

VICTORY OF MARRIAGE AND FAMILY OVER ROMANCE, LOVE, AND PASSION IN THE FICTION OF VIKRAM SETH

Karuna Sharma
Research Scholar
Department of English
Himachal Pradesh University
Summer Hill, Shimla – 5

The objective of this paper is to present Vikram Seth as a versatile writer who has deep insight and understanding of the social issues — romance, love, passion, marriage, and family. For this purpose Vikram Seth's novels *The Golden Gate*, *A Suitable Boy*, and *An Equal Music* have been taken into consideration. Though all the novels are set in the background of three distinct countries and the main purpose of marriage is to have a life partner but Seth has made marriage to have an influential place in the society and to have glorious victory over love, romance, and passion. This brief research will analyse the importance of marriage and family in human life and people's preference for marriage and family than transient relationship as: romance, love, and passion. Marriage has been proved as an everlasting social relationship and eternal source of bliss and satisfaction than the fleeting and unrealistic relationship of romance and love which is based on lust and infatuation.

Marriage or to choose when and whom to marry is a fundamental human right which is provided without any discrimination on the basis of sex. Marriage is an individual settlement "between two consenting heterosexual adults to be legitimate" (Chowdhry 22 Feb. 2016). On the other hand, romance means a short and exciting relationship between two people who are in love with each other. It usually implies "an expression of one's strong romantic love, or one's deep and strong emotional desire to connect with another person intimately or romantically" ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Romance_\(love\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Romance_(love))). Love is a variety of different feelings, states, and attitudes that ranges from interpersonal affection. It is an emotion of strong affection and personal attachment. Generally, love is "a strong feeling of affection for somebody that you are sexually attracted to" (Hornby 913). Though love and romance seem to a person enchanting, alluring, and fascinating for some time and he wants to be drown fully in the glittering ocean of love but it is only marriage and family that is the permanent source of bliss, stability, and satisfaction in human life.

Love and romance is a kind of state of unreality and dreams and the person who falls in love passionately does not think about anything but about his lover, he has nothing to do with this real world, he weaves his own dreams and remains lost in the world of fantasy. But it is a universal fact that a man cannot live in the world of love and romance forever. He has to face the stark realities of life, bear his responsibilities, and set his feet on the land of reality. A person cannot reside in the world of dreams and love forever which is far away from reality. It is a kind of escape from the world of reality which is full of worry, tension, responsibility, and duty. It is marriage and family which provide basis to human life, and make people to enjoy their life with satisfaction and stability.

Marriage is a mutual contract between two persons who swear wedding vows during their marriage ceremony to live together for the whole life. Marriage is a legal and social relationship

between two heterosexual persons that provides sexual, emotional, and mental satisfaction. It is the beginning of new life full of responsibilities, adjustment, co-operation, tolerance, sacrifices, and bliss. It is a social institution where a man learns many good qualities and virtues as: co-operation, sacrifice, adaptability, tolerance, forgiveness, belongingness, and many other virtues that are essential for the well-being of a person, family, and society. It is a check on one's loitering and illegal physical relationships. It teaches people to live in social limits.

Marriage occupies a considerable place in all the novels of Vikram Seth and it is described as a sacrosanct social ritual. Marriage is a special gift of God to run this world. The main purpose of marriage is “to have companionship, to love each other, to help each other in daily struggles of everyday life ... to have children and be an outlet for sexual expression” (https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php/title=Marriage_in_the_United_States&oldid). Marriage and family are such a kind of relationships that become victorious in the long run of life and leave romance and passion much behind. In *The Golden Gate* John and Janet are passionately in love with each other during their college time but they shed their passion and leave for their own independent ways because they find coming married life full of restrictions, responsibilities, burdens, and a check on their freedom. Later, John understands the value of life partner when he bears the pangs of loneliness and aspires to have someone to talk with him, to love him, and to share his feelings. He gives an advertisement to have a life partner and selects Liz as a suitable girl for him. They fall in love very soon of their first meeting but for some reasons Liz deserts John and marries with Phil. John is left alone and in his loneliness he aspires for Janet, his former lover. John and Janet re-establish their relationship, their romance and love rekindle, and they want to settle their lives together but the almighty God wishes otherwise and Janet meets an accident and dies leaving John to pine alone in this world.

