
SOCIO-POLITICAL, ECONOMICAL AND HISTORICAL DETERMINANTS IN VIKRAM SETH'S FICTION: A POSTCOLONIAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract: One of the long term and lasting effects of Colonialism is a combination of several cultures leading to displacement of values, beliefs and practices that provide an identity and individuality to the members of society. In the contemporary world there is no culture immune from the influence and the impact of other cultures leading to multiple identities of the same individuals. Earlier this problem was not pursued as individuals were born in a particular culture paradigm and often spent the entire life in it, with out of individual and social identities. Due to this juxtaposition and often the conflict of identities an average member of a society is forced to live in and to be in touch with several cultures leading to fragmentation and splintering of personality.

As Ashish Nandi points out no educate Indian lives in Indian culture alone but often there is an inherent split in personality due to divided loyalties and assimilation of different values and practices. It not only weakens a personality and often confuses as to which values one should give priority when they come into conflict. Whether it is in the case of India or America or Europe or China, in the globalized scenario people have to come into contact with many cultures and values which influence the shaping of their personality. So there is a continuous attempt to reconcile and harmonized multiple values resulting in inner stability. But often the attempt is partial success and the individual learns to live with the problems rather than to resolve them.

Introduction: It is an interesting dimension that Vikram Seth identifies and explores that now due to conglomeration of several values, people live piece meal and fragmented lives without being aware of it with shifting personal loyalties. The core problem of how an average member of society is shaped and conditioned by the socio-political, Economical and historical determinants that he was born-in and taught to accept as a natural way of life. Irrespective of geographical and demographical factors the life of an average member of society is certainly controlled and influenced and directed by the said determents without the individual being aware of it.

The passion of love and its struggle for fulfillment is a universal theme widely explored in several literatures. In spite of this universality, love has an expression between two human beings either of the same gender or opposite genders is modified, modulated and negotiated, through several social demands and marked by which an individual becomes a member of society. A traditional locator like Indian emotion of love and its fulfillment is strictly limited to married form and is not accepted or at the most tolerated in its extra- marital dimensions. In several cases the emotion is subsumed and often subdued by several social cultural values which are strong enough to override the individuals choice. In contrast the western mode of love in its present form is an open human to human relationship ignoring social determinants due to the latitude of liberty given to individuals which includes gay relationships. It is these several forms and gradients of love that Seth explores in his novels bringing out as to how different it is to satisfy the vital need of fulfillment of love relationship.

Since times immemorial people of India have been migrating to other countries for various reasons. Though Indians are not reputed to be very mobile people their presence abroad can be attested from the days of remote antiquity. In spite of the fact that crossing a sea was considered as breaking a proscription in India, a large number of people crossed the sea in different periods of history. Thus the

myth that Indians are land locked people, who feared crossing black waters has been proved wrong. The journey of the Indians can be divided into three broad phases 1) pre colonial phase, 2) colonial phase, 3) post colonial phase. The experiences of migration expatriate workers, refugees, exiles, immigrants and ethnic community experiences recorded in the form of socio cultural and literary perspectives are recorded in the form of Indian Diaspora as a substitute of De-territorialized or "Transnational". In a way of large number of recorded experiences have been giving expression to their creative urge and have brought credit to Indian English Fiction as a distinctive form. Some eminent creative writers have been accorded recognition for their endeavors at home and abroad. It has not been the quantity but also the quality. Kiran Desi won the Prestigious Bookers Prize in 2006 for her "Inheritance of Loss", Jhumpa Lahiri has been awarded the Pulitzer Prize for "Interpreter of Maladies," Indo-trenidian author Sir V.S.Naipaul conferred Noble Prize for literature has been a powerful literary force for decades. Salman Rushdie widely considered to be both the father of contemporary Indian English literature and one of the best living novelists, was awarded 'Booker of Bookers Prize' for his "Midnight's Children". Like Rushdie, Vikram Seth is the author of the longest single volume English novel "A Suitable Boy" for which he was awarded Common Wealth Writers Prize. He also secured several other prizes for his talented works in different genres. Anita Desai's novel "Fasting, Feasting" was a finalist for the 1999's Booker Prize. In 1997 another Indian writer Arundati Roy won the Bookers Prize for her "The God of Small Things". Amitav Ghosh "Circle of Reason" has won the Prize Medici Estranger' a top French literary Award. Rohinton Mistry's "The first short story" won the 'Hart House Prize' for the Fiction in 1983. Upamanyu Chatterjee's debut novel "English August: An Indian Story" attracted instant notice and has been made into an award winning film. Geetha Hariharan's "The Thousand Faces of Night" won the "Common Wealth" Prize for the best first novel. Shashi Tharoor's "The Great Indian novel" won the "Common Wealth Award". The Indian living boundaries of Indians have made their mark in the field of literature worldwide.

