vaunted, multicultural syncreticism. Contrasting it with cultural essentialism prevalent in narratives.” (1994:86)

Another, well known reviewer Marjorie Perloff expresses comments on Vikram Seth as an outsider in the American culture, both are walking hand in hand, understanding each other. The reviewer, here presents Californian scheme through the eyes of outsider. In the American poetry review:

“As an Indian, educated at Oxford and hence having the vantage point of the ‘outsider’s witness on the California scene, Vikram Seth has been praised all around for his sharp eye for social nuances.” (1986:46)

He himself considers the well-known expatriate writer in the contemporary period. An international publisher considers Vikram Seth as a successful novelist. Vikram Seth is also famous as an expatriate Indian, although not strictly one in the limited definition of the term, by various listings of prominent South Asian Americans among whom he is commonly included. He therefore is known as a South Asian American novelist. In fact, Bharati Mukherjee, Vikram Seth, Bapsi Sidwa and Amitav Ghosh are referred to a prominent South Asian American novelists.

The expatriate writing became popular in the postcolonial literature as many people migrated from their mother land for various purposes to the Britain and America. Being a post-colonial writer, Vikram Seth presents an Indian culture as well as the culture of foreign countries perfectly. The border crossing of the people and
their culture result in the divided psyche of the migrated people. Similarly, Indian novelist in English in the contemporary period migrated into the other country and settled there. Regarding it Myers David says, “Thus labelled, Seth inevitably belongs to the parameters of American expatriate writing, however reluctantly” (1994:73).

Music becomes dominant theme in his novels. The artists, singers, musicians, and dancers from different countries represent their culture. Since all the characters in his novels are Europeans, his love for music that crosses national borders. Vikram Seth, in his interview says that how he was trained as musician, “In the evening when I wanted to be myself, I found that the moment I started playing an Indian musical instrument or singing an Indian song, I was drawn back into the world of my novel. It wasn’t a form of relaxation but work by other means. That’s when I began singing Shubert songs,” (Interview, 1992).

There are autobiographical references expressed in the novel. Vikram Seth, in his school days learned music, singing from his teachers. The Headmaster of this school appreciated Vikram Seth as a trained artist, a musician. The authentic report from his Headmaster, Mr. Gurudayal Singh says in his worth quoting:

“Master’s teaching Vikram has sent in the most glowing reports about him. He has a keen and incisive mind, and is very quick in getting to the heart of any matter. He has an accurate ear for music, and is a delightful companion in every way. He has been working on a monumental quiz book in partnership with a friend of his.” (1988:11)

Vikram Seth in his poetic as well as prose work describes his journey to European countries as well as China. These experiences became the sources for his novels. It was precisely for the reason that Indian English Fiction came to be regarded as a major source for, as Spencer Dorothy says, “A systematic study of cultural contact and cultural change with Indian world view at the focus which will increase one’s knowledge an acculturation processes” (1960:11).

Vikram Seth in his study tour to China observes social, religious and cultural life of the people. He describes his return journey from China, as his mother, later on encouraged him for writing his travel book. As far as, the inspiration and
encouragement to Vikram Seth for writing is concerned, he himself says, “I have always felt like the son in some ways. I think that’s true of all extended families, as true of Italian or Jewish families as Indian ones” (Adams, Tim. 11/9/2005).

Thus, the reviewers have placed Vikram Seth as one of the most popular representative Indian novelists in English, who is known as a true researcher of cultural contexts and encounters in Indian culture with the culture of China and Burma. Khushwant Singh, the celebrated Indian writer conferred on Seth, the status of, “a new star in the literary firmament that outshines in brilliance anything that I have seen in half a century of star spotting” (Sunday Times 1986). The contemporary social structure of a nation or world society can be described and narrated in his literary work. Being a transnational traveller he can present very successfully the modern ideas. Meenakshi Mukherjee in placing Vikram Seth as an international novelist says, “In the cultural examination of Vikram Seth as not only national but also transnational, global literary figure in the contemporary literary scene” (2-8 Jan.1997). The cultural encounter between the native culture of the artists and the culture of other countries are presented by him. For the true appreciation of Vikram Seth, the comments of a well-known reviewer are very essential. Kwame Anthony Appiah rightly says:

“If there is a lesson in the broad shape of the circulation of cultures it is surely that we are all already contaminated by each other,” and that, ‘It might be said to be a mark of popular culture, that its borrowings from international cultural forms are remarkably insensitive to-not so much dissimissive of as cultural imperialism.” (1995:119-124)

In this way, it can be said that Seth’s novel is a product of and contribution to popular culture and partakes equally of its blindness and its insight. Vikram Seth’s encounter with several cultures seems to have enriched his outlook towards life, which could easily be seen in his works. This writing shows a great respect and response towards different cultural ethos. One can say that Seth draws his experiences from multiple locations and also addresses divergent locations, due to the diversity of his themes, forms and genres.
2. **AN EQUAL MUSIC:**

2.1 **Introduction:**

*An Equal Music* and *A Suitable Boy*, these two novels are selected for the close study in the cultural and transnational perspective. By setting his novel *An Equal Music* in England and outside the natal order, Vikram Seth once again eschews his localized status for transnational identity. A well-known critic, Mala Pandurang regarding it says, “With his central pre-occupation with the western classical music, the experience gap, between the author and his Indian is likely to be much wider” (2010:183).

There are dissimilarities between the novel by Rushdie and Vikram Seth and the traditional novel. The traditional, conventional English language was used by the three Bigs, Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and R.K. Narayan, in their novels stress is given on structure, grammar and spellings. In Rushdie’s novel *Midnight’s Children* very simple, hybrid, day to day English is used. Salman Rushdie’s novel, *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* and Vikram Seth’s novel *An Equal Music* have striking dissimilarities. In this regards a critic Rohini Punekar says, “Rushdie’s book is about rock music and is typically exuberant and widely expensive. On the contrary, Vikram Seth sets his novel in Europe and all white English cast and the high classical tradition of European music as his theme” (2008:151).

*An Equal Music*, is a finely written love story about two musicians. Being a realistic novel, it is written in first person narration from the perspective of lonely and sensitive artist. In this autobiographical novel his love for training of Indian classical music is presented. Vikram Seth became perfect as a singer and musician under the training of Pandit Amarnath, he later on makes the use of music in his writing that represents Indian culture. Vikram Seth's interest in the traditional as well as Western music had made him a perfect and all round musician. He was interested in playing all the traditional as well as classical instruments like tabla, flute and piano. Regarding his training for playing musical instruments the reviewer Knorr, Kathrine says, “Vikram Seth turned to Western music somewhat late, though he learnt some piano
and cello, Seth confesses that he did not have the kind of early training necessary to become a musician” (23 April 1999).

The inspiration for the novel is, marked while walking across a park in London Seth had a sudden imaginary vision of a tall man, dressed against the weather, staring fixedly at the serpentine. This vision of a strange man created a kind of gloomy atmosphere in the novel. The novel is based on the Greek Myth of Orpheus and Eurydice that has haunted music lovers through the ages. The mythical figures and their love for music also inspired Vikram Seth to write this novel. These mythical figures also known as the human weakness. Rohini Mokashi Punekar, regarding it very aptly says:

“Orpheus descends to the underworld to bring back Eurydice, who has died of snakebite, and sings so beautifully that head is persuaded to grant him his wish. And all the human weakness compels Orpheus to look back, something he has been expressed warned not to, and Eurydice almost recovered, is lost yet again.” (2008:155)

It is a conservative novel about an English musician, whose function is to maintain the great European tradition of music. The novel begins with the epigraph from John Donne, from which the title of the novel is taken, the word, ‘equal’ is repeated five times. “One equal light’, ‘one equal music’, ‘one equal possession,’ one equal communion and identity’, ‘one equal eternity’” (www.randomhouse.com Accessed on 10th July 2006:06).

John Donne’s lovely and solemn words evoking the after life describe a harmonious balance between oppositions. The culture of a nation can be expressed through its social, religious and spiritual life, art, music, dance, paintings, sculpture, and a way of life. In other words, there are number of instances and examples that express the cultural elements of society.

