

Bridging the Self and its Identity Through the Works of Vikram Seth

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Abstract--*Vikram Seth is one of the prominent writers in the modern age. He was born on 20th June, 1952. He is awarded with several titles such as Padma Shri, Sahitya Academy Award, Pravasi Bharatiya Samman, WH Smith Literary Award and Crossword Book Award. His work portrays an Indian canon which vividly describes the beauty of the post-independence period. The works of Vikram Seth mainly deal with the idea of the search of self-identity. The major works of Vikram Seth are A Suitable Boy, The Golden Gate, An Equal Music, Mapping and others; which majorly focus on the self and its search for true identity through dislocation. The plot contains different perspectives and ideologies. His works deals with the multiple framework of Seth's artistry dealing with Indian culture, religion, family life, and post-colonial politics. The theories of the post-colonial attitude are also drawn from different perspectives like history, psychology, anthropology, political science, philosophy and sociology. Seth's interpretation of life is real and voluptuous. His works are more interesting because of his presence as narrator throughout this work. The paper highlights some of the major objectives such as institution of marriage, love and romance, moral and ethics; and the socio-economic propagations which also deals with the search of self-identity and individuality, through a post-colonialism aspect. Post-colonialism is a historic era which depicts the consequences of the life and the circumstances of the people after colonialism. Seth's works help in analyzing the enthralling facets of woman. Also, it helps to find the nature and temperament of it.*

Key words--*colonization, dislocation, individuality, culture, self-identity*

I. INTRODUCTION

In society gender plays a collective role. It emits power, status, economy and the vulnerabilities too. And the male prominence is catalogued through the social institutions like education, law and other traditional and as well as religious overtones. And thus it encourages the idea of patriarchy by subjugation of women's interests at the first place. So, in response to these patriarchies the feminist writers protest about Gender Equality.

Marginalization is a major issue customary to the representation of the deceptive image and the double standards of the society. The Indian novels have played a vibrant and energetic representation of the modern civilization. The space provides the new novelist to explore the areas and experiment with different techniques. Vikram Seth, Amitav Ghosh and Salman Rushdie are well known for the experimental approach towards the traditions and ethos.

Sometimes, the realization of self is so dragged out that the awful taste last throughout the life. The realization does not spread across in a short span of time, but it lingers around reminding each second of a monotonous life. The mystery of identifying one's own self lies within inner-self. In true sense, a person can be discovered or recognized by the self only when they sense alienation. The alienation may lead to dreadful effects but

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the reward after the horrifying journey will be always fruitful. The variance of the redundancy of the society may differ but one of the major issues that the patriarchal society imposes is its dominance over the woman. Sociologist Sylvia Walby describes patriarchy as, “a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress, and exploit women” (Giddens. *Sociology*, 473-4).

Post-colonialism carries the prominence of post-independence that deals with the search of self-identity which at the time was under the cover due to colonisation. The novels of Vikram Seth deal with the ideas of post colonialism but the search of self-identity is also emphasized in his works. The chief aim of the paper titled “The Study of Self-Identity in the Major Novels of Vikram Seth with reference to Post-Colonialism” is to study the novels of Vikram Seth through a post-colonial point of view. *Orientalism* by Edward Said, vividly posts the issues of how the European imperial power has put down the colonial subjects and the representation of the fear that is found in the period and which particularly discusses “the dark, the irrational, the other” (Said. *Orientalism*, 1979).

Vikram Seth is one of the prominent writers who was awarded with several titles such as Padma Shri, Sahitya Academy Award, Pravasi Bharatiya Samman, etc. The major works of Vikram Seth are *A Suitable Boy*, *The Golden Gate*, *An Equal Music* which were published in 1993, 1986, and 1999 respectively. The post-colonial attitude towards the major works of Vikram Seth helps to analyze the intensity and the need for the search of identity. His novels help to understand the position with respect to that of in colonial period. The post-colonial comparative study of the major novels of Vikram Seth treats the questions of history, nationalism and identity.