Love and romance is described as a sexual-oriented passion and a means to kill boredom. John and Liz's union and love is the result of an advertisement. John gives an advertisement to have a lover to kill his boredom and selects Liz as his would be life-partner. They feel attracted towards each other at the first sight and fall in love very soon of their first meeting. They enjoy the bliss of physical as well as emotional romance and love about one year. But Liz gets fed up with their romance and passion and finds John over-dominating. She finds that John does not share her interests and hates her dear cat Charlemagne. There is lack of trust or belief in their relationship which is considered as the foundation of any relationship. One day John gets a letter of Phil for Liz and suspects that there is something wrong between Phil and Liz. John grabs Liz from her shoulders and asks about her relationship with Phil. Liz pleads John not to blame her for establishing amoral relationship with Phil because there is nothing illegal between them but John does not believe her and goes away in a fury. It is lack of trust and faith that becomes the root cause of the destruction of the love relationship between Liz and John. Liz finds passion, love, and romance as a transient, shaking, and temporary relationship and takes a heart-shaking relationship to get married with Phil who is already a divorcee. She recognises the futility of passion and love and understands the value of marriage and family to lead a happy and satisfactory life. She selects Phil as her would be husband because she finds him a mature, understanding, sensible, and experienced person. She finds Phil as a good father and hopes him to be a perfect husband also. Liz gets married with Phil within fifteen days of her break-up with John to the astonishment of her family and they set their sail in the cool pond of life. They prove themselves as a perfect couple; they have trust in each other, they share their interests and lead their life happily.

Though John and Liz are head over heels in love but they lose the battle of love because of lack of respect and regard for each other's feelings and interests, lack of trust in each other, and over-dominating nature of John. Liz feels that John wants to occupy her as his personal property and wants her to do as he wishes. Liz does not find John a mature and sensible person and these virtues are very essential to lead married life happily. On the other hand, Liz finds all these virtues in Phil and she prefers mature and practical Phil over volatile and passionate John. Liz prefers the bliss of married life that is the reality of human life and denies to be drowning in the dreamy and unreal world of love and passion which she finds as an illusionistic mirage in the desert. Liz understands very well that a person cannot reside in the unreal world of love and passion forever and he has to face the cruel realities of actual world and rightly decides to settle her life with mature and practical Phil. In this way, marriage and family get victory over romance, love, and passion in *The Golden Gate*.

A Suitable Boy presents “multiple shades of love, such as romance, friendship, lust, love and marriage” (Singh 13). Marriage and family occupies an important place in this epic novel, as one of the themes of this novel is marriage. The novel starts with the marriage of Savita and Pran and ends with the marriage of Lata and Haresh. It presents romance and passion gone awry, and Seth emphasizes that the search should not be for love but for suitable life-mate because man cannot live on love and fresh air. Seth's views about marriage are that “Man without life companion is either god or beast” (Seth *A Suitable Boy* 416) and he has propagated his theory of value of marriage in all the three novels.

Three boys come in Lata's life: Kabir, Amit, and Haresh but she selects Haresh as her would be husband, rejecting Kabir and Amit for one or another reason. Lata and Kabir are university scholars and fall in love passionately. Lata finds herself unable to resist Kabir's “charm and oozing sexuality and falls desperately and passionately in love with him” (Mohanty 175). In the beginning, Lata becomes so blind in Kabir's love that she becomes ready to elope with Kabir, blotting the name and fame of her family. But it is Kabir who asks her to wait for two years till he gets the aim of his life. Later, Lata understands the futility of love and passion and feels that Kabir has occupied her life totally; she cannot think about anything except Kabir and explains to Malati, her friend that “I am not myself when I am with him. I ask myself who is this — this jealous obsessed woman who can't get a man out of her head — why should I suffer like this?” (Seth *A Suitable Boy* 1296).

Lata feels that she is over-powered by Kabir and she has lost her own identity and sense of thinking being fallen in the trap of enchanting spell of love of Kabir. Lata explains to Malati the reason of her decision to enter into marriage with Haresh, renouncing her romantic infatuation for Kabir and tells her that she loses herself when she is with him, she finds herself unable to get him out of her head and mind and she does not want to suffer like this in her whole life. Lata confesses to Malati that “when I'm with Kabir, or even away from him but thinking about him, I become utterly useless for anything. I feel I'm out of control — like a boat heading for the rocks — and I don't want to become a wreck” (Seth *A Suitable Boy* 1298).

