

The Global M lange: Interrogating the Consequences of Globalization in the Works of Vikram Seth

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled “**The Global Mélange: Interrogating the Consequences of Globalization in the Works of Vikram Seth**” and submitted by **JAYASHREE HAZARIKA** ID No. **2011PHXF418H** for award of Ph.D. of the Institute embodies original work done by her under my supervision.

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“There is no school equal to a decent home and no teacher equal to a virtuous parent.”

— Mahatma Gandhi

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ABSTRACT

This thesis introspects the cultural implications of the processes of globalization in the fictional and non-fictional works of Vikram Seth. In various chapters of this research, Seth's perspective on travel, nation, food, middle class and gender will be analysed taking into account the social and cultural theories of globalization, postcolonial perspectives and theories on gender.

The first step in the thesis will be to see how Vikram Seth, as a traveller, deals with the notion of globalization in his non-fictional works. The idea of authenticity of a text has always been a problematic one and I will be examining this issue with respect to Seth's works. His outlook on the impact of globalization in different parts of the world will be considered through the voice of the natives. Seth's works stand testimony to the fact as to how an impulsive and unplanned expedition leads to a deeper understanding of a specific culture. Travel becomes a mode of escape for the author and a reader can easily co-relate his works and the biographical elements of his life.

After travel, my research will explore the dominant trends in the works of Vikram Seth in envisaging the concept and impact of a nation. The key focus would be on different cultural diversities and how this diversity creates hurdles in promoting the idea of globalization. The role of narration in the imagining of a nation and its accompanying problems will be seen through Seth's works. In the world of globalization the policies of one nation can have repercussions on the others nations too and this aspect will be explored through Seth's fictional and non-fictional narratives.

A further investigation will be done as to whether Vikram Seth, through his depiction of food in his literary works, is creating solidarity or creating dissent among characters. An analysis of how food accentuates or polarises the binaries thereby speeding or hindering the process of globalization is attempted. This probe will be undertaken by relooking at the deliberate food choices the characters make and how it bears tremendous impact on his/her life and the life of people around. An in-depth analysis of Seth's works, viz. the critical discourses on food will be deliberated and, to facilitate this, I will extensively borrow from the structuralist theories proposed on food.

The next focus of my research is directed towards a re-examination of Seth's fictional works where he portrays the middle class lifestyle. The role of education in mobilizing and creating global citizens shall be probed. Furthermore, a study will be attempted to see if this concept of 'progress' leads to a reduced or heightened sense of awareness of the contemporary issues and an increase in consumerism among the middle class. In addition, a study will be conducted using theoretical paradigms in Seth's works to depict how this class meddles with state policies.

Gender Studies highlight the fact that gender is a system of differentiation and domination at the heart of every society. Gender is a crucial aspect which is impacted by the fluidization of borders. In this thesis a detailed study will be conducted on how Vikram Seth's fiction depicts his characters as being marginalized based on their gender and sexual preferences. The next crucial aspect I will explore is Seth's treatment of gender issues and the changing dynamics of family structure as a result of cross-cultural links and influences on the indigenous cultures and the role of women. Vikram Seth's handling of the queer issues, which have been a topic for global discussion, will be introspected. His unique treatment of gender has portrayed how violence becomes one of the tools in the quest for domination over these groups of people within the framework of women and queer studies. A detailed analysis will be done on how society and culture discriminate people who are perceived as 'weak' be it a woman or individuals with queer tendencies. My research will try to decipher the problems and the advantages of the processes of globalization through an in-depth study of Vikram Seth's works.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Contents</i>	<i>Page No.</i>
<i>Certificate</i>	<i>i</i>
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>ii</i>
<i>Abstract</i>	<i>iv</i>
<i>List of Abbreviations</i>	<i>viii</i>
CHAPTER 1– Introduction	1-23
1.1 History of Indian English Literature	2
1.2 Foregrounding the writer Vikram Seth	7
1.3 Introducing Globalization	12
1.4 Scope	17
1.5 Objectives	19
1.6 Limitations	20
1.7 Research Methodology	20
1.8 Thesis structure	22
CHAPTER 2 – Literature Review	24-42
2.1 Gap in Existing Research	40
CHAPTER 3 – Implications of Travel in the non-fictional writings of Vikram Seth	43-63
CHAPTER 4 – The portrayal of Nation in Vikram Seth’s works	64-87

CHAPTER 5 – Exploring Cuisine and Food Culture in Vikram Seth’s works	88-107
CHAPTER 6 – Representation of the Middle Class in the works of Vikram Seth	108-123
CHAPTER 7 – The Queer and the Ladies: Gender Studies with Vikram Seth	124-144
CHAPTER 8 – Conclusion	145-153
8.1 Scope for Future Research	152
References	154-165
Publications	166
Biography of the candidate	170
Biography of the supervisor	171