The paper highlights some of the major objectives such as institution of marriage, love and romance, moral and ethics; and the socio-economic propagations which also deals with the search of self-identity through a post-colonialism aspect. Post-colonialism is a historic era which depicts the consequences of the life and the circumstances of the people after the colonialism. The theories of the post-colonial attitude are also drawn from different perspectives like history, psychology, anthropology, political science, philosophy and sociology. Some of the post-colonial works that inspire the approach towards the study of Vikram Seth’s novels with reference to post-colonialism are *Sea of Poppies*, *The Hungry Tides*, *Midnight Children’s Dream*, *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*. Some of the luminary works by Vikram Seth, Shashi Tharoor, Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh, Shashi Deshpande, Githa Hariharan, Vikram Chandra has illuminated the post-colonial literature. The multi-cultural attitude has commingled the culture and the minds that lead to meta-identity. Gayathri Spivak Chakravathy *Other Worlds: Essay in Cultural Politics* (1988), Homi K. Bhabha’s *Nation and Narration* (1990) and *Location of Culture* (1994) deals with the complex issues like nation, nationality, concocted colonial identities. *The Glass Palace* discusses about the cruel politics to which the domestic life is subjected to the discourse.

The novels of Vikram Seth deal with the idea of the search of self-identity. The post-colonial approach towards the study of Vikram Seth’s major novel will help to search the self-identity in a different perspective. It also helps to find the self-identity which gets lost in the struggles of everyday life. It presents a canvass view of the socio behavioral life of the people in the chaotic atmosphere. So, the study of self-identity in the major novels of Vikram Seth will reference to post-colonialism and search the lost self and emphasizes the abiding aspects of the personal individual life. The collection of Seth’s poems was published in the year 1991 “Beastly Tales” is a collection of ten fables in poetry. It is well accepted by every epoch for its popular fable “The Hare and The Tortoise”. In 1992 a

collection of poem “Three Chinese Poets”, translated by Seth describes the ostensible poets, who describe the Buddhist hermit as a Taoist immortal and a Confucian Sage as a historic artifact. “The Frog and the Nightingale” also his work, was published in the year 1994.

All the works of Seth’s poem comprises of female characters in both virtual and abstract forms. The personified female figures also describe the marginalized features that extract the self out of it. In the poem “The Frog and the Nightingale”, the heartless frog convinced the nightingale so that she seeks training, to which the frog volunteered. But the sheer pressure that the frog pounded on nightingale resulted in her death. And the frog called the nightingale ‘stupid’, ‘nervous’ and ‘without originality’, which satisfied his male ego and made him the ‘unrivalled singer’. This shows that the temperament towards the female in the social context.

Seth’s portrayal of the feminine figure draws a comparison with that of the other critical writers like Khushwant Singh, Jhumpa Lahiri, Charles Dickens and Jane Austen. Vikram Seth tries to depict the female characters by unrevealing the traditionalist and the modified approach, which comes with different time and place. His decantation of the women pre and post independence is remarkable. After the independence the Indian Constitution was shaped after the British Constitution by Magna Carta, which ensures the right to equality- a Fundamental Right.

Seth’s also works depicts the generation gap in the India after independence. The best example we can find is the conversation between Lata and Mr. Sahgal which portrays the patriarchy in post-independence Indian society; where the adolescence girl Lata is being forced by her Mousaji to apprehend the identity that she did not wish for.

“I know you are a lipstick girl. Do you want some lipstick?” said Mr. Sahgal, moving forward along the bed.

‘No -’ cried Lata. ‘I don’t – Mousaji – please stop this -’

‘It is so hot – I must take off this dressing gown’.

‘No!’ Lata wanted to shout, but found she couldn’t. ‘Don’t, please, Mousaji. I – I’ll shout- my mother is a light sleeper – go away – go away- Ma – Ma -’

The clock chimed one.