Another boy Amit, a poet enters in Lata's life who wants to marry her but Lata finds him unsuitable because she thinks that Amit would not have any time for her, as he will remain busy in his musing and dreamy world of poetry. He lives in the imaginative world of dreams, away from reality and cannot prove himself a responsible husband and father. Lata finds Amit “non serious and a flippant person who would not be able to shoulder the responsibility of a marriage” (Sinha 51). Though Amit likes Lata and proposes her for marriage but rejecting his proposal, Lata selects Haresh as her life-partner, as Haresh seems her more practical, mature, sensible

person whose feet touch the ground of reality, who does not wander in the enchanting world of love or in the world of dreams.

Haresh is the boy who is selected by Mrs. Rupa Mehra for Lata. In spite of being desperately in love with Kabir, Lata does not refuse to marry the boy of her mother's choice, as she knows very well that her marriage with Kabir (a Muslim boy) will not be acceptable neither to her family nor to the rigid Indian society of 1952. She puts her love for Kabir on the stake for the sake of her family, especially her mother. She does not want to do something amoral that would blot the honour of her family. She sacrifices her first love for Kabir, admiration for Amit, and marries with Haresh whom she does not like or love before marriage. Lata finds some qualities in Haresh that were absent in Kabir and Amit. She finds Haresh as a hard-working, ambitious, intelligent, self-made, practical person. Lata's rejection of Kabir signifies her rejection of passion and romance in her life. She takes the rational and sane decision to get married with Haresh and her decision means "the death of romance, the very flower of feeling" (Mohapatra & Nayak 28). Family and Marriage get victory over love, romance, and passion. The flower of Lata and Kabir's love withers before it gets bloomed because of inter-religious differences and Lata's preference for her family.

Haresh has love affair with Simran but the main obstacle in their union is their distinct religions. Haresh belongs to Hindu family, whereas Simran belongs to Sikh community. Her parents do not allow them to get married, so Haresh leaves any hope to get Simran in his life and decides to settle his life with some other girl and selects Lata a suitable girl to sail in the cool pond of life happily. Haresh and Simran both sacrifice their passionate love for the sake of their families and make their mind to establish their own families with someone else — the persons of their parents' choice.

Maan is torridly in love with a courtesan Saeeda Bai despite of being engaged with a suitable girl from Banaras — a girl of his parent's choice. His passion for Saeeda Bai leads Maan to jail for stabbing Firoz unknowingly, as Maan suspects that Firoz might have physical relationship with his beloved. Firoz gets a fatal wound in his stomach during a struggle between Saeeda Bai and Maan and Maan is sent to prison for his crime. Maan's mother could not bear this disgrace and the discomfort Maan has to face in the prison and dies suddenly because of a stroke. Maan's passion and love for a whore give him nothing but disappointment, disgrace, and loss of his dear mother. Maan understands sensibly that the root cause of the loss of his mother is his torrid passion and romance for Saeeda Bai. After this magnificent loss Maan renounces his passion for Saeeda Bai and becomes a mature, sensible, and transformed person. Maan's rapturous emotions for Saeeda Bai leaves him empty-handed, as he has to loss his mother, the reputation of his family, and the Banaras girl engaged with him because the Banaras people do not find Maan suitable for their daughter and deny to marry their daughter with Maan. Again family gets victory over passion, romance, and love, as Maan realises his responsibilities towards his family, especially to his father and becomes ready to bear the responsibilities of his father. Maan is transformed by remorse; "he renounces his passion for Saeeda Bai and bears the guilt of his mother's premature death with a sorrow but profound maturity" (Sinha 68).

Tasneem the daughter of Saeeda Bai has three admirers— Rasheed, her tutor in Arabic; Firoz, the son of Nawab Sahib; and Ishaq Khan, the *sarangi* player. But Tasneem does nothing to get married to one of her lovers because she prefers her family, especially her mother in a disguise of her sister than her love and passion for her admirers. Saeeda Bai feels that the responsibility of Tasneem's marriage is upon her and she herself would choose a suitable boy for her. Saeeda Bai finds all the admirers courting Tasneem unsuitable — Ishaq Khan has no future,

Rasheed is already married and eccentric by nature, and Firoz is associated with Saeeda Bai's past and he is Tasneem's half brother.

