

Diasporic love and identity: the case of displaced during the Partition

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Abstract

Partition in a wider term refers to the event associated with globalisation due to technological or political changes. Diasporas plays an important role when it comes to promote the native culture globally. To which Vikram Seth's contribution is highly regarded, his wide variety of topics such as music, travel, work environment, family and love propelled him to the public limelight. Works of his, *The Golden Gate*, *A Suitable Boy*, *An Equal Music* presents the same argument of love and marriage to discover the true identity of the characters. The search for love, affection, sense of belongingness and self realisation rules his arguments in his works. Seth also tried to speculate the subject in a more personal way to understand the belief system of the characters due to displacement. To sketch sensitive topics like homo-sexuality, inter-religious marriage in the contemporary times helps to evaluate the different meaning of love. The constant stress on adapting the painful subject like loss of child or the way one comes from the so called liberal branch of society are the truths Seth wants to sincerely focus in his works. The paper tries to give an explanation to the abandoned human being who ties to fill the emptiness but it leads to nothing but more emptiness. It also speculates the characters of Seth's who constantly lives in a twisted society trying to make everything right but fails. The paper will try to untangle the twister of the predicated terrified decisions of the characters of their own priorities and becoming vulnerable to the inflection of affinities.

Keywords: displacement, love, sexuality, adaptation, partition

1. Introduction

Partition is a very vast and a political term in contrast to the paper's title 'Diasporic love and identity: the case of displaced during the Partition' as it basically deal with the theme of love. But it is important to understand the phases of love and its discourse at the times of revolutionized period of the state. The change in love occurs mainly through displacement due to various reasons and partition is one of the great causes among all. To understand the colours of love during the partition due to political and personal aspect Vikram Seth has made it easier for all of the audience through his works.

Vikram Seth an eminent persona whose works deals with the search for love, affection, sense of belongingness and self realisation in the themes of music, travel, work environment, family and marriage. His major novels *A Suitable Boy*, *The Golden Gate* and *An Equal Music* showcase his approach towards love with respect to social as well as personal context. The love according to Seth is not a romantic and a chivalry one to him aesthetic love is an amalgamation of feeling for another person or self irrespective of social junctures. He is also focused on the affaires that generally occur before and after marriage. According to him marriage should not be a bondage which leads to illicit ventures it should be a chance to enhance the person and a mode of liberation of the self. In point of Namita Gokhale view Vikram Seth is an international artist who should be intuited more for his works and to support her idea she also commented that, "a writer about human beings, not as a peddler of Indian exotica . . . deeply rooted in his specific Indian identity, Vikram Seth is yet a citizen of the world in the best sense . . . His genius should be evaluated in his control over his material, and in creating a credible world-in-itself which he can co-habit and explore" (Prasad. 183).

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The three major novels of Seth not only depicts the theme of love and marriage but it also focuses on the recognizing a positive aspect of the culture under an ongoing change towards racial overtones. In all three novels it can be seen how Seth's characters encounter their love but due to social obligation they have had to let it go. But in the journey towards the search of love the characters also comes across their lost self which eventually lead them to live a life of contentment even though they horribly fails at love. His works are a caracoles of feelings which runs high on the mount of excitement as the characters are not finite about their decision and the twists and turns makes the reader to endeavour more of it for a better understanding.

In the diasporic works there is always a conflict between acceptance and healing from overcoming through the experience of coping in the transcultural society. To which Seth has successfully established relationship coming in terms with the traumatic past memories to that of the dialogic future.

Some of the works that inspire the approach towards the study of Vikram Seth's novels with reference to a diasporic point of view 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 also illuminated the partition literature. The multi-cultural attitude has commingled the culture and the minds that lead to the search of meta-identity. Gayathri Spivak Chakravathy *Other Worlds: Essay in Cultural Politics* (1988), Homi K. Babha's *Nation and Narration* (1990) and *Location of Culture* (1994) deals with the complex issues like nation, nationality, concocted colonial identities with respect to the cruel politics of the domestic life of the subjected discourse. Similarly according to Bikhu Pareikh's idea of partition is that, "the Indian migrant can share and co-exist in several homes simultaneously, and therefore distances need not necessarily lead to sense of fragmentation and loss". (Prasad. 176). It gives the idea that the rootlessness and alienation are due to geographical displacement which is also a challenge to traditional view point of adjustment and settlement.