Settlement in alien lands cause them unsettlement and dislocation. Dislocation can be regarded as a break with the old identity. There is a search for continuity and "ancestral impulse" and effort to look for the roots. They feel alienated in the adopted land as they suffer non acceptance by the host society and face racial discrimination. It is a general dimension which is applicable to most of the expatriate Indian Novelist and Literary figures.

Vikram Seth who has experimented with different subjects and genres for his creative writing, who tries to assimilate, adapt, and integrate with the society of their host country. For that reason his attempts of adaptations and adjustments are his main concern to preserve the original culture, value system and identity. So his subjects (characters) are subjected with the Social, Cultural, Political and Economical baggage with a focus on religion, language, music, art, family, love, identity with missing cultural elements and with concords and conflicts of these subjects.

The story of "Hell and Heaven" is a study in contrast to the institution of marriage of Indian versus American where the former [Indian] prefers consolidation and subjectivity of marital relationship with preferences like and dislikes, basing on the self.

The writers of post colonial India like Vikram Seth having awareness of Indian & World history and heritage, society and it's current problems in the context of limitations and frustrations focuses the diasporic space, experiences of unsettlement and dislocation at various levels. His texts can be examined in the terms of location, dislocation and re location. The shifting design of "Home" and attendant anxieties about homelessness and the impossibility of perennial themes in his stories. As a whole Seth tries to probe and explore his own Indianness as unique under new geo-political and social contexts-it's separation from the forces and the factors which changed the face of India. He sought to recognize the practices and prejudices that still characterized the conscious and un-conscious connections with Indianness. Sometimes it disowns the Indianness and some apologetically owns it, sometimes proudly uphold and applaud it. The search for this identity and part-identity goes on and find expression in his writings. The subject of Indian diaspora in Vikram Seth is one of the Sweat and toil often washed with

tears achievements despite impediments of education advancements and economic progress. His view of history deals with a fluid memory with distant memory which characterize diasporic experiences. As he opines literature plays one of the key roles for focusing persistence and changing society which can lead to a better appreciation of its multi cultural and ethno-centric fabric. So the experience of migrancy vary from writer to writer depending upon the levels of education, age, background and point of entry. In this context Vikram Seth's post colonialism is often referred to as a theory of migrancy, but it does not help one to approach interrupt diasporic writing.

Vikram Seth is also notable for expatriate subjectivity in his writings. As far as the Indian writers in English, notably Raja Rao became an expatriate in the pre independent India, G.V.Desani was born in Kenya and lived in England, India and U.S.A. as an expatriate writer, Kamala Markandeya married an English man and lived in Britain associated with expatriate subjectivity, Nirad C.Chaudhuri preferred the English shores because his views were not readily accepted in India. In the post colonial era Salman Rushdie's "Imaginary Home Land" encompasses the world over. The Iranian "Fatwa" phase has added a new dimension to Rushdie's exilic condition.