All the other women of the novel prefer their family and adjust themselves in their families in all circumstances. Mrs. Rupa Mehra becomes widow in the prime of her youth and she bears the responsibilities of her family and runs it in all odd situations. Savita marries with Pran who is the boy of her mother's choice. Though Pran is asthmatic, gangly, lank, and dark in complexion but Savita does not deny marrying with Pran because she prefers the reputation of her family, especially her mother than anything else. There was no love between Savita and Pran before marriage and this emotion develops between them after being tied in marital bond. Veena and Priya also prefer their family and adjust in the odd circumstances prevailing in their respective families. They suffer in the hands of their mothers-in-law, Veena has to face financial difficulties, Priya has no freedom in her house and when she paces up and down the roof she pictures herself "as a panther in a cage" (Seth *A Suitable Boy* 239). Mrs. Mahesh Kapoor is the incarnation of sacrifice, simplicity, endurance, forgiveness, and kindness. She obeys her husband meekly, respects him as a god, and fasts for him despite of his cruel and dominating nature. She remains busy as a clock-work to run her family smoothly but it is the shock of Maan's going to jail that ends her life due to a sudden and fatal stroke. All the women of the novel except Meenakshi respect and maintain the sanctity of marriage and family and devote themselves for the welfare of their respective families. On the other hand, Meenakshi and Arun get married after falling rapturously and passionately in love but their love also proves transient and they get fed up with their passion shortly. They do not maintain the purity of this everlasting bond and establish extra-marital relationships.

An Equal Music is "an unforgettable tale of love, lost and nearly regained" (Mohanty 153). Though this novel is centred on the ill-fated romantic and passionate love-affair between Michael and Julia, yet it is family and marriage that comes out victorious in the long struggle of love and marriage. Michael a second violinist and Julia a pianist meet in a music school and fall passionately in love within seven days of their meeting. But due to Michael's row with their teacher Carl Kall Michael leaves Vienna as well as Julia and flees to London. Though he tries to have contact with Julia by writing letters and calling her but all goes in vain. He remains empty-handed and aloof to pine for his sudden and wrong decision.

It might be their luck or coincidence that Michael sees Julia in London at red light in an opposite bus after ten years of their separation. Michael does his best to reach at Julia and even hires a cab to pursue the bus in which Julia was travelling but he fails in his efforts. The almighty God gives them another chance to revive their romantic relationship and makes them to meet again in the Wigmore Hall where Michael was playing violin and Julia had gone there to enjoy music. They get astonished seeing each other and their old passion and romance for each other rekindle. They start to meet each other and even establish physical relationship despite of Julia's being married to James, a banker in London and having a seven years old son. Julia continues to meet Michael and establish sexual relationship with Michael whenever they get a chance. She even goes to Vienna and Venice with Michael and other fellow musicians for musical performance and enjoys Michael's company, living as husband and wife. It seems that love and passion would get victory over marriage and family but it does not happen and at last it is marriage and family that emerges victorious in this long run.

In Venice Julia finds herself residing in dual worlds — the world of Michael as a lover and the world of James as a wife and she finds these worlds chafing each other. She finds that she cannot live in these two worlds at the same time. Julia realizes for the best that Michael is her

past and one cannot reside in her past forever. She feels guilty about her deception, treachery, and disloyalty to her loving and caring husband. Julia prefers her family than passionate Michael who seems to overpowering her. “Her choice to opt for her dependable businessman-husband James over the volatile and moody Michael, and her denunciation of passion for family and social order, is a thematic preoccupation once again repeated from *A Suitable Boy* and *The Golden Gate*” (Pandurang 157).

The marriage of Julia and James is not the product of love but this passion develops between them after their marriage. Julia and James lead their married life happily until Michael re-enters Julia’s life. When Julia suffers from hearing loss it is James who stands with her in her odd situation and encourages her to face her problem boldly. He encourages her to continue with her music, makes an arrangement for Julia to attend classes for deaf, and shaves off his moustache so that Julia could lip-read him better. Though Julia diverts from her path for some time and establishes sexual relationship with Michael, yet she does not forget her duties for her husband and son and misses them both during her stay with Michael in Vienna and Venice. Julia, taking a sane decision, leaves Michael to pine alone and returns back to the soothing arms of her loving husband forever. In *An Equal Music* true, companionate, and conjugal love of Julia and James emerges victorious over passionate and sexual love of Michael and Julia.

