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## Social Transformation in Vikram Seth Novel: A Suitable Boy

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### Abstract:

When structural or far-reaching social changes occurs, it is said to be a social transformation. The primary goal of this research paper is to track social transformation portrayed in Vikram Seth's novel A suitable Boy. Set in post-independence Indian Society of 1950s. Most of the affairs displayed by the novel are concern about national Indian political issues during the years leading to the post-independence national election, Hindu-Muslim conflict, discrimination, land reforms, academic affairs, gender inequality. Vikram Seth has gone a long way in successfully articulating concern about society and anticipates the immorality and illegal activities.

**Keywords:** Politics, discrimination, land reforms, inequality, communal conflicts, transformations.

### 1. Introduction:

Vikram Seth is considered as a very prolific Indian novelist, poet, and travel writer. He was born in Kolkata, India, and his childhood was spent in the town of Batanagar near Kolkata, Patna, and London. His father, Prem Seth, was a prominent business person and author, and his mother, Leila Seth, was the first woman to become a judge of the Delhi High Court as well as the first woman Chief Justice of Shimla High Court. For his studying purpose and job, he has travelled widely and lived in Britain, India, USA, and China. Vikram Seth's personal life and identity created matters of interest among his readers, he publicly identifies as bisexual and has openly discussed his experiences and conflicts related to his sexuality in interviews and his writings, there have been important or secondary gay theme as well as characters in each of Seth's novel and much of his poetry, which raises challenges about his sexual identity and the role that sexual politics plays in his works. Seth became a prominent face to stand for the rights of the LGBTQ+, and protest against gender inequalities. Vikram Seth is a very important writer whenever we talk about the 'Third World' due to his writings on diasporic literature. He writes on the themes of diaspora, nostalgia, shifting identity, love, loneliness, longing are very common in the poetry or the books or the novels that are written by Vikram Seth.

The word 'multilingual' can be very much attached to the name of Vikram Seth because he has learned many languages: Tibetan, Chinese, Welsh, German, French, English, Hindi, Urdu, and because he was born in Kolkata, he knew his native language as well. He has won numerous awards: Common Wealth Poetry Prize for The Humble Administrator's Garden, Sahitya Akademi Award for The Golden Gate, Pravasi Bharatiya Samman, Padma Shri, is some of them.

Vikram Seth is well known for his 1349-page novel *A Suitable Boy* published in 1993. The novel set-in post-independence Indian society and follows the lives of several characters, investigating themes of family, love, politics, and social norms. It remains one of the longest single-volume novels ever produced in the English language. The publication of "*A Suitable Boy*", moves Seth into public limelight, and it was adapted into a BBC television drama mini-series in 2020. The epigraph has two lines by Voltaire, among them:

*"The secret of being a bore is to say everything."*

Due to its length, social scrutiny, and realistic style, it is often compared to George Eliot's *Middlemarch*. Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy* is a post-colonial national narrative making India as a nation and its varied repercussions in the socio-political realms. Although it is a story of a mother's desire to find a suitable boy for her daughter, it besets narratives of the making of a nation that is post-independent India. The novel represents a good old tradition of arranged marriage in India, which is a combination of rituals, customs, and religious practices. In Indian society, marriage not merely means the relationship between two persons, but it is also between two societies or the two families. Therefore, the institution of marriage is taken to the pedestal and that is why Seth is punning and criticizing the institution of marriage and its different rituals.

The novel is a satirical exploration of national political issues during the years leading to the post-independence national elections of 1952. The Hindu-Muslim conflict, discrimination, land reforms, the decline of feudal princes and landlords are dealt with in the novel. Characters of the novel always manifest their desires as Mrs. Mehra is in search of a suitable boy for her daughter Lata, Dipankar is in search of religious base, Mr. Mahes Kapoor is in search of a political base and the Nawab is in the search for his feudal stability.

Social Transformation in his novel *A Suitable Boy* deals with shifts that occur in Indian society, which moves through the challenges of modernization, political issues, and communal conflicts. With the help of themes and characters, Seth displays the changing dynamics of caste, religion, gender, and status, highlighting the difficulties and bounce-back of individuals in the midst of a rapidly evolving society.

## **2. Social Transformation:**

Social change connects a change in the society arising from different type of group activities, from adjusted inter-personal and inter-class relationships and from modified attitudes and methods of people and government, for governance, personal and social life, economic process, and social surroundings as compared to their previous position.

According to Roger Cotterrell: - "*Social change is held to occur only when social structure patterns of social*

When massive or structural or far-reaching social change occurs, it is known as 'Social Transformation.' It can also be understood as modification of social structured, inequalities, and dynamic relations in society that reduce the weight of morally irrelevant circumstances such as socio-economic status, caste, gender, religion, socio-political or social orientations.