ABBREVIATIONS

IWE : Indian Writing in English

LGBT : Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Indian English literature has been garnering a lot of attention throughout the world since the last quarter of twentieth century. Increase in the popularity of Indian English literature is an amalgamation of various factors. One of the factors is the immense efforts put by the publishing houses in publishing, distribution and advertisement of a new work. The publishing houses do not shy away from paying huge advances for a future book and writers like Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh, Vikram Seth, and Amish Tripathi have been in the news for the advances they have received for publication of their books. Another factor is that the new generation writers are actively involved in interactions with readers by joining literary festivals, conducting workshops, organizing book reading sessions, and participating in book fairs. In recent times many Indian English writers have been recipients of prestigious awards which have boosted the morale of potential writers. There is also the added benefit of substantial prize money, world-wide audience and the prospect of film-adaptations. These factors have made both the writers as well as the publishers passionate about the advancement of Indian Writing in English (IWE). Although IWE literature has faced a lot of criticism from the regional writers, this has not stunted its growth. The regional writers accuse the Indian English writers of not being truly Indian. Nevertheless, many regional writers get their works translated to English which has brought excellent writers into the limelight. The ever increasing body of the Indian English writers continues to garner attention in the literary world.

1.1 History of Indian English Literature

Indian English literature refers to the literary works of Indian writers writing in English. These writers could be residing within India or outside. Indian English literature has a short history as compared to other literatures. The origin of Indian English literature can be traced back to the introduction of English education in India under the colonial rule of the British. This literature has garnered a lot of appreciation and interest from readers back in India and worldwide. Indian English literature has carved a place for itself not only in the Commonwealth literature, but also within the World literature. The terminology Indian English literature has replaced the earlier terminology, Indo-Anglian Literature. Indo-Anglian Literature has a connotation of dependence on its colonial English parent but Indian English literature has shed the overbearing influence of the West and, since the last decades of the twentieth century comes across as a body of literature which has more imaginative space, independent of any colonial leanings.

Sake Dean Mahomed, a soldier employed with the British army who later immigrated as a cook to England, is the first Indian to write a book in English called *The Travels of Dean Mahomed* in (1793). Most of the early Indian writing in English was non-fictional. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, in his book *Indian Writing in English*, defines non-fictional prose as “a basket that bulges with variety: history, biography, autobiography, belles-letters, translation, travelogue, literary criticism, journalism, oratory, all the miscellaneous ‘notes’, in fact, of the ‘other harmony’” (761). There was a shift in the writing from non-fiction to fiction in the late 1800s, when famous Indian authors who wrote mostly in their mother tongue, began to try their hand at writing in English. Rabindranath Tagore who was a famous Bengali writer had also translated his works to English. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee’s novel *Rajmohan’s Wife* (1864) was the first Indian novel written in English. It shows tremendous influence of colonial masters in form, narrative structure and language of the novel. Fiction has attained a

prominent position in Indian English literature and it can be seen as the most powerful form of literary expression. Prof. M. K. Naik in *Dimensions of Indian English Literature* remarks: “one of the most notable gifts of English education to India is prose fiction for though India was probably a fountain head of story-telling, the novel as we know today was an importation from the West” (99).

It is through the fiction of the 1930's written by writers like Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao that Indian English writing was brought into the notice of the Western world. These three writers are regarded as the “founding fathers” of the Indian English novel. Mulk Raj Anand's novel *Untouchable* (1935) was a leading book on ‘dalit writings’ in Indian literature. His other prominent novels are *The Village* (1939), *Across the Black Waters* (1940), *The Sword and the Sickle* (1942), which were written in England, and *Coolie* (1945), and *The Private Life of an Indian Prince* (1953) were written in India. Raja Rao was considered a Nationalist novelist as his works gave a lot of emphasis on the Indian freedom struggle. His famous novel *Kanthapura* (1938) bent the English idiom and incorporated the Indian dialect and showed the impact of Gandhi's teaching of non-violent resistance against the British. His other novels are *The Serpent and the Rope* and *Cat and Shakespeare*. Rao, in his works has used the style and structure of Indian vernacular tales and folk epics.