2.2 Textual Analysis:

Vikram Seth, having influenced by different ancient and mythical sources, presents the theme of the novel, which is sad, unhappy and gloomy. The nature described in the beginning of the novel also represents such atmosphere. The novel An
Equal Music (1999) opens with the description of a scene of isolation. There is a description of nature, the sky was milky white and branches of the tree are bare. The scene is described by the novelist:

“The branches are bare, the sky tonight a milky violet. It is not quiet here, but it is peaceful. The wind ruffles the black water towards me. There is no one about. The birds are still. The traffic slashes through Hyde Park. It comes to my ears as white noise. I test the bench but do not sit down. As yesterday, as the day before, I stand until I have lost my thoughts. I look at the water of Serpentine.” (Seth Vikram. An Equal Music. 1999:03)

In the very beginning of the novel. The novelist, describes the tall image of inspiration, a lonely figure at the park in the perception of his narrator:

“Yesterday as I walked back across the park I paused at a fork in the footpath. I had the sense that someone had paused behind me. I walked on. The sound of footsteps followed along the gravel. They were unhurried; they appeared to keep pace with me. Then they suddenly made up their mind speeded up, and overtook me. They belonged to a man in a thick black overcoat, quite tall about my height-a man from his gait and attitude, though I did not see his face.” (03)

Thus, the novel opens in a peaceful and calm atmosphere. The protagonist of the novel is lonely, sad and nervous. Michael Holme, the narrator is a violinist based in London. He is in late thirties and is a member of a string quartet called Maggiore and supplements his income as the second violinist in the group by teaching a number of rather unwilling students. Michael is attached with the unsatisfying love affairs with one such student Virginie, a young French girl. In the beginning of the novel, Michael recalls his time as a student in Vienna ten years ago, “What I lost there I have never come near to retrieving” (05).

The novel is narrated in the present tense ...Ten years ago, as a student of the demanding Swedish Maestro Carl Kall at Musikhochshute in Vienna, he has been deeply in love with a young pianist Julia. Julia is the daughter of an Oxford don and
an Austrian mother, and she is in many ways the making of Michael, who is from a working class, North England background. The narrator feels unsettled in London from the height. He regarding it says, “But it is not Vienna. It is not Venice, it is not, for that matter, my hometown in the North, in clear reach of the moors” (04). Vikram Seth, presents two characters, the protagonists, Michael and Julia, who create a fresh and happy atmosphere representing culture of their nations. The European characters perform their music in the cultural activities. He later on walks to the flat of Julia, Seth describes pink colour, “Pink bath, pink basin, pink toilet, pink bidet, pink tiles, pink wall paper and pink rug” (06). Michael and Julia discuss about the music and play the musical instrument in different way and style, representing their culture. The rehearsal for their performance is planned at the house of Helen, the Maggorie Quartet, where the other artists, musicians and singers gathered. They are: Billy Piers, Michael, Helen, Nicholas, Spare and others.

As these artists travel and wander in the various parts of world, transnationality is reflected here. The music teachers like Prof. Carl Kall from Sweden, Kreuter Sonata, and Michael recall their teaching. Virginie’s parents inspired her regarding her career in music. She wants to join a Music College in Manchester, “You want to be a violin player” asked Dad slowly. A “violinist, Stanley, interposed my mother” (22). These musician’s life is divided into two parts: their past life and culture of their traditional home and in the countries in which they live. This cultural encounter is the major theme in this novel. Though the musicians are in other country, they remember their houses and the family members. They are honest to their past life and culture. When Michael was in Royal College of Music, Manchester, his father was ill. His father lived for long period in Rochdale. Therefore the protagonist is unhappy and in sad mood, even in the park. When Michael saw Julia he called, “I began to proud the window and shout, Julia!, Julia!, Julia!, Julia!, Julia!” (41). Thus, the characters that are introduced in the first part of the novel, represent their culture. When Michael was in Royal College he learned western music. The characters, belonged to different social, cultural background. Who are the preservers of their culture. In the second section, Michael’s busy schedule of rehearsal is expressed by him:
“I get through the rehearsal A day passes then another. I buy bread and milk. I eat, drink and bathe, I shave. Exhausted by wakefulness, I sleep. I teach. I attend rehearsals. I turn on the news and absorb words. I exchange greetings with our porter and the other denizens of our building. As once before, after I fled Vienna, My brain and body direct themselves.” (47)

All these European artists, musicians, singers, move from one place to another for their rehearsal and performance very easily. It is their new attitude towards their life and culture. Julia McNicholl’s father was a doctor. After his death, her mother Mrs. McNicholl went back to Austria. Dave and Phil, these characters are also introduced. Michael still feels nervous, he expresses it to Carl Kall through his letter. Regarding his nervousness he writes, “He was a mocker: Oh, you English! Finzi! Delius! It would be better to remain in a land without music than to have music like that” (55). Virginie plans to go to Nyons to spend Christmas with her family. The characters, very strongly remember their religious get together for festivals celebration, it represents their culture. Michael again suffers from virginie’s absence, “Life settles into a bearable aloneness” (56).

A music critic, Nicholas Spare invites Michael for pre-Christmas party of the Musicians, Erica Cowan, Nicholas and Piers discuss among themselves on the modern music opera. Mr. and Mrs. Farmby also took part in the religious celebration who visited the places like Rochdale, Middleton, Manchester and finally Cheshire. These cultural travellers, thus, move on the different places and perform their music and singing in a cultural activity. About it Michael says that “I met Julia two months after I arrived in Vienna, in early winter. It was a student concert. She played a Mozart sonata. I told her afterwards how entranced I had been by her playing” (80). As she lived in England, she was interested in speaking English language. All the Musicians, old and new came together as they celebrated their get together in the Wighmore Hall. The second part of the novel describes Michael’s desperate search for Julia. He engages Erica their “Big White Chief” and her, “bulletins of unsuccess” drain away all his hopes when alone he risk of memories. Michael talks about Erica. Who regarding it says, “Michael, darling its Erica, I felt I had to call you, I had to the concert last night was absolutely brilliant” (104).
In this third part of the novel, Seth describes the romantic rapture expressed by the two lovers after a decade. They visited picture gallery which represents the artists and their culture. The protagonists Michael and Julia are attracted towards the picture gallery. Michael becomes happy as Julia comes back. He says, “Her eyes are on my face – almost warily. Then she says something which I lose in the noise around me... “I am married’ softly she repeats it almost to herself, I am married” (108).

In the fourth part, Michael comes to know about Julia’s joining them for a performance. Julia joins the musical performance with Michael. Julia has her personal life attachment for her husband and son. When he asked about her husband, she says, “He is a banker. He’s American. From Boston. That’s where we’ve lived since we’ve been married. Until we come to London”(118). These artists, musicians and singers wander in different places, performing their art for the entertainment of the people, but their personal life is full of sorrow and unhappiness. Julia is found as a born deaf, even though she plays music very perfectly. Michael wonders, “Can Vienna restore what we have lost in London? I sink my thoughts into the soft roar of the plane and look across her face into the evening sky” (219).

The fifth part of the novel, *An Equal Music*, is set in Vienna. As all the musicians are busy in their rehearsal, Michael got an opportunity to talk with Julia. This part of the novel, describes travelling into many countries. Through their musical performance in different countries reflect transnationality in the novel. Vikram Seth describes the sad and unhappy life of the protagonists, Michael and Julia. On this incident, one can say that this modern woman still follows and takes care about her culture and restriction. Michael, in his frustration decides to leave Vienna forever and for good:

“Beloved Schubert, in your city I am adrift. I am consumed by past love; its germs long- embedded, half contained, have grown virulent again. There is no hope for me. I turned away four thousand nights ago, and the path was closed it by trees and brambles. I am eaten by futile pity. I make too much of much... How can I long for what I do not grasp?.” (242-243)
Though these artists suffer in their personal life, they entertain the people by their musical performance. The lovers do not cross their cultural principles. Julia’s married life soon made Michael disturbed. In this situation, Michael and Julia are normally bounded but their culture does not permit them to behave like lovers. He says:

“Though we are alone, we do not kiss; we are almost shy. The journey is everything it could be. The day grows warm, and I am like a torpid bee. Soon we are in the Veneto… The two of us stand in the corridor with our luggage and look out over the water. I speak her name softly to myself, and she, somehow sensing it or is it chance? - speaks mine.” (253-254)