Seth being an omniscient character gives his comments which help the reader to understand the relationship of the character's mental and emotional attitudes. Seth's understanding of the intercultural mobility is exemplary which is also seen in his works. He has lived in three different cultural continents experience lot of cross-cultural knowledge which also gives an understanding of his literary works. To which Seth adds, "I have been quartered between California, China, India and England". (Gupta. 8). His understanding and looking into the different culture helps to understand the essence of post-partition works. To enjoy Seth's work one needs to be interested and patient novice than just a mere observer or a passerby. According to Seth's ideology his works carried a lot of challenges and confrontations though he enjoys in his diverse, imaginary places and themes succumbing to reality, acing to his theory he commented that, "I know from an editor's point of view or a publisher's point of view it's easier to slot me into a particular niche. But I know that I would be bored unless I wrote a book that in some sense was a challenge. And this might mean I vary the form by writing a poem or a play or a novel. Or set the stories in different countries or write in the first person as opposed to the third or in the present tense as opposed to the past or a very long novel as opposed to a short one". (Mohanty. 248)

The description of the characters can be categorised through their interpersonal relationships and through other's point of view rather than their own experiences and self-expressiveness. The characters of his novel are drawn to a basic desire of love which craves them for love and to be loved. The caving of love often ends up in sexual containment which jeopardise the situation more and leads the characters in a touselled position.

The aim of this paper is to focus on the primary aspects of love which is very evident in Vikarm Seth's *A Suitable Boy* the novel is a volcano of emotions which allows us to analyse the thematic concept of the novel in terms of partition literature. That is also a major attribute of it towards the novel to look into it as a diasporic study.

The diasporic study may change the idea of restricted and bounded love because there are many love politics in this novel due to cultural, religious and social customs. So to focus on each character of the novel is the major aspect of this paper which will allow the reader to have a clear perspective of the characters and their laps of judgements regarding their love lives. Regarding the insights of diasporic identity and ethnicity Stuart Hall comments that : "Diaspora does not refers as to those scattered tribes whose identity can only be secured in relation to some scared homeland to which they must at all coat return, even if it means pushing other people into the sear. This is the old, the imperializing, and the hegemonizing form of ethnicity. The Diaspora experience as I intend it here is defined not by essence or purity. But by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of identity which lives with and through, not despite difference by hybridity. Disopric identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves and through transformation and difference." (Hall 31)

A Suitable Boy is a bulky novel of nearly 1400 pages which not only draw Seth into the limelight but also gained him immense criticism. The novel is recently adapted into a mini series in the year 2020 directed by Mira

Nair and after two and an half decade put Vikram Seth's idea of love a question mark again. The novel published in the year 1993 deals with the lives of the people after partition. The novel gives a pictorial view of the whole post- independent period and the politics of the aftermath. The novel is about four families Mehra's, Kapoors, Khans and Chatterjis intertwined with relation to one another through the bond of marriage and friendship. But in the meanwhile its main objective is to search a 'suitable boy', suitor for Lata, Mrs. Rupa Mehra's youngest daughter. So the search of the suitable boy also rummages around to find the self of the characters in the novel. The classic search for a suitable boy is the main objective of the novel as Mrs. Mehra focuses on a good Khatri boy matching to their social status will be the suitable suitor for Lata. This attitude of her represents the social dynamics of the post independent era where the suitability is base on social norms rather than love.

But in the case of Savita, Mrs. Rupa Mehra's eldest daughter who got married to Pran Kapoor the eldest son of Mr. Mahesh Kapoor is an example of the arrange marriage that is a profound tradition in Indian marriages. The marriage reflects the custom and culture of the Indian society that is deeply rooted in the mentality of Indian people. So the arrange marriage is a symbol of approval and consent of the elder's of the family members. Thus there are parameters set by the elderly which must suit the bride and bridegroom both with also the like and the willingness of both the families to the concepts like same caste, religion, culture and social status. Indian culture and traditions is the hierarchal embankment of the ancient values and ethics so there is no breakthrough. And the religious context does not allow draining its values on cosmopolitanism. Love marriages are not permissible unless there is a religious conduct. So the religion in Indian marriage plays an important role in an effective happy marriage life, but after partition when the nationalist feeling running so high affected the people mentally, physically and emotionally. So it also becomes important for the families to share the same custom and cultural understanding which will help the families to value each others rituals and nuptials.

Thus partition literature also helps to understanding of Lata's detachment from Kabir Durrani whom she loves and preferably a good match for her. The religious context was a barrier in their love and Lata very discreetly detach herself from Kabir by justifying herself that, "Even now I almost feel it's he who left me and I can't bear it" (1332). Taking into some considerate suggestions like that of Caryl Campbell who says: "Lata, a Hindu knows that she cannot marry a Muslim, and she also realizes or she persuades herself, perhaps with more prescience that is entirely convincing that romantic love is not necessarily the best prelude to marriage" (77-80). And David Myers comments that, "Another reason for the rejection of Kabir by Lata. It is her rejection of passion from her life. She selects Haresh because he was not only a hard working, uncouth, intelligent and pusher but also a symbol of a new India ambitious programmatic anti-snobish, working class, self made Indian man" (84). So accordingly Lata dejection of Kabir was more of a social discreet rather than a personal one. It can also be said that the gamut of the socio-cultural aspect compels the characters' live to oscillate between the personal attributes and cultural biasness.