R.K. Narayan is one of the most renowned and widely read Indian novelists even in contemporary times. He wrote numerous novels like *Swami and Friends* (1935), *The Bachelor of Arts* (1937), *The Dark Room* (1938), *The English Teacher* (1944), *Mr. Sampath*, *The Printer of Malgudi* (1949), *The Financial Expert* (1952), *The Vendor of Sweets* (1967), *The Painter of Signs* (1976), *A Tiger for Malgudi* (1983), *Talkative Man* (1986) and *The World Of Nagaraj* (1990). In addition, he wrote a few short stories about Malgudi, a fictitious semi-urban town in southern India. He has been a recipient of numerous

awards. Narayan's style of writing is more descriptive and less analytical and he works with a realistic narrative. However, most of the Indian writing in English before the 1970 was caught up with the creation of a national identity and the writers used their works to bring in a type of cultural revivalism.

A tremendous change in the characteristics of Indian writing in English has been observed after Indian independence. The 'individual' has emerged leaving behind the 'societal subjects'. Kamala Markandaya, Vikram Seth, Bharati Mukherjee, Salman Rushdie, Vikram Chandra, Anita Desai, Kiran Desai, Arundhati Roy, Gita Mehta, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Raj Kamal Jha, Jhumpa Lahiri, Bharti Kirchner, Khushwant Singh, Vijay Singh, Tarun Tejpal, Amit Chaudhuri, Amitav Ghosh, Vikas Swarup, Rohinton Mistry, Suketu Mehta, Kiran Nagarkar, Dr. Birbal Jha, Upamanyu Chatterjee, Allan Sealy, Boman Desai, Firadaus Kanga, Farrukh Dhondy, Suniti Namajoshi, Mukul Kesavan, and C. R. Krishnan are some notable writers. These writers have made Indian writing in English widely popular throughout the world. The Indian novels acquired a world-wide visibility. The form of the Indian writing in English became more open and playful. Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* is regarded as the novel that completely transformed the Indian novel in English. The novelists after 1970 have made a lot of innovations in their works in terms of themes and techniques. These novelists have made a mark in the world literature by using techniques such as social realism, psychological realism, mythical realism, magic realism, and using themes like the East-West encounter and issues of immigration.

Indian writing in English has been condemned by many critics for exoticizing its contents which is one of the burning topics. Amit Chaudhuri and Vikram Chandra, two well-known critical thinkers of Indian English writing discuss this issue. They focus on the critical argument that Indian English writers use their ethnic identity to evoke the nostalgia of the immigrants and offer images of India that can be easily consumed in the West. Well known

critic Meenakshi Mukherjee in her article “The Anxiety of Indianness: Our Novels in English,” has claimed that exoticism in the writing of the earlier generation of Indian Anglophone writers signified their compulsion to provide a veneer of detachment from the indigenous context; whereas, in contemporary writers, exoticism is often the outcome of their anxiety to be viewed as authentic. In the article, “The East as a Career,” Amit Chaudhuri rejects the charge of “exoticism” that is repeatedly levelled against Indian literature written in English. He observes that Indian English writers regularly face the indignation of their audience in the form of two common questions: “What audience do you write for?” and “Are you exoticizing your subject for a Western audience?”(111) Such attacks according to Chaudhuri belong to the arena of “politics of representation” (111) and do not contribute to an appreciation of “literary practice” (111). He expresses his disappointment in the essay that the analysis of a text’s conditions of production has taken preference over the scrutiny of its meaning. The charge of exoticism issuing from a vulgarized Saidian legacy of vigilantism is ultimately grounded in a homogenized nationalist narrative and any departure from it is perceived to be “exotic” (113). Like Chaudhuri’s article, Vikram Chandra’s “The Cult of Authenticity” begins by invoking images of writers harassed by critics who require the writers to repeatedly give justification for their choice of writing. Chandra describes the scene of a reading he did with two other Indian English writers. All three writers were questioned on whether they wrote for an Indian or an international audience. The panellists have levelled the charges that the writers betray an anxiety about portraying “Indianness” to the West (42). Chandra believes that such critics are primarily motivated by a kind of “nativism” and an urge to be protective towards an intangible and unreal notion of “Real India” (45). Chandra points to the cosmopolitan character of urban India (45-46) and designates the notion of an authentic India as misplaced. Secondly, he takes strong exception to the critics’ position that English is an alien language in India; he contends that it is the “lingua franca of power, of

business, of cultural exchange, of politics” (46) and hence the Indian writers should not apologize for writing in English.