The sixth part of the novel is set in Venice, Julia is accompanied the group. The musicians, artists and singers cross the borders of their nations, who carry with them their culture. That encounters with the culture of the native country. The seventh part expresses crises together in quick succession. It attempts at self analysis. He goes back to London, hoping Julia’s come back. She neglects Michael and becomes more sad:

“Go, then, with breathing tide, and do not make a scene, and learn wisdom of the little dog, who visits from elsewhere, and who knows that what is, is, and, O harder, knowledge, that what is not, is not.” (306)

Vikram Seth makes the use of musical instruments as a means to overcome unhappiness and frustrated life of the artists. Violin represents a kind of happiness in the life of artists. The last part of the novel begins with Michael’s musing. He feels that his violin senses when he suffers. “My violin, I am sad like you, and yet I thank the moon for these few months of grace.” (335) The artists are culturally bounded therefore they suffer but will not do any wrong. The protagonist wants freedom from sad life, therefore he wants to escape from this atmosphere. He decides to give up everything even his musical instrument. He in very happy but sad in mood, says:
“Farewell then my violin, my friend. I have loved you, more than I can say. We are one being, but we know part and never hear our common speech again. Do not forget my fingers or our voice. I will not hear you, but remember you.” (359)

Having been made frustrated, he wants to play his violin. There is no forced gravitas in her playing. It is a beauty beyond imagining clear, lovely, inexorable, phrase across phrase, phrase echo wing phrase, the incomplete the annexing, “Art of Fugue. It is an equal music” (380). The novel ends in the same atmosphere in which it begins. The protagonist of the novel is presented by the novelist in a sad and unhappy atmosphere. The singers, musicians travel place to place performing their cultural activities and tried to create a kind of happiness in their life. Vikram Seth, thus focuses on music which creates happiness. Music saves society from its decay and degeneration. The writers in the contemporary period have turned to culture and cultural studies, which have crossed national borders and entered into new society and native culture in which they live. Vikram Seth, in a way has presented a cultural confrontation. It was raining and Michael becomes completely sad and unhappy. The novel ends with his newly found realization:

“Music, such music, is a sufficient gift. Why ask for happiness; why hope not to grieve? It is enough, it is to be blessed enough, to live from day and to hear such music - not too much, or the soul could not sustain it-from time to time.” (381)

Thus, all the musicians, singers and artists, belonged to different nations and culture live together in another country in different society and culture. All the musicians wander in the various countries and perform their art, but they are attached to their rooted original cultural and social life. To investigate and find out the cultural and transnational elements reflected in the novel is the main purpose of the present research work.
3. A SUITABLE BOY:

3.1 Introduction:

Vikram Seth’s *A Suitable Boy* is the novel selected in the present research work, which presents a pen-portrait of post independence Indian social, political, religious and cultural life of the people. There are number of incidents, events and episodes in which Indian culture is reflected. As the novel itself is based on the wedding ceremony that takes place in the imaginary town Brahmpur, which is located on the bank of Ganges in between Banaras and Patna. Brahmpur, along with Calcutta, Delhi, Kanpur and other Indian cities, forms a colourful backdrop for the emerging stories. Lata is a nineteen-year-old college girl, vulnerable, yet determined to have her own way and not be influenced by her strong mother and opinionated brother Arun. Her story revolved around the choice she is forced to make between her suitors, Kabir, Haresh and Amit. The novel is not simply based on one story, as there are other episodes and incidents.

This epic novel covers various issues faced by post independence India including Hindu-Muslim strife, Abolition of the zamindari system, land reforms and empowerment of Muslim women. It is divided into nineteen parts, with each part focusing on a different story. For example part one is about Lata’s story, part second is about a courtesan, part three focuses on Lata again. While part four deals with Haresh and fifth part of the novel describes political scene of Brahmpur and so on. Regarding the structure of the novel, A.K. Singh rightly says, “More than Eight lakh words Knitted in 478 sections of 19 parts in its 1347 pages, weighing about fifteen hundred gram” (1997:11).

As far as the characterization of the novel is concerned, there is a galaxy of characters who play their roles in the formation of a complete new fictional society. The nature of this imaginary society is complete in form and structure having presented all the aspects of modern society. There are four main families mentioned in the novel, as it moves around these four families, which belonged to different parts of society. These four families, are: The Mehras, The Kapoors, The Khans and The Chatterjis. The first family of Mrs. Rupa Mehra, a mother of searching for a suitable
boy for her daughter. Arun, Savita, Varun and Lata are Mrs. Mehra’s four children. Arun is married to Meenakshi Chatterji, Savita to Pran Kapoor. Lata is Mrs. Mehra’s youngest child. A large portion of the novel as well as the title describes for mother’s determination to marry Lata of to ‘A Suitable Boy.’ The second family is Mr. Mahesh Kapoor, Mrs. Mahesh Kapoor and their three children-Veena, Pran and Maan. The third family portrayed is of Nawab Sahib of Baitar and his three children- Zainab, Imtiyaz, and Firoz. And the next family of Mr. Justice Chatterjis and Mrs. Chatterjis and their children Amit, Meenakshi, (married to Arun Mehra), Dipankar, Kakati and Tapan.

The other sub-ordinate characters represent different social groups of Brahmpur society. Who also play their roles in the development of plot and complete the society in full form. These people are the citizens of fictional world, Brahmpur. There are 66 minor as well as major characters. The novel received awards and nominations. In 1994 – Best Book, Commonwealth Writer’s Prize. In 1994- it received the Award W.H. Smith Literary Award. The resources and the evidence, incidents on which the novel is based, are biographical. After a great success for his Award winning novel *The Golden Gate* as he got ‘Commonwealth poetry prize’ and ‘Sahitya Academy Award’ in India which gave tremendous confidence to Vikram Seth. He decided to come back in India, responding his parent’s insistence. As his mother, Leila Seth puts it in her autobiography, *on Balance*, a book which provides an inter textual context for Seth’s main works, “We had visions of him as a penniless poet, living in a garage and being supported by his younger Shantum after we were dead” (Leila Seth. 2003:294). But Vikram was determined to keep his creativity alive, and not be “bound by chains of gold” in a lucrative position. In 1981, he returned to India to write his ambitious novel, *A Suitable Boy*. When asked about what got him interested in that specific time period (1950-52). In order to create perfection in the life of Muslim characters, for understanding problems, issues in the life of community and their culture. Vikram Seth learned Urdu language from a teacher. As his mother herself describes:

“In order to understand the nuances of Muslim culture better, all the land reform cases visited shoe maker’s families in Agra, gathered intimate knowledge of Muslim villages in the U.P. of by lanes and
Gullies in Old Delhi and went for a dip in the Kumbha-Mela at Allahabad.” (2003:350)

The solidity of specification is pressed into the service of a love story which is the novel’s main plan. According to Seth, this monumental novel originated with a scrap of conversation overheard at a party between a mother and daughter, which was to provide the opening lines of the novel. The author’s autobiographical material is also recognizably evident in many episodes though transformed by the strategies of allusion, illusion and elusion. As Leila Seth says, “except for Mrs. Rupa Mehra, and Haresh Khanna who are based on the authors Material, grandmother, Chanda and his father, Premo Seth, almost all the characters in the novel are composite.” (Leila Seth. 2003:453)

Vikram Seth has made up his mind for return to India. He studied social, political, religious and cultural life of post-independence period. He expressed his decision of writing a big novel. He intended to write about India into five books, but finally he wrote a big novel. Vikram Seth talks to Amit Roy about the genesis of A Suitable Boy:

“...I wanted to write about India. I planned to write a series of five short novels-instead, I wrote one rather long novel which deals with a period. I did not, at first, think was very interesting the early 1950s. He thought that, after dealing swiftly with this period he would “go forward to the Sino-Indian war, emergency and all that kind of stuff, instead I got stuck in that period.” (Interview.-The telegraph, 29th Aug. 1992)

The distinguishing feature of A Suitable Boy is its recasting of nineteenth century English novelistic conventions as popularized by Jane Austen, Charles Dickens and George Eliot of these, Austen in particular has been Seth’s favoured model.