Michael and Julia enjoy each other’s love and romance in Vienna when they were students and in London when they meet coincidentally after ten years of separation. But their love, romance, passion, and devotion prove feeble and transient against the stable and everlasting bond of marriage and family. Love or passion is such a relationship that is developed because of lust, physical attraction, and infatuation only but marriage is a social relation that does not depend on physical attraction but internal feelings and beauty because physical love is alluring only at the initial stage, later on it dissipates into unnecessary and meaningless rifts. In love and passion a person becomes blind; he loses his sense of understanding and acts blindly regardless of moral and social codes of the society. He wants to get hold of his lover completely and takes his lover as his personal possession. Julia feels that Michael has possessed her life totally, as she finds herself impatient to meet him despite of being married to James. Besides it, she finds herself attracted towards Michael sexually and establishes sexual relationship with Michael. Julia feels herself a prisoner in her mind and later, finding her love for Michael as an act of deception towards her loving and loyal husband, she pines to come out of it. “I feel as if I am a prisoner in my mind and in this room ... you are too much here, and everywhere else in my life. I have to learn peace again, for my own sake – and for Luke, and for James ... (Seth *An Equal Music* 324). Julia understands the real value of marriage and family and finds love and romance as a transient and unreal situation and marriage as a source of security, safety, and everlasting fountain of bliss to enjoy forever.

Love, romance, and passion are states of fantasy, dreams, and unreality. Love leads a person towards the world of dreams, imagination, and far away from the stark and cruel realities of this world. Though Julia establishes sexual relationship with Michael but Vikram Seth has made her to realise her folly very soon because immorality is acceptable neither to Seth nor to the society. Julia takes a sane decision to leave Michael forever and returns back to James and her family which is the perpetual source of bliss, enjoyment, and satisfaction. She understands for the best that though the world of love seems enchanting and alluring but it is far away from the real world of social responsibilities and one cannot reside there forever.

Though it is a stark reality that woman is dominated by man in this patriarchal society and her world is limited to the household works, to give birth to children, to rear them up, and take

care of family. She has nothing to do with the outer world and what is going on there. But at the same time woman proves herself no less than the man when she has to go outside to perform her duties for the sake of her family and she sacrifices her health and happiness to run her family. In *An Equal Music* Michael's mother prefers her family more than other things and remains busy to fulfil the needs of her family. She nurses her ailing husband, who is suffering from bronchial attacks, in such a devotional way that she has to lose her life in this effort. "My mother exhausted herself trying to nurse him, to earn a living working as a dinner lady in a school, and to fight the case. Though it was he who was ill, it was she who dies – quite suddenly, of a stroke" (Seth *An Equal Music* 27).

In all the novels of Vikram Seth there is victory of marriage and family over love, romance, and passion. Although Liz enjoys the passionate love of John but marries with mature and sensible Phil for safety and security, Lata is head over heels in love with Kabir and becomes ready to elope with him, without caring for her family but later, she takes a sane decision to be get married with Haresh whom she finds more mature, practical, and sensible than Kabir. Haresh, Simran, Maan, Tasneem all prefer their family over transient love and sacrifice their love for the sake of their respective families. After enjoying the passionate and sexual love of Michael, Julia leaves him to pine alone and returns back to her mature, understanding, caring, and loyal husband and to her dear son Luke to enjoy the bliss of married life and family. Her family seems her more enchanting than the sexual love of Michael. In all the novels love and passion has been described as an imaginary state of mind and a fleeting emotion but marriage and family has been described as an eternal source of security, safety, bliss, and perpetual satisfaction – physical and emotional.

Works Cited:

- Vikram Seth. *An Equal Music*. New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 1993. Print.
- . *A Suitable Boy*. New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 1999. Print.
- . *The Golden Gate*. London: Faber and Faber, 1986. Print.
- Chowdhry, Prem. "Courts, Not State, Facilitate Right to Choice in Marriage." *The Tribune*. 22 Feb. 2016. Print.
- https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php/title=Marriage_in_the_United_States&oldid=67478806
1. Web. 18 Aug. 2015.
- [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Romance_\(love\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Romance_(love)). Web. 14 August 2015.
- Hornby, A. S. *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005. Print.
- Mohanty, Seemita. *A Critical Analysis of Vikram Seth's Poetry and Fiction*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers & Distributors (P) LTD, 2007. Print.
- Mohapatra, Himanshu S. and Nayak Jatindra K. "Jane Austen and Vikram Seth: Use of Realism in *A Suitable Boy*." *Vikram Seth's A Suitable Boy: An Anthology of Recent Criticism*. ed. Murari Prasad. New Delhi: Pencraft International, 2005: 24-43. Print.
- Pandurang, Mala. *Vikram Seth: Multiple Locations, Multiple Affiliations*. Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 2001. Print.
- Singh, Avadhesh K. "Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy*: A Critique." *Indian Fiction of the Nineties*, ed. R.S. Pathak. New Delhi: Creative, 1997. Print.
- Sinha, Prerana. *Vikram Seth A Suitable Writer: A Critical Response*. New Delhi: Creative Books, 2007. Print.