The specific accusation that both Chaudhuri and Chandra contest is that Indian English writers tend to incorporate an orientalist representation to cater to their international audience. In their articles, Chaudhuri and Chandra highlight some of the central critical assumptions against Indian English literature. The exoticized cultural images, the critique claims, are rather a presentation of the national condition, in effect, details of banal particularities devoid of history and politics (Chandra 44-45; Chaudhuri 122-24). Indian English literature is contrasted with its vernacular counterpart, which, critics assert, largely escapes the pressures and lures of a global market (Chaudhuri 111-12; Chandra 45). Adding to the critics’ ire is the fact that the rich corpus of Indian regional literatures, even in translation, rarely captures global attention (Chandra 45). Chaudhuri and Chandra concisely grasp the underlying assumption of the critique: the international popularity of Indian English literature is riding high on the preferences of a global market rather than on the intrinsic literary qualities of the text. After identifying the widespread suspicion against Indian English writers, both Chaudhuri and Chandra proceed to deny any validity to such criticism. The critics, Chandra asserts, have created a “cult of authenticity” (42) and cry out against all perceived distortions and misrepresentations of what they believe to be the “real” India. Both writers criticize what they view as deep-seated narrow-mindedness of Indian English criticism and hold that there is no material basis for its assumptions. For Chandra, the cosmopolitanism of urban India (45), and, for Chaudhuri, the complex conglomeration of social classes (113) opposes any homogenized notion of the nation. Their critics are thus reproached for subscribing to a utopian idea of Indian history based on a denial of its manifold social complexities. If writers like Amitav Ghosh or Vikram Seth portrays one of the many aspects of the Indian society, their authenticity cannot be questioned.

1.2 Foregrounding the writer Vikram Seth

Vikram Seth is one of the prominent writers of Indian English literature. Many critics have termed him as the citizen of the world and a cultural traveller. Due to his varied interest in different mediums of art, he does not fit into the cartel of a particular genre or category of literature. Vikram Seth was born on 20th June, 1952 to Leila and Premo Seth in Calcutta (now Kolkata). Seth's parents had a seminal influence on the writer during his growing up years. Vikram Seth spent part of his childhood in Patna since his parents were posted there. He attended St. Xavier's High School. Seth, from an early childhood, travelled outside India. He went to Doon school which is an elite boarding school which encourages international education. At Doon, he excelled both in his studies as well as literary activities. Seth later shifted to England to pursue his A-levels to study in Oxford and after attaining a degree from Corpus Christi College, Oxford, he shifted to Stanford University in California to do his graduation in Economics. Although he enrolled for a Ph.D. he never completed it. At Stanford he went on to study creative writing and took up classical Chinese poetry at Nanjing University in China. In spite of staying outside India he maintained a strong attachment to and pride for the country.

Vikram Seth is a versatile writer. His works are pertinent to contemporary issues and debates raging at both national and global level. His works reflect a unique alchemy of reason, humour and rhyme. This aspect of his made me want to do my thesis on his works. Further, his works have a universal quality and are not restricted to any particular era. Although he deals with specific time frames yet the issues he takes up could be relevant throughout the history of mankind. Seth has tried his hands at a wide variety of genres. He published his first book of poems *Mappings* in 1980. It is a collection of personal poems

written during his twenties as a student. They are mostly contemplative and thoughtful. In 1982, when Seth returned to Delhi, from his journey from China to Tibet to Nepal through hitch-hiking, his father proposed that he should give proper shape to his notes on the journey in the form of a travel book. This led to the publication of the travelogue *From Heaven Lake: Travels Through Sinkiang and Tibet* in 1983 which earned him the Thomas Cook Travel Book Award the same year. This was the first prose attempted by Seth. He went on to publish his collection of poetry *The Humble Administrator's Garden* in 1985 which was divided into three sections: 'Wutong', 'Neem' and 'Live-Oak' which represented his association with China, India and California. This collection resulted in Seth's receiving the Commonwealth Poetry Prize (Asia) in 1985. During his stay in California, Seth was influenced by Pushkin's verse novel *Eugene Onegin*. This resulted in the publication of verse novel *The Golden Gate* (1985) which catapulted him to the world of fame. This novel which was set in California and dealt with the Yippee culture, won him the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1988. *The Golden Gate* provided a stepping stone for Seth to enter the world of fiction writing and his final break from his academic pursuits. After the success of *The Golden Gate*, Seth returned home to India and began writing his novel *A Suitable Boy*. In between he published a series of poetry: *All You Who Sleep Tonight* (1990), *Beastly Tales* (1991), and *Three Chinese Poets* (1992). *All You Who Sleep Tonight* is a set of personal poems related to love and relationships, feelings of distress, pain, happiness, playfulness and appreciation of nature as well as death, and a sense of relaxation. *Beastly Tales* is a collection of fables retold in verse and it is a treat to the young readers. It is a group of ten animal fables that were written in rhymed couplets for children. *Three Chinese Poets* is Seth's translation from Chinese to English of the works of the three poets Wang Wei, Li Bai and Du Fu. These three were considered among the greatest Chinese poets.