When her family came to know about the relationship of Lata and Kabir, Lata's sister Savita was supportive of her sister but she also make her aware about the consequences of her relationship which her brother in law Pran Kapoor also supported. But to Mrs. Rupa Mehera the relationship of Lata with Kabir was not acceptable and she tried her best to sever their relationship by parting both them away, leading Lata to Kolkata where a new aspect of love awaits her in form of Amit Chatterji.

The character of Lata is a portrayal of a subjugated young girl whose choices are biased due to post-independence scenario. Her love for Kabir was instinctual which was not driven by her mother's aspirations but her social obligation created a barrier which resulted in her falling out of the relationship. And if the case of Amit Chatterji is considered she was attracted to him as he is represented as the man of new social class the cosmopolitan. She felt a new vibe around him but was not ready to adapt the new socio class that he shares. So she lets her mother Mrs. Mehra to search a suitable boy for her.

The search of suitable match is an epitome of power which Mrs. Mehra posses over her daughter Lata. The novel begins with a power politics of mother over her daughter "You too will marry a boy I choose." (Seth.1) where she uses her love as a leverage to make Lata agree to her decision. But to contrast Lata seems quite adamant and her self-love overpowers the deal that her mother offers and her reply 'Hmm' was enough to set her mother off. She not only tries to control the life of Lata but also at the end of the novel she ventures for a suitable girl for her younger son Varun that's shows her overpowering and poignant reminder of her attitude. It is not only Mrs. Rupa Mehra but also other motherly figures like Mrs. Kapoor and Savita are keenly described by Seth to show the contrast of the love for their children are quiet evidently and surpasses the other motherly figures like Meenakshi Chatterji and Pavtira Seth.

The search of Mrs. Mehra resulted in coming across Haresh Mehta a proper Khatri boy who comes from a good family, well educated and had a good livelihood. Lata finds him boring at the beginning but he was the

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man who owes up to his verbal argument with Lata and also made her feel secure. He even stopped eating paan (betel leaves) because to Lata chewing paan was not appealing. It is important to understand the down to earth mentality of Haresh because it changes the dynamics of the whole novel because to understand Lata's decision. Kabir who was good-looking and the innocent love of Lata's refuses her proposal of eloping because he first wanted to be established without understanding Lata's situation "Receiving no response, she finally gave up. For once, she hardly talked to the other passenger. Lata kept quiet. She looked out of the train window till it became completely dark. She felt heartbroken and humiliated. She was sick of her mother, and of Kabir, and of the mess that was life." (Seth. 212) And on the other hand Amit Chatterji who uses Lata as one of his muse to fulfill his wanton desires. But in case of Haresh the love was pure and sacred as nuptials.

Lata on comparing the three suitable candidates Kabir, Amit and Haresh, Haresh is in the least suitable but she never dislikes him. According to her Haresh exhibits the excellent quality of being a possible suitor rather than the other two and he is also has the consent of Mrs. Mehra. And she eventually accept the fact that she will in times will fall for Haresh as he is supportive and makes her feel comfortable which also shows she will enjoy a healthy and a stable married life. In the antithesis to the novel's theme Lata's best friend Malati is a contrastingly opposite to Lata's character. She is a free spirited girl who involves in relationship with whatever turns her fancy which also resulted in having a relation with a married man. So here Seth shows the contrast to show the theme of the novel which also stands as a distinctive attribute of Indian cultural and traditional aspects.

Another important character that Seth depicts is of Maan Kapoor, youngest son of Mr. Mahesh Kapoor. Maan's inclination towards his personal life is quite interesting for a reader as it project a wide spectrum of love. His relationship with his fiancée whom he never paid attention to, can be considered as a diplomatic relation arranged by his family to fulfil their social status. His relationship with Firoz Khan is also imprecise, the friendship they shares is platonic but the carcass touch and impetuous love is questionable. Man's fantasy for older women is from ages and Seth give a vivid delineate of this relation through the relationship of Maan and Saeeda Begum and Varun and Kalpan's amusements.