3.2 Influences and review:

It becomes clear that Vikram Seth’s inspiration itself is a kind of transnational aspect on which the novel itself is based. Marriage is a culturally and socially
approved relationship between a man and woman that legitimizes a sexual and economic union. It is seen as a social institution, where in individuals make a commitment to one another. Most of the societies around the world have rules and restrictions regarding marriage which addresses issues such as the acceptable age of marriage, rites/rituals to be followed, type and amount of gifts to be exchanged and so on. Marriage is that celebration in which number of cultural, traditional activities, customary elements and celebrations take place. It is interesting to note that how different writers in different periods reflect this issue based on their personal and societal experiences. According to H. Kalpana and Vidya Gangadharan, the differences in the issues of marriage and domesticity can be marked through an analysis of Vikram Seth’s *A Suitable Boy* and Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*. The reason for choosing these two writers is that Seth’s *A Suitable Boy* was acclaimed as a social novel and was also criticized for the depiction of arranged marriages in India. Similarly, Austen is a Victorian writer who has been criticized for filling her novels with the major theme of marriage. H. Kalpana and Vidya Gangadharan further state:

> “Women in Seth and Austen are confined to domestic space after marriage, none of them go out to work. They have restricted their life within the houses and take the role of housewives and mothers. Vikram Seth’s women also have restricted their space within marriage.” (2006: 223-232)

*A Suitable Boy* and *Pride and Prejudice* reveal how women lose their individualities and identities and this does not dependent on the age. Every society at any point of time imposes restrictions on women and expects to be socialized and conditioned in society. Vikram Seth has adopted the style for writing, as he himself says:

> “I prefer a clear and easy style. It should be a window that helps you to see the scenery clearly instead of drawing attention from the scenery to the window.” (Cited in The Times of India. 28 Feb 1993)

Vikram Seth is influenced by Jane Austen strongly in the style and theme. The galaxy of characters and the Saga and Magnum Opus novel expresses Indian cultural elements in the domestic, spiritual and social scenario of the post-partition India.
well-known critic Harish Trivedy goes on to observe that, “Seth is a latter day Jane Austen” (1996: 11-26). Vikram Seth seems to be indebted to Elizabethan drama for a considerable number of parallelisms. The constant reference to the Elizabethan comedy as a structure to the whole novel is not a secondary aspect. Obviously, the emphasis on *Twelfth Night* as a model is quite overt, since some of the major characters are even called to play a part in the representation of the Shakespearean play, which, therefore functions as a mise-en-abime in the novel. Shyam S. Agarwal, actually parallels the early fifties in India to the Shakespearean age:

“The early years of Nehruvian age started with a bang, like that of Elizabethan Age of the sixteenth century, full of bubbling optimism, rebuts vitality and great expectations, one of the chief factors was the presence of leaders of proven integrity, the other being the continuation of the services of “Steel frame” bureaucracy. Nehru had wide choice in the choosing able and trustworthy counsellors like Elizabeth he had a heart but it was always ruled by his head.” (1995:33)

The use of number of major and minor characters as presented in the great novels by Jane Austen, entitled *Pride and Prejudices* and Tolstoy’s *War and Peace*, Vikram Seth has introduced number of characters in this novel. Talking about great novels from Austen’s *Pride and Prejudices* to Tolstoy’s *War and Peace*, Virginia Woolf has remarked:

“...if you think of these books, you do at once think of some characters who have seemed to you so real that it has the power to make you think not merely of it itself, but of all sorts of things through its eyes… in all these great novels, all these novelists have brought as to see whatever they wish us to see through some characters. Otherwise, they would not be novelists, but poets, historians or pamphleteers.” (1992:96)

Vikram Seth’s Magnum Opus, *A Suitable Boy* is compared with the great novelists of nineteenth century on many levels. Through this Vikram Seth implies transnational ideas and elements because it was based on English novel as model. The
inspiration for writing this novel, about the subject matter and style, one can very emphatically state that it is also a kind of transnationality reflected in the novel. The novel *A Suitable Boy* has a kind of attraction for the other countries, as the young characters are influenced by these countries. Regarding it he aptly says:

“The novelist introduces the characters of Haresh Khanna in section four of the novel. Haresh is on a visit to Brahmpur on business from the Kanpur Leather and Footwear Company. He also has diploma in leather technology from England but has the disadvantages of having gone to a midlands technical college unlike Amit Chatterji, who has studied in Cambridge. The ‘Indian young boys, have completed their education abroad, it is also a kind of crossing boundaries in the field of education, Kedarnath also has lost everything in Lahore, he sets himself up in Brahmpur in the polluting Caress-tainted shoe trades.” (Seth Vikram. 2005:02)

Number of characters are influenced by British society and culture. The westernised character is called baboo. Arun Mehra represents western culture. Vestiges of the colonial past are reflected in the artificial life style of the westernized ‘baboons’ Arun Mehra is a good example of ‘Mimic Man’:

“The influence and impact of British culture is reflected on the shopping list of Meenakshi Mehra, that includes other items, white flower, chivers formulate and lyles Golden Syrup and Anchor Butter, and a half dozen of Beck beer.” (2005:372)

The British colonizers left India in 1947, they left their way of life, their influence on the Indian social, political, and day to day life of educated Indians in particular and on the Indian people’s life in general. The long stay of the Britishers influenced Indian life. After four years from Indian independence, the British firms still run things commercially in Calcutta. Arun is employed by Bentsen Pryce, a British owned company which manages the back of the foreign trade and controls a large share of the production of goods that are processed or manufactured in the hinterland of Calcutta:
“Young Indian men returning from Oxford or Cambridge, seek employment at this prestigious firm. They were known as ‘covenanted assistants, bound by convent or rolling contracts to the company...what could be called Brown-whites...If ever there was a man enraptured by England and the English, it was he.” (2005:420-422)

The novel *A Suitable Boy* belongs to the post-colonial period. A great change took place in India in the form of English speaking middle class as the Britishers created it. While the novel is directed towards a post-colonial criticizing of British presence and the after math on the Indian subcontinent as Pandurang Mala, a well known reviewer says, “One of the most important consequences of British rule was the creation of an English speaking middle class” (2001:104-108).

Vikram Seth’s only novel located specifically in India is *A Suitable Boy*. As it depicts the political history of the subcontinent in the 1950’s. In it, Seth neither explores the gap between the ‘culture of origin’ (Indian/home and the culture of adoption (UK/USA/other countries), nor does he address issues of ambivalence or liminulity that come from a conflict of different cultural perspectives. The concept of home derives new parameters for an emerging pocket of international citizens, who are caught in a social construct called a ‘new world’. Another reviewer, Akshay Mukul in his article contents that a lot of Indian writing has family as its subject. The concept of family of the ancient Indian society has changed into separated families in the modern contemporary society. Consequently, the ancient culture has changed into modern one. He further adds, “The family as a social unit is dying in the West, particularly in the U.K. and U.S., but it still makes a wonderful subject for novels” (1999). In *A Suitable Boy* most of the action take place in the city of Brahmpur, the Indian subcontinent in 1980s was still recovering from the horrors of partition, when Muslim dominated Pakistan was cleaved off from the rest of India in an orgy of communal violence. The construction of a Mosque is deliberately positional so that when the Muslims gathered for their daily prayers and kneel to face Mecca, they must face Hindu idols, which they consider obscene. Regarding the Babri Masjid episode, the deadly spate of Bombings on 06 December 1993, Seth said in exasperation:
“…Its sad and distressing. India has weathered as lot of final crisis, but this one is very serious indeed. It requires us to speak out and say that this is not the kind of country we want India to be.” (Robinson Eugene. 1993:05)

Using hybrid contexts mediated through migrations and diasporic locations, Vikram Seth’s novel, *A Suitable Boy* (1993) figures out different realities that constitute India after independence. In his reconstructed narrative of the Indian nation, Seth, unlike Rushdie in *Midnight’s Children* eschews magic realism and adopts an integrated approach within a given and accepted notion of India. India as a secular state with traditions of multiculturalism and tolerance towards other regions. As Neelam Srivastava analyses and comments the novel:

“In *A Suitable Boy* the nation is an all exclusive concept that moves from the individual, to the locality to the regional state, and arrives to embrace the entire nation. Seth invents a state Purva Pradesh, who’s regional, specifically North Indian dimension is stretched to make it representative of India in its totality.” (2003:11)