A landmark change came in Seth's career with the publication of his mammoth novel *A Suitable Boy* in 1993. The novel received unprecedented success. It was shortlisted for the 1993 Irish Times International Fiction Prize. In 1994 the novel won the Commonwealth Writers Prize, and also received the WH Smith Literary Award. *A Suitable Boy* gives a glimpse of India of the 1950s and is a social novel. Many critics compare the book to the Jane Austen way of writing. In 1994 Seth wrote a libretto *Arion and the Dolphin* for the English National Opera and the music was provided by Alex Roth which was performed in June 1994. It was based on a Greek myth. In 1994 Seth published another poem *The Frog and the Nightingale* which is a fable with moral values and was incorporated in some of the school textbooks. Seth's next novel *An Equal Music* (1999), based on the life of Western classical musicians had also garnered a lot of publicity and won the Crossword Book Award in 1999. This novel was also awarded the EMMA (BT Ethnic and Multicultural Media Award) in 2001. Seth, in his memoir *Two Lives* (2005), narrates the story of his great uncle and aunt, along with his own story of love, bonding and keeping faith with his life and family in India. Seth published *The Rivered Earth* in 2011, a collection of four libretti, which he wrote for the composer Alec Roth. The first three were about places- China during the Tang Dynasty, The Salisbury house of the English poet George Herbert, and India; and the fourth, about the elements which overarched the other three. *The Rivered Earth* also shows Seth's calligraphy skills. In 2012, Vikram Seth made his first major foray into the world of art with three paintings of the *Absolut* bottle. His upcoming novel *A Suitable Girl* is expected to hit the markets by 2016. Seth has also been the recipient of the 2005 Pravasi Bharatiya Samman, the Padma Shri in Literature & Education in 2007, and in 2013 he received the award of The 25 Greatest Global Living Legends In India.

Vikram Seth's uniqueness lies in his refusal to be categorized within a particular genre. He keeps shifting his interest and goes to achieve excellence in whatever form of

creativity makes him zealous. He has a complete disregard for market politics. When he felt a need to write a novel in verse he did it, being well aware that he was not taking a well-trodden path. When inspiration for poetry pulled his heart strings, he gave in, in the midst of his research for a mammoth novel. He has taken up diverse subjects and cultures. He does not dwell on one particular subject for long. His works bear testimony to his status as a global traveller and writer. He has followed his heart and is not apologetic about his behaviour. He has openly come out as a bisexual regardless of belonging to a conservative society and the impact it would have on his reputation. Seth is one of the foremost supporters of the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) movement that is currently brewing in India. In 2006, he became a leader of the campaign against India's Section 377, a law against homosexuality. His views on Section 377 and gay rights in India were repeatedly aired on national news channels, and in December 2013 issue of *India Today*, he passionately defends the right of a person to love another, irrespective of the gender. Speaking to the *Guardian*, Seth said he had been "incensed" by the Supreme Court judgement. He says that:

The thing that bothers me most is the misery [it means] for people who live in small towns, who have come out, or if they have not ... and their families ... telling them not just that this is against our religion and our beliefs but also against our law and that they are criminals. It will increase their isolation, their loneliness, their unhappiness.

Disappointed at the Supreme Court's ruling upholding Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), author Vikram Seth said that political parties that favoured this ruling should know that homophobia came into India and not homosexuality. Seth adds saying that Khajuraho, Kamasutra and Sun temple have always been here. Even if one reads the 'Baburnama' - the book of founder of Mughal Empire, Babur, one will see how there are fine descriptions of him being in love with another man and how he speaks about it. It is very

moving. Seth expresses his own personal experiences in the poem “Dubious” from the book *Mappings*.

Some men like Jack and some like Jill

I'm glad I like them both but still

I wonder if this freewheeling

Really is an enlightened thing,

Or is its greater scope a sign

Of deviance from some party line?

In the strict ranks of Gay and Straight

What is my status: Stray? Or Great?

(Writers Workshop, Calcutta, 1980)

Thus, Seth is seen defending something that he believes in. Seth mostly shuns the limelight except, for the LGBT issue where he came out openly and acknowledged and defended the group's rights and interests. This can also be seen as an example of the broader perspective he has achieved with his transnational travels. Vikram Seth's works as well as his themes are very different from one another. He is at ease writing poetry as he does with a novel or travelogue. He writes books for children with the same comfort of writing a love-story or a social narrative. Seth dabbles with different locations in