The very nearness of Saeeda Bai in these last few minutes, delightful as it had been, now created a small problem for Mann. Before he got up to change places with her he had to make a slight adjustment to his clothing in order not to let her see how aroused he was. But when he sat down again it seemed to him that Saeeda Bai was more amused than ever. She's a real sitam- zareef, he thought to himself- a tyrant with a smile. (143-144)

Seth here tries to focus on the sexual orientation of a person being drawn to the same sex but is quite overwhelmed about the social context and to divert those feeling it is directed and draws towards an older woman in contrast to meant his sexual desires. In the diasporic study of Seth's novel it is quite fascinating to understand the people's position after the partition. The riots that takes place during the Ramanavami and Eid (Hindu- Muslim riot) was due to the partition and the indifferences of people to understand each other also lead to an interesting turn towards Maan's characteristics where Maan and Firoz took sheltered in Veena's (Maan's elder sister) house to be saved from the fiery and agitated communal people trying to prove religious over humanity. And the protection they got in Veena's house was because Veena's husband was on the Ramlila committee which is a representation of Hinduism and no one will attack their house.

He and Firoz ran for their lives. The mob was still dangerous. It was in effect leadless for a few minutes and uncertain what to do, but it soon regrouped and, feeling cheated of its prey, moved along the alleys to hunt for more.

'I'll try to get back to the Imambara,' said Firoz.

'It's too late now,' said Maan. 'You're cut off, and you don't know this area. Stay with me now. We're going to my sister's. Her husband's on Ramlila Committee, no one will attack their house.' (1205)

Because another aspect of this event is remarkable which showcase the diasporic identity and attitude of people towards the displaced ones. The bloody and deadly riots between Hindus and Muslim are a symbol of the lack cognitive dissonance. The partition has led to an overnight displacement of millions of people on both sides of borders leaving their home and their relations behind resulting them to become refugees in a new land. So when the Nawab of Baitar mentioned his brother, he inadvertently mentioned the books his brother took with him to Pakistan to which Veena's mother-in-law's reaction was torrid because to her the partition was not an easy reminisce "At the word Pakistan, Veena's mother-in-law, withered old Mrs Tandon, flinched. Three years ago, her whole family had had to flee the blood and flames and unforgettable terror of Lahore. They had been wealthy, 'propertied' people, but almost everything they had owned was lost, and they had been lucky to escape with their lives. Her son Kedarnath, Veena's husband, still had scars on his hands from an attack by rioters on his refugee convoy. Several of their friends had been butchered". (21)

Makarand Paranjape anticipates that “inauthenticity” of Indo-Anglian writers focuses on the issues of location which helps to establish and claims that it is a representation of governance by the West’s on Orientals “they offer a certain kind of representation of India which is governed by the West’s tastes, images, specifications and likings Behind such a compromise, infiltration and cooptation is the writer’s location ideological, political, cultural and of course, geographical.” (Paranjape.65)

So it is important to understand the situation of Maan and Firoz because the friends whose platonic friendship leads them to diving into deadly situation latter resulted in Firoz being stabbed by Maan. The religious drawback was never a barrier in the Kapoor’s and Khan’s friendship but the love did create a fence to it. Maan’s love for Saeeda Begum resulted in his arrogance which shaped into a misunderstanding between him and Firoz resulting in stabbing Firoz.

The other relationships in the novels were also ambiguous and twisted after partition as it created the complexity of acceptance towards legitimacy. Many illicit relations are portrayed by Seth to make the audience understand the intricacy of the changing period. One of the examples is of Billy Irani and Meenakshi Chatterji, the wife of Arun Mehra eldest son of Mrs. Rupa Mehra, is a portrayal of a liberated modern woman. Both Billy and Meenakshi were in a relationship with their partners but still they were sexual engrossed towards each other making it an illicit affair. Their relationship was trivial and was meant only for amusement. But it became a serious problem when Meenakshi got pregnant with Billy’s child and had to name it Arun’s. Her self-love imposed herself to abort the child because she can not come to the terms with her illicit relationship. Similarly in case of Mr. Khan who also had a relationship with Saeeda Bai refuse to acknowledge her and accept her in public as she was a courtesan. Their daughter Tasneem is always represented as the sheltered younger sister of Saeeda Bai rather than her daughter. The illicit relationships here show the uncertainty of human’s relationship with its own and its partner. The love which is considered to be an escape from the chaos here resulted in the confusion itself. The loss of understanding self and to commit into a relationship is one of the chief effects of diasporic study. The detachments all the characters to face the truth in the novel is the result of displacement from their original grounds leading them to compromise their lives and making it more penitent.

Seth’s portrayal of arrange marriages with contrast to inter-religious marriage in the contemporary times has helped into understanding and evaluating the different meaning of love. He also showcase the post-independent women attitude towards the society because mainly women in traditional terms are confined to family and its issues. So the novel presents a socio-cultural view of the people after partition and their relationships. The issues and obstacles of an individual followed by the society needs to be tackled which the novel appropriately presents. Thus it requires stability in both social and familial to cope with the mental and physical disabilities to overcome socio-cultural barriers.

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Bio-note

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