Great change has been occurred in the contemporary Indian novel in English after the publication of Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* the theme as well as in the language and narration. A common man has become protagonist of the modern novel. The hybrid language has emerged as a medium of the novel. Indian English Fiction has earned recognition of its own in the world literature of the recent past particularly since 1980. R.S. Pathak, in this sense aptly observes:

“In the growth and development of the Indian novel in English in 1980s occupy the most significant position… It is during the eighties that Indian English novelists and novels earned unheard western academic world.” (1994:04)

Vikram Seth meticulously, intermingles the political and social struggles with the daily domestic affairs of the four families: The Mehras, The Chatterjis, The Khans and The Kapoors, who emerges as a reliable spokesman of India’s cultural heritage and national identity. Commenting about the impact of the novel on the world literary scene the critic Shands Kerstin says:
“Many western readers, not surprisingly, have seen this novel as a good introduction to India or at least to those aspects of Indian history and culture that they conveyed through a narrative that moving through an impressive array of dissimilar and desperate discourses touches on historical, cultural and religious issues ranging from the caste system, the Land Reform Act. Aiming to abolish the zamindari landowner system, the tensions between Hindus and Muslims and the political struggle of post independence India.” (2003: 98)

The novelist has created a picture of imagined state, which has changed from colonial to post-colonial, modern situation. The novel, *A Suitable Boy* has post-partition and post-colonial background. The representational exactitude and richly imagined reconstruction of Indian society in a state of transition to modernity at a fundamental moment of nation formation, *A Suitable Boy* has a colonial status in post-colonial writing. A reviewer of the novel, Martha Mcphee, one of the authors featured in meet of writers, she adored *A Suitable Boy*. It is a high praise:

“It is a brilliant book-Tolstoyan, in a way, that few books are today: broad, deep, long, a literary saga that describes a culture, a country, written by a fearless writer so deeply smart and penetrating, he can go inside any heart he chooses and knew it as he knows his own. In the end, the reader can’t help but full in love with all the characters. Seth is an incredibly generous writer. He loves his characters, loves watching them move through history.” (2005; 50).

During the 1980s and 1990s, there was great and variable exploration of Indian English fiction on the British and American market. Indian novel in English has crossed national borders, and the people of America as well as Britain started reading Indian novels getting information about India. In international book market, the purchasing of Indian books has increased. It has created transnationality. Neelam Srivastava in this concern says that *The Midnight’s Children* and *A Suitable Boy* which later on became international best sellers:

“These two texts aimed at both a national and international audience, are perceived as familiarizing and de-familiarizing at one and the same
time. At times their aim at a pan Indian national representation can risk simplifying the complexity of a pluralistic culture.” (2005:50)

In order to convey it better to their international relation, in its attempt to represent a pan-Indian perspective international Indian writing in English risks eliding the specificity of regional cultures, their languages are used by the characters, Hindi, Urdu and Bengali. They are shown to be vehicles of a national culture. Vikram Seth presents the expression of Malena Kuss, of human lives that provide an entry into the aesthetic, moral, and spiritual perceptions and conceptions of the world, particularly the world of cultural identities rather than national/nationalist identity under the impact of globalization, migration and multiculturalism. Nyla Ali Khan in her article ‘The fiction of Nationality in an era of transnationalism’ 2005 observes:

“no single theory could adequately frame or incorporate the multiple inheritances of the current diasporic subjectivities. The strong presence of the migrant/ diasporic intellectual in the age of globalization has come to mean as Karim H. Karim writes, ‘The end of cultural hegemony and imaging transnational citizenship.” (Karim H. Karim. Online)

As transnational elements are reflected in the novel A Suitable Boy. This novel is written in English, it is only for the readers of England and America, and other foreign countries. Through this big novel, Vikram Seth intends to introduce the social, political, religious and cultural life of India after independence to the people of other countries. Parth Chatterjee in support to this view very aptly says:

“that nationalism on the subcontinent is not simply a European import but also has its roots in Indian culture when, as a strategy to mark its differences with nationalism in the west, it divides the realism of the material from that of the spiritual.” (1999:06)

Vikram Seth describes the picture of post-independence of India. Indian society was divided into caste, class and religion. Expressing her comments on the novel, Meenakshi Mukherjee points out, recreating the tradition in Bangla of “three decker realistic family stories.” She also focuses on the both size of the fictional city, Brahmpur, the material and the spiritual. She, thus states:
“Through this twice born text, Seth makes an attempt to show the complex’ divisions of class, caste and religion as well as the external western influence resulting from the colonial encounter that produced such a deep rift in Indian society. He does this through the recreation of both the physical and social geography of the fictional city of Brahmpur and other Indian cities that Mrs. Mehra visits and also through the changes brought about by the land reform... The material is the domain of the ‘outside’ of the economy and of state craft, of science and technology, a domain where the west had proved superior and in which the Indians tried to reach the same standard to be acknowledged as equal.” (2002:02)

3.3 Textual Analysis:

Vikram Seth portrays a picture of post-independence period of Indian social, political, religious and cultural life as well as discusses the issues of the period. The novel opens with the dialogue of Mrs. Rupa Mehra with her young daughter Lata, she says, “You too will marry a boy I choose” (Seth Vikram. 2005 1.1-03).

The novel opens with the celebration of wedding, the guests and the people from the local society gathered on the lawn. Mrs. Rupa Mehra selects a suitable boy for her elder daughter, Savita. It is Indian culture that the husband for a young girl is generally selected by the parents in the arranged marriages. The novelist describes the scene of early winter of 1950, and India had been free for over three years. But freedom for the country did not mean freedom for his younger son, Maan, who even now was being told by his father, “Arun and Varun are always complaining: Why didn’t they choose a boy for their sister, then? Pran is good, decent cultured Khatri boy” (1.1-04). They preferred a cultured boy. Mrs. Mehra has selected Pran Kapoor as a suitable boy for her daughter, Savita. The wedding ceremony with all the rites and rituals, with various customs and traditions, reflect Indian culture. Pran, a popular lecturer in the college in which Savita also learns English literature. Marriage is an excellent example of culture in which number of activities take place. The other chief host for the wedding was groom’s father, Mr. Mahesh Kapoor, a Minister of Revenue of the state of Purva Pradesh. It was, in fact in his large, ‘C’ shaped cream coloured two storey family house, ‘Prem Niwas’, situated in the quietest greenest, residential
area of the ancient, and for the most part over populate of city, Brahmpur, the wedding was taking place, “Arun, Minakshi’s elder brother, who had been to Oxford, was studying Law at Lincoln’s Inn, and was, in addition a published poet” (1-4-12).

In wedding, it is a long tradition in Indian culture that the groom comes to the gate by riding on the back of white horse, a nephew sitting in front of him. It is an old convention but Pran disliked it, it is quite untraditional activity of Pran, which is against Indian culture. After the welcome ceremony, bride and bride groom moved together to the middle of the garden, where a small platform, decorated with more white flowers and open to the auspicious stars, had been erected. It is in Hindu marriage celebration, according to Indian culture, “Here the priests, one from each family, and Mrs. Rupa Mehra and the parents of groom sat around the small fire that would be the witness of their vows” (1.5-13). After it the Bangle ceremony takes place, it also reflects Indian culture. The marriage ceremony takes place according to tradition, in which it gets completed by exchanging garlands. After it, number of wedding rites took place according to Hindu marriage system. Thus, Prem Niwas has been known as the house of arranged marriages and centre of Indian culture, “‘Prem Niwas’ for a start: the abode of love. An idiotic name, thought Lata crossly, for this house of arranged marriages” (1.5-15). The novelist, thus presents the celebration of wedding ceremony in which number of rites and rituals took place. A cultural programme was organised, they invited beautiful ghazal singer to celebrate the wedding ceremony at ‘Prem Niwas’.