Colonial and post-colonial India are divisions that are now more relevant to a historian than a litterateur because the Indian English literature has transcended the barriers of petty classifications and has become part of main stream english literature. A major contribution in this regard has been that of the Indian writers like Rushdie and Naipaul, who live as world citizens-a global manifestation of the exilic condition. Indian English writers like Anitha Desai, Bharathi Mukherjee, Sashi Tharoor, Amitav Ghosh, Vikram Seth, Sunetra Gupta, Rohinton Mistry, Jhumpa Lahiri and Hari Kunzru have all made their names wide, residing abroad. The non-resident Indian writers have explored their sense of displacement a Perennial theme in all exile literature. They have given more poignancy to the exploration by dealing not only with a geo-graphical dislocation but also a socio-cultural sense of displacement and rootlessness.

But Vikram Seth is a writer of different connotation or nuance. He can neither be branded as an Indian nor as an American nor as an English Man. He is an International Citizen with different affiliations. He has a tendency to adapt him self to the local circumstances like Cultural, Social, Political, Economical and other required subject matters to have a original view point of that particular society or nation. He is a transnational writer who has written immense variety of literary works address different countries in three different continents. He, being a multilingual polyglot is equally at ease while writing different Genres. For him the world is his stage and its people his characters no matter to which nation, colour background they belong. Seth is not just restricted to themes of cultural displacement, such for roots or diasporic dislocations but is a universal writer and writes as the Muse takes him. He is known for his Global Image as reflected in variety of his works with diverse themes. Much of his output (works) reaches the audience beyond Geographical, Demographical boundaries. He is the world and he belongs to the world.

In a way, Vikram Seth as a modern Indian English writer can be grouped into two distant classes. One class comprises those who have spent a part of life in India and have carried the baggage of their native land offshore. The other class comprises those who have been bred since childhood out side India. They have had a view of their country only from the outside as an exotic place of origin. The writers of the former group have a literal displacement where as those belonging to the latter group find themselves rootless. Both the groups of writers have produced an enviable corpus of English literature. These writers while depicting migrant characters in their fiction explore the theme of displacement and self-fashioning. However Seth is considered an NRI (a Non-Resident Indian) and an RNI (a Resident non Indian) who deals with variety of themes.

The diasporic Indian writer's depiction of dislocated characters gains immense importance, if seen against the geo-political and Socio-Cultural background of the vast Indian sub-continent. That is precisely why such works have a global readership and an enduring appeal. The diasporic Indian writers have generally dealt with the characters from their own displaced community as focused in the *Two*

Lives and *A Suitable Boy*, but some of them have also taken a liking for western character and they have been convincing in dealing with them. Two of Vikram Seth's novels the *Golden Gate* and *An Equal Music* have as their subjects exclusively the lives of Americans and Europeans respectively, where as epic novel *A Suitable Boy* is set in the light of post independence India. In all his novels we find a multicultural dimension with characters of different social affiliations who represent a replica of Global Themes. Similar to the other diasporic writers Vikram Seth also deals with the subject matters like sense of alienation and displacement of culture, rootlessness in his non-fictional work *Two Lives*. Yet is not obsessed with the theme of displacement, diasporic dislocations or search for roots. He is one of those fortunate people who have travelled and resided at many places making the world their own. Having a considerable amount of cultural mobility Seth has made himself the first truly transnational writer. Having lived in four countries India, England, America and China in *Three Continents* and having travelled in different countries he has a first hand experience of various cultures and values which promoted him to rank of Global Citizen. Seth, taking his writing as a challenge, enjoys writing about diverse themes like sense of alienation, emotional upsurge, romantic love, racial and cultural conflicts, religion, death homosexuality, land reforms, individual liberty, family and society, political and financial affairs which are applicable to International Community.

However our main concern in this study is to explore, how Vikram Seth tries to portray the lives and characteristics of individuals are shaped and conditioned by Social, Political, Economical and Historical determinants in the selected works of Vikram Seth.

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