In Karl Marx's view: - *"Social changes transit from one stage to another through a revolutionary transformation, which was led by increased deterioration of society and intensified class struggle."*

Foundation of new cultural field, new relationships, and new social conflicts emerges from social transformation. In sociological discourse the phrase *"Social Change is interchangeably used with Social Transformation."* Change is the basic rule of nature, but in the context of society, change does not occur on its own, it should be designed and its process should be carried out with accurate planning.

Jawaharlal Nehru observed: - *"Society is always conservative and opposes change. It likes to remain in the roots it has got into and firmly believes that it was meant to remain so."*

But those who desire progress and positive transformation must protest against old customs and institutions by employing appropriate democratic means without resorting to either regimentation or laxity. The balance between continuity and change is a factor that social reform has to appropriately address.

### **3. Social Transformation in *A Suitable Boy*:**

#### **1.1 The Abolition of Zamindari System:**

The novel focuses attention on the impact of land reforms on rural India after Indian independence. The zamindari system fundamentally started being abolished due to economic imbalance between landowners and occupiers. Vikram Seth focuses on the social importance of the zamindari system and on the significant impact of land reform that, by abolishing this old system, developed the road map for the contemporary agricultural structure in India. The novelist accomplishes this through his portrayal of the friendship that connects two of the novel's major characters: Mahesh Kapoor, the Minister proposing the land reform, and the Nawab Sahib of Baitar, the head member of the Khan family and a chief zamindar. The mutual understanding between two friends, who try to assess the reason behind each other's standings, is in against each other on the rancorous parliamentary discussion of the bill focusing on the abolition of the zamindari system. This transformation started a new era that altered the socio-economic imbalance, and initiated the decline of feudal princes and landlords.

#### **1.2 Political Landscape and social Change:**

The political landscape is complicatedly constructed into the narrative of *A Suitable Boy*. It portrayed the interaction between politics and social changes, drawing observation of the characters involvement in political movements, election politics, and the significant effect of historical events on their social life. By investigating characters motivating forces, actions, and consequences, the author aims to provide the extent to which political transformation influences societal change. The novel is set during the period after the partition of India, which

was followed by the Hindu-Muslim conflicts, when the old and esteemed human values face problems and lost all relevance. Lata's love for Kabir Durrani, her first suitor, is set against the backdrop of communal tension, which led him to remain insufficient to make him a suitable choice. The author also portrayed the migration as the result of partition. Those who wanted to take shelter were tortured before and after crossing the borders. The novel is a satirical exploration of national political issues during the years leading to the post-independence national election. The changing dynamics of post-independent India and in its institutions have led to change in political and social transformation.

### **1.3 Gender Role and Women Empowerment:**

*A Suitable Boy* significantly explored the theme of transformation of gender roles and the empowerment of women. Seth presents a range of female characters who challenge societal norms and endeavor for independence and self-reliance. Mrs. Rupa Mehra is a widow who lost her husband when her children were very young, but she emanates her strength from this loss, and stands against patriarchal norms which are prevalent in the post-independent Indian society. Mrs. Mehra's daughter Lata Mehra, the main character of the novel, emerges from her mother's shadow. She became aware of her agencies and independence and set against the societal norm for women in society, as she has had the luxury of choosing a suitable husband. The search for a suitable boy for Lata, is enlivened by discreet competition between three suitors, Kabir, Haresh, and Amit. The unconventional choices made by characters such as Saeeda Bai and Meenakshi, the novel portrays the evolving status of women in Indian society during post-independent era.

### **1.4 Caste and Social Hierarchy:**

One of the main aspects of social transformation portrayed in *A Suitable Boy* in the changing scenario of caste and social hierarchy. Caste is unavoidable in the Indian society; Dalits have very less appearance in this novel about the new Indian middle class, but they do appear and we get a glance into their opinion. The caste conflict between the Khatri and the Brahmins are less serious and transformed. But those are played as insignificant enough as to allow inter-caste marriage. Seth provides an insightful exploration of the complexities surrounding the caste system and how it deals with power dynamics and societal expectations. Through characters like Lata and Maan, Seth portrayed the difficulties faced by individuals who go against traditional caste boundaries and, in doing so, challenges the deeply implanted notions of social hierarchy.

### **4. Conclusion:**

Vikram Seth's novel *A Suitable Boy* examine national parliamentary matters, the division of class and social hierarchy, gender inequality, shifting identity, and inter-family interactions in a joyous and serious manner. Social changes, social transformation, and the post-independent social environment are handled in Vikram Seth's novel. Post-independence social transformation has been depicted in Vikram Seth's novel as a fractured Congress Party, the abolition of the zamindari framework, religion, caste, and social hierarchy. Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy* serves as a rich shade of social transformation in post-independence India. The novel captures the diverse experiences and difficulties faced by individuals across different social layers, gender, and religious

the societal shifts that occurred during that period. This research paper has provided an insightful analysis of the theme of social transformation in *A Suitable Boy*, focusing attention on the difficulties and implications of these changes within the context of Indian society.

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