Transnationality is also reflected in the incident in which Mrs. Tandon, had been willing to tolerate talking to the Nawab Sahib though he was a Muslim, but she mentioned comings and goings from Pakistan, it was too much for her imagination. It is also another instance of transnationality as the Nawabs crossed Indian border. Lata is also interested in Indian classical music. Malati was charming, dressed conservatively but attractively and could talk to Mrs. Mehra about everything from religious fasts, cooking to genealogy, matters that her own westernized children showed very little interest in. This impact of Western culture of this character reveals its transnationality:
“Malati had lost her adored father a surgeon from Agra, when she was eight. He had been a successful and handsome man with a wide acquaintance and a varied history of work: he had been attached to the army for a while and had gone to Afghanistan; he had taught in Lucknow medical college; he had also been in private practice.” (1-11-27)

The characters in Vikram Seth’s novels travel from one country to another. This border crossing of Indian culture creates transnationality. Malti’s father’s journey to Afghanistan is a kind of translational aspect reflected in the novel. Even Malati’s family life was under the influence of transnationality. As Malati’s mother says about their kitchen, “Malati’s Mother had cleared out what she had seen as in essentials from their life. It was not necessary now to have two kitchens, one European and one Indian” (1.11-28). Another example of transnationality is Chinese culture in the form of pottery and other articles. Indian culture reflected in the Hindu society is ‘Ekadashi’, a one day fast. The novelist, thus focuses on ancient Indian culture, as he says, “‘It is Ekadashi’ today, Mrs. Mehra fasted on the eleventh day of each lunar fortnight in memory of her husband” (1.13-36).

In the second part of the novel, Saida Bai Firozabadi, a classical singer organizes ghazals on the wedding night. A long conversation takes place between Tasneem and Saida Bai about various things in Muslim and Arabic culture. There was prayer in the Masjid in the evening:

“All over India, all over the world, as the sun or the shadow of darkness moves from east to west, the call to prayer moves with it, and people kneel down in a wave to pray to God. Five waves each day-one for each a namaaz-ripple across the globe from longitude to longitude. The component elements change direction, like iron filings near a magnet-towards the house of God in Mecca.” (2.15-117)

Saeeda Bai performs the rituals and the prayer later on. Thus, the religious, cultural and traditional activities reflect Muslim culture in the novel. Many characters in the novel visited other nations like, England, America, Pakistan and Bangladesh. For mother in India every child is equal. It is Indian culture that no Hindu mother
makes difference between two children. Pran doesn’t believe in April fooling as he says:

“It’s because I’ve married into westernized family that I decided, well, Pran, you have to keep your end up or they’ll think you are a peasant, and you’ll never be able to face Arun Mehra again.” (2.16-133)

The character of Pran is completely westernized, it proves that how there is crossing border directly or indirectly in the novel, which reflects transnationality. Savita also wants to say that how she is westernized. Regarding this westernization she says, “I want to see a Hindi film today- Just to emphasize how westernized I am” (3.1-133).

The novelist focuses on Malti’s interest in music therefore she gets training in classical music. The characters perform the cultural activities. Lata joins music class, along with Malati in the class of Ustad Majeed Khan. Their training in music, and its performance reveal culture of the Indian traditional life, “A couple of days later there was a music recital in the Bharatendu Auditorium, one of the two largest auditoriums in town. One of the performers was Ustad Majeed Khan” (3.6 143).

There are number of events that reveal and reflect culture, therefore, it can be said that India has rich heritage of ancient culture, which is deeply rooted in the life of Indians. On each step and stage of life, Indian cultural activities, are found. As the period of novel is three years after independence, 1950, the Britishers lived in India for one hundred and fifty years, they left their impact on Indian social life. The impact of English people and culture is seen in art, music, painting and education. The names of places, of roads, the building, the churches and the sculptures are British. The novelist, therefore, introduces Indian cultural, social, political life to the world, as it is written in English; it is a kind of crossing borders, which is resulted in transnationality.

Vikram Seth in the novel presents different episodes reflecting Indian culture. The sports activities, the historical places, forts, also reflect Indian culture. The Parsi family is introduced, Mr. Nowrojee wrote a poem, “Hunting Passion.” There are Mahals, Barsat Mahal, during the mast; it used to be called Fatima Mahal. Kabir
Durani describes these places. The conversation between Mrs. Mahesh Kapoor and Mrs. Tandon moved into different modes. “Can’t we do something about Ramnavami”? They also talk about recital of Ramcharitmanas. Zaidi’s son passed the civil service exam, his wife arranged a reading of the whole Quran in her house. Old Mrs. Tandon thinks about Ramlila in six months time. In the part four of the novel, novelist describes Lata’s love for Kabir. Mr. Haresh Khanna is introduced by Kedarnath, who also has crossed Indian boarders, as he says, “This is Mr. Haresh Khanna, who is originally from Delhi, but is working for CLFC in Kanpur. He had studied footwear manufacture in England” (4.4-204). Here is another cultural performance, where Sunil Patwardhan is going to perform Kathak Dance. Lord Krishna is dancing with the Milkmaids, “Come” he says to the gopis, “Come to me. What is there to fear?” (4.6-210). The novelist thus focuses on the religious activities, festivals reflecting Indian culture. In India, there are number of religions living together. On Friday at the midday prayer the hereditary Imam of the Alamgiri Mosque gave his sermon. On the other hand there is talk about the construction of the shiva temple was going ahead. On both sides efforts were made to establish the calm and cool atmosphere. The construction of the temple and the mosque were only two problems before both communities. There was a kind of tense atmosphere between Hindus and Muslims. It was with dismay that many Muslims in Brahmpur had, over the months seen the foundations of the temple rising in the plot to the west of their mosque. There is reference to the Shivalings. The people gathered together for the worship of God. There was a struggle between the Hindus and the Muslims on the same issue. Both the communities are claiming the place for the construction of temple and mosque. So the riots between two communities took place. The encounter between two religions and cultures is the main issue. The novelist says, “They worshiped their hundreds of idols that they claimed were divine-idsols with four heads and five heads and the heads of elephants” (5.2-233).

The prayers in the Muslim religion having their faces westward. The religious people look after different activities, the daily prayers are also controlled by the religious people. And the infidels who held power in the land wanted Muslims, when they turned their faces-west wards in prayer to the Kaaba, to face this same idols. The members of the Alamgiri Masjid Hifazat Committee made a few crowd rousing
remarks, the local hot heads and crowd increased in size, “There were cries of ‘Allah-u-Akbar’ which could be heard all the way to the police station” (5.3-235).

In Indian culture, joint family is not tested. Priya lived in a joint family which included her husband’s brothers and their wives and children, this family is known as Rai Bahadur’s House, the title was given by the Britishers. There are other problems for the politicians to think. Food is the main. Bihar is virtually starving due to bad monsoon, “Mere Muslims threatening us from inside the country or across the border, we can deal with” (5.4-242). Transnationality is implemented in the crossing borders by the Muslims. Vikram Seth in the fifth part of the novel introduces Muslim political leaders, Begum Abida Khan, wife of the Nawab of Baitara’s younger brother, one of the leaders of the Democratic Party that sought to protect the interest of land owner in the face of the impending passage of the Zamindari Abolition Bill. Although a Shia, she had the reputation of being an aggressive protector of the rights of all Muslims in the new, truncated Independent India, “Her husband like his father, had been a member of the Muslim League before Independence and had left for Pakistan shortly afterwards (5.7-251). The Muslim youngsters and political leaders represent Muslim religion and culture. The conversation between Abida khan and Zainab about various problems among the Muslim community, “For Zainab – who saw elegance, subtlety, etiquette and family culture as qualities to be prized in their won right, the world of the zenana was a complete world, even if a constrained one” (5.12-272). Different religious activities, regarding the mosques and Muslim festivals described in the novel as the preservers of Muslim culture perform different activities. The real preserver of the culture, the music, the etiquette of this province is to be dispossessed is to be driven through the lens to beg its bread. The novelist, later on focuses on the relationship between Indian and Pakistani people at religious, political, social and cultural level. The novelist, moreover presents how the British Government ruled both communities, Hindu as well as Muslim. The policy of British government is to rule Indian:

“The British had been happy to let the zamindars collect the revenue from land-rent (and were content in practice to allow them whatever they obtained in excess of the agreed British share.) But for the administration of the state they had trusted no one but civil servants of
their own race, selected in, partially trained in, and imported from England-or, later, brown equivalents so close in education and ethos as made no appreciable difference.” (5.16-284)