Mr.Sahgal’s mouth opened. He said nothing for a moment. Then he sighed.” (Boy.672)

Even prior to Independence women actively took part in various reforms and rallies and had played an pivotal role in the path of freedom. Everybody wants a perfect wife in an ideal home. The wronged men of the society have been portrayed with exploring the extremities that many righteous wives have to suffer. Similarly, Lata is one of the major protagonists of Seth’s novel, *A Suitable Boy* which is an exact depiction of ever-increasing generation gap in post Independent India. Lata during her graduation days in college fell in love with a Muslim boy named Kabir Durrani. The love between the two of them points towards the mounting of the cultural lag. Lata was in no mood for an arranged marriage which leads to many feud and disturbance in the family. Indian people desire and prefer homey boys because of their value in farming activities which tend to be higher yielding in course of time. Preferably after marriage, a boy continues to reside with his parents and sustains them as they grow old.

To its contrast, the girl's family is drained out for the marriage. Because a fair dowry accompanies the girl to the family she steps into. But now a days, the mentality that the Indian society possessed, has changed in the course of time. The change is placed in the cultural pattern which is followed by a real time. The real time here accomplishes the love, passion and the sexual power that is being sacrificed out of obligation to the compulsions of the everyday existence. Similarly, Seth's justification of Lata's marriage in *A Suitable Boy* portrayed as an accomplishment than the sprout of love. Hence, Lata marriage to a man other than the one she loves justifies that she had swapped for the tranquility of optimism.

"Lata had alternated between serene optimism and terrifying attacks of uncertainty for the last Week. After the civil ceremony was over, she felt calm and almost happy, and grew fond for Haresh than before. From time to time, he had smiled at her as if he knew exactly when she had most needed reassurance." (Boy.1519)

Seth's novel *An Equal Music* is about a modern musician Julia, the protagonist and her love tale with her lover and their separation thereafter. Julia is a free spirited woman who is constantly provided with male company. The companionship is justified by in part of her by Seth even after her separation with her lover. "I had slept with other woman before, and she Had had a boyfriend before once, but I was her First love and she was mine. Nor have I ever been in love since. But then I have never fallen out of love with her- with her". (Music.83)

The quick justification and criticism to the character is never welcomed by her or nor Seth. Thus, it is clearly understood by Seth's depiction that he never adds false colors to his female characters who to him possess a great originality. "I'm not a mouse or a tigress, she thought, I'm a hedgehog." (Boy. 164)

The conditions of Islamic women are also described in *An Equal Music*. Which expresses that the interests and the situation of them where they have no voice of their own; they are strangled by the demands and opinions of their husband or the male dominance. The women leads a life of ignorance and darkness, they are even out of the education which alienates. Illiteracy and imminence cut them from the outer world and it gets far away from their reach. The patriarchy and dominance is vividly portrayed in the novel. Seth's also portrayed the women conditions in the post-independence. The family clustered women are often focus of his works. The patriarchy heads like Mahesh Kapoor and the Nawab (Sahib of Baitar) -the heads of the family, are defined by the space encapsulated by the domestic ideals which also created a significant role and space between the male and the female.

So the condition of the Islamic women and the lower caste women were like that of the Kachheru's wife. She was a wife of lower caste man, who was a caretaker of Rasheed's grandfather's estates. The caste they belong to, was 'Chamar' and were marginalized due to the class and caste they belonged to- "the village into which she had been born and village into which she had married". (Boy. 605) shows the limitation of Rudhia (Kachheru's wife). She was confined to household chores like bringing chapattis, buttermilk and chilies for her husband who works in the fields. She leads a dull life like that of a caged. She was detached from the charm and the attractions of life.

The lack of education, traditions, social prejudices and lack of awareness was not destined for the marginalized. The women were meant to keep the way so that they will be away from the light of charm, respect and openness. To the women, the liberty of choosing their partners was forbidden. 'You too will marry a boy I choose', said Mrs. Rupa Mehra firmly to her younger daughter. (Boy 3). Thus, it showcases the position of the youngster's dependence and approval of parents and their respective families.

All of Seth's works are very different from each other and belongs to different genres. From fables to novel written in verse to the bulkiest novel, all focuses on different perspective of the Indian society and its prejudices. Seth's multi- façade and multi- cultural aspects evidently a detailed fact that speaks for the characters. He has given a voice to the voiceless and a life of honor for the desecrated.

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