The Britishers, in a way, arrived in India by crossing the borders of England and ruled India. The Indians were influenced by the Britishers, it is a kind of transnationality. The relationship between the president of Pakistan, Liyaqat Ali Khan and Nawab Sahib’s father also reveals the cross-border relationships. In the cultural performance organised in which songs of Rabindranath Tagore were singing by the singers, with the musicians, Majeed Khan supported the singers by his music. How the songs attracted the people. These artists and art of dancing is good example of culture and its practice. Rabindranath Tagore’s songs are sweet to hear because of Ustad Majeed Khan’s music. Regarding it the novelist says:

“Hmmh!’ said Ustad Majeed Khan. That the sickly-sweet so-called music of Rabindranath Tagore’s songs should be more attractive to any man’s ears than the beauty of classical khyaal, clearly marked such a man as a buffoon.” (6.1-293)

The artists, singers and musicians have very close relationship. All these artists were influenced by Ustad Saheb, Veena, an artist was also influenced by the music teacher. Both the religious artists gave respect to each other. There is close relationship between Muslim and Hindu artists and singers, “Ustad Sahib’, Veena corrected herself. She too was surprised that in addressing her Muslim teacher she had used the title of respect due to a Hindu one” (6.1-294). There is another example of Hindu-Muslim relationship, as, “Veena realized that Ustad Majeed Khan was referring to the Shiva Temple, being constructed in Chowk, only a couple of lanes away from Ustad Majeed Khan’s house” (6.1-295). Vikram Seth has presented the character of Mr. Mahesh Kapoor, who is well-known for his knowledge about different languages, as well as his mastery on English language. Mr. Mahesh Kapoor learned heavily sanskritized Hindi, which no one in his right mind could understand. The languages like Hindi, Urdu and Arabic are inter related. In the educated class English becomes very important language, “In the 1930s the Proceedings of the Protected Provinces Legislative Assembly were printed speech in English, Urdu and Hindi-depending on the language that the speaker wrote and spoke” (6.14-327).
The educated characters in the novel, are interested in religious activities. Mrs. Mahesh Kapoor would like to recite Ramcharitmanas. In Indian culture, such religious programmes have great importance. Vikram Seth, therefore, presents these religious activities for the better of people. Similarly, he also focuses on the activities in Muslim religion. The Muslim characters in the novel also plan to recite Quran. Mrs. Mahesh Kapoor, at the second opening saw, she mentioned that, “She would like to have the Ramcharitmanas recited in the house some day soon. It would be good for the house and family in general...” (6.16-328). Similarly, Mrs. Chatterji wants to organise a religious programme, the chanting of Gayatri Mantra. The novelist intends to present another example of Indian culture as well as western culture by appointing two cooks, Indian cook as well as western cook. The food items have crossed their nation, therefore it creates a kind of transnationality. The chanting of Gayatri Mantra in chorus at any time as they like, “Mrs. Chatterji rallied to her daughter’s aid. She had two cooks one for Bengali and one for western food” (7.2-373).

Another character in the novel Biswas Babu traditionally dressed believes in Goddess Saraswati, who is popularly known as Goddess of education. Similarly, Goddess Laxmi represents money. Vikram Seth, thus, compares two goddesses it reveals Hindu culture:

“‘In fact’, he ruminated ‘though not admitted in our Hindu society, lady is more excited than man as a rule. I will have to say. That is why there should not be too much difference. So that lady can cool down with man.” (7.18-417)

Lata is interested in reading books like Egyptian Mythology. Arun used to listen Churchills speeches on the radio during the war and murmur, “Good old Winnie!’ Churchill loathed Indians and made no secret of it, and spoke with contempt of Gandhi, a far greater man than he could ever aspire to be; and Varun regarded Churchill with a visceral hatred” (7.5-378). There are number of characters in the novel who crossed the Indian borders for different purposes. These characters are also influenced by western ideas, Amit is very much interested in western culture, who comes back in India from England. The novelist, thus presents these characters representing transnationality. It can be said as, “Amit had returned from England, ‘Laden with laurels’ as he put it-on speaking to him almost exclusively in English” (7.11-416).
The Calcutta based managing agencies such as Bentsen Pryce managed the bulk of the foreign trade of India. The managing agencies typically owned controlling intersects in the actual manufacturing companies that operated the factories and supervised them all from the Calcutta head office:

“Almost without exception these agencies were still owned by the British, and almost without exception the executive officers of the managing agencies near Dalhousie square— the commercial heart of Calcutta— were white. Final control lay with the directors in the London office and the shareholders in England— but they were usually content to leave things to the Calcutta head office so long as the profits kept flowing in.” (7.20-421)

These number of factories and agencies and its ownership reveal their impact and influence over Indian social, trade and commerce. All these reflect a kind of transnationality in the novel. It is also seen in the reference to Hitler and Napoleon and Subhash Chandra Bose. Mr. Ganguly began to walk in Varanda to talk about this great man Hitler: chewing his thoughts like, cut the head begun the kind of monologue that Mr. Justice Chatterji had heard from him twice before:

“how even Napoleon (another great Bengali hero) did not come up to Hitlerian standards, how Hitler had helped Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose when he wanted to fight the dreadful British, how atavistic and admirable a force the Indo-Germanic bond was, and how terrible it was that the Germans and the British would within a month be officially, terminating the state of war that had existed between them since 1939.” (7.36-466)

The Indians fought against the British Government on different levels. The struggle by Indian socialists, politicians compelled the British Government to quit India. Subhash Chandra Bose had fled to German and Japan and established the Indian National Army. This effort of Subhash Chandra Bose, later on influenced number of Indians in Germany and Japan. Transnationality is reflected through these national as well as international activities:
“...the mad deification of the patriot Subhash Bose who had fled to Germany and Japan and later established the Indian National Army to fight the British; the eulogization of Hitler and Fascism and violence; the denigration of all things British or tainted with ‘pseudo British liberalism; and resentment bordering on contempt for the sly milksoop Gandhi dispossessed Bose of the presidetship of the Congress Party which who had won by election many years before. Netaji Subhash Chandra was a Bengali, and Mrs. Justice Chatterji was certainly as proud of being a Bengali as of being an Indian, but he-like his father. Old Mr. Chatterji- was profoundly grateful that the likes of Subhash Bose had never succeeded in ruling the country.” (7.36-467)

The Indians were influenced by the Britishers and their language, English. Even the villagers would understand English language. They believed that speaking and using English language makes a kind of impression. This impact thus, creates a kind of transnationality.

Another new village, Salimpur is introduced by the novelist, the youngsters from different social groups are Maan, Pran, Firoz and Imtiyaz are friends from childhood. The villagers are described as, “what was he doing anyway in this doltish place so far away from all civilization – among suspicious peasants, illiterate and unelectrified, who knew nothing better than stare at strangers” (8.3-506). Vikram Seth creates a complete picture of Indian traditional village by presenting all factors, parts of Indian traditional social life. There are many communities living together having their separate parts, wells, temples, mosques. The four hundred families obtained their family water well. There are three water wells:

“...The Muslim well, which stood in an open space near a neem tree. The caste Hindu well, which stood in an open space near a pipal tree, and the outcaste or untouchable well, which stood at the very edge of the village among a dense cluster of mud huts, not from a tanning pit.” (8.7-520)
Mrs. Mehra arrived in Delhi in search of a boy for Lata-for her marriage. Kalpana Gaur says that when she was in Lahore we would get up every morning at five and all of them from her father. In the talk between Mrs. Rupa Mehra and Kalpana, the purpose of Mrs. Mehra is revealed, “It is Lata, said Mrs. Rupa Mehra in a rush. I want you to find her a boy at once a suitable boy” (9.1-548). In the morning, Mrs. Rupa Mehra woke up even before the Gaurs to chant in a soft voice her verses from the Bhagwad Gita. Mrs. Mehta observes six boys for Lata Robert Bruce and the Spider is the first. Haresh Khanna, another character is introduced who comes from other nation, Mrs. Mason comes to see Mrs. Mehra, “She was an Anglo-Indian woman of seventy five, who lived with her middle aged unmarried daughter” (9.9-568). Lata rejects Haresh as he is not a westernized boy. He was about to say something more, but decided against it, “Au revoir, then, he said smiling. He had taken a few French lessons in England” (9.14-582). Here is a kind of transnationality as the characters in this novel are foreign return, and learned not only English but French language also. Lata likes English poems and Persian and Sanskrit languages. The youngsters, like Tahir Ahmed Khan, Netaji and others, talked to SDO, regarding different problems of the people. In the eleventh part judiciary process is described; the sanction of zamindari abolition bill was passed. The Justice and advocates took part in this decision. In the Pul Mela celebration the characters take name of God, “Hare Ram, Hare Ram, Ram, Ram Hare Hare. Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna, Krishna, Hare Hare.” …Gopala, Gopala, make me yours- I am the sinner, you are the merciful one” (11.8-708). Dipankar is another character who represents Hindu culture. An old man, a Brahmin, with a caste mark on his forehead, kept up a load commentary to the splash of the hoarse. The event in the epic Ramayana, the meeting of Ram and Bharat is described as: O Ganga! O Yamuna; cried the old man, cupping his hands towards the sun and reciting in Sanskrit. The song in Sanskrit is:

“O Ganga ! O Yamuna !

Godavari, Saraswati !

Narmada, Indus, Kaveri,

Be Manifest in these writers.” (11.10-713)
They sang a song of Krishna and Radha. The Sanaki Baba is described, reciting. “Om, Om, Om. Lord is ocean of the bliss and I am his drop. Lord is ocean of love and I am part and parcel of it. I am part and parcel of Lord.” (11.16-726) Mrs. Rupa Mehra takes care of Haresh, who has a degree from England. Kabir takes interest in pul-mela, “What could Kabir have been doing down by the pul-mela-and as a volunteer- at a Hindu festival (12.2-765).

Vikram Seth, thus, focuses on all the parts of Indian traditional society which creates a complete picture of Indian rural life. India is known for multi-cultural community. People belonged to different caste and religious groups. There is unity in diversity. The celebration of Moharrum reflects Muslim culture in the novel. Nawab Sahib and other young Muslim took part in Moharrum celebration. The Muslim and Hindu communities came together for the passing of Zamindar Bill. Begum Abida Khan reads the Hindi version of Zamindari Bill:

“Obscure words are being dug out of old religious texts and being reburied in our modern language. It is a plot of the religious fundamentalists who hate anything to do with Islam, even Arabic or Persian words. That the common people of Brahmpur have used for hundreds of years.” (14.27-1018)

The performance of religions and cultural activity, Ramlila reflects Indian traditional society. The characters discuss about Ramayana based on Ramcharitmanas of Tulsidas and Ramayana of Valmik. The cultural aspect is seen in the performance of Ramlila. And the sweepers want the Ramlila to continue after Rama’s return to Ayodhya and his meeting with Bharat and the coronation. Maan asked regarding it:

“Oh, you know, they style themselves, Valmiki’s these days, and they say that Valmiki’s, Ramayana, which goes on and on about all these episodes, is the true text of the Ramayana, said old Mrs. Tandon just trouble making.” (15.5-1036)

Veena said about Ramlila. “But the Ramlila has always been based on the Ramcharitmanas of Tulsidas, not Valmiki’s Ramayana.” Another character Bibbo says about Dagh Sahib and the Muslim festival, Moharrum, they discuss about the
religious performance like Eid and Moharrum “‘No, no’ said Bibbo, startled. Dagh Sahib is a Hindu; that would never do. Id, yes Moharram - how would that be possible? It is different matter altogether” (15.6-1043). The political leaders referred features of Muslim life after independence and post-partition. In Pakistan, the political leaders are discussing about Muslim culture, and way of life. When the Nawab sahib thought about Pakistan, it was about West Pakistan. Many of his old friends were there, many of his relatives, many of the places of which he had warm recollections:

“That Jinnah should have early died in the first year of Pakistan’s life, and Liyaqat Ali, in its fifth was no happy augury for a country that needed more than anything else, experience in its leadership and moderation in its polity, and appeared now to be bereft of both.”

(15.17.1073)

The excellent example of Indian culture is the celebration of Karwa Chauth, Indian women pray for the health and long life of their husband. Vikram Seth now describes Hindu festival of woman for the health, and security of husband, Karwa Chauth, the culture of Hindu traditional woman strictly follow, “Savita was fasting until moonrise for her husband’s health and longevity, and touching a needle, even inadvertently, on that day would be disastrous.” (15.17-1073)

The events of culture in the Hindu festive season was almost over but for Brahmpur one festival observed much more devotedly here than almost anywhere in India, that of Kartik Pornima, remained. The full moon of Kartik brings to an end one of the three especially sacred months for bathing, and since Brahmpur lies on the holiest river of all many pious people observe their daily dip throughout the month, eat their single meal, worship the Tulsi plant and hang lamps souls across the sky. As the Purana’s say, “What fruit was obtained in the Perfect Age by doing austerities for one hundred years, all that is obtained by a bath in the Five Rivers during the month of Kartik” (15.20-1080). A seventeenth century commentator on the Mahabharata wrote about Brahma’s festival which is celebrated by all and is held in autumn when the corn has begun to grow. There is another event in Hindu culture, which is celebrated in Hindu Kartik month. Perhaps the strong observance of the festival in Brahmpur is a residue of the time when Brahma was worshipped here too, in his own
city, as a bhakti god, a god of personal devotion, before he was displaced in this role by Shiva or by Vishnu in one or other of the incarnations. Mrs. Kapoor celebrates Janmashtami bear witness to his presence as Krishna and his presence as Rama is unmistakable not only during Ramnavami early in the year but during the nine nights culminating in Dassera, when Brahmpur is a part of Rama worship in a sea of Goddess worship that extends from Bengal to Gujarat. The modern life is influenced by various events in Puranas... There are number of gods and Goddesses, and festivals, and celebrations of their events. We go to a temple to be blessed by our chosen deity before a journey, and have our account books sanctified by Kali or Saraswati:

“Perhaps it was because unlike Shiva or Rama or Krishna or Durga or Kali- he was never associated with youth or beauty or terror, those well springs of personal devotion. ...At Diwali, the words shubh-laabh auspicious profit- are seen on the walls of every newly whitewashed shop; while Lakshmi, the presiding goddess, smiles from a poster as she sits on her lotus, serene and beautiful, dispensing gold coins from one of her four arms.” (15.20-1081)

Vikram Seth, in his imaginary town, Brahmpur, says that how all the social groups live together, share the events and celebrations of each other’s customs and traditions. The festival celebrations of each religion reflects cultural elements in the post independence society. Post partition social life is depicted by the novelist.

Transnationalism is reflected as there is relationship between England and India. The Britishers came in India for business. British culture, way of life still is seen in the Indian society. The Britishers made developments in each and every field. Vikram Seth focuses on the cricket matches, in which players from England came in India for playing cricket matches. This border crossing, thus, creates internationality as well as transnationality. Indian boys also participate in the cricket matches organised in the ground of Eden Garden, Calcutta. The English players, crossing the borders of their nation came in India, all the young boys “Amit, Dipankar, Humber, Arun, Varun and Pran- went to Eden Gardens” (16.20-1138).
A strong tree, banayan tree, socialist party is also like this India’s beauty and glory in the land of Buddha and Gandhi, of Kabir and Nanak, of Akbar, Ashok the land of the Himalayas and Ganga, the land that belongs equally to all of us, Hindus, Muslims, Sikh and Christian alike. “Better than all the world is this Hindustan, we are its nightingales, it is our rose garden” (17.6-1172). The Muslims had tried through the Alamgiri Masjid Hifazat committee to obtain an injunction against the installation of the profane monolith behind the western wall, but not to avail. Even among the Hindus, however, there were some who felt that the Linga should be left near the cremation Ghat for the Puja of Mahadeva.

“The wedding arrangements proceeded with great verve and much conflict. Mrs. Rupa Mehra, Malati, Dr. Krishna Chand Seth and Arun each tried to act as major Domo” (19.6-1333). The morning after the wedding, Haresh suddenly decided over breakfast that since he happened to be in Brahmpur, he should look in on the local Praha factory. The novel, thus describes the complete picture of post independence and post partition Indian society. The novel, in a way, is full of events and incidents that reflect cultural aspects and transnational elements. Through this epic novel, the novelist has successfully introduced a complete picture of real India to the world. Thus, two novels by Vikram Seth have analyzed in the perspective of culture and transnationality. These two elements are reflected in novels, are revealed in this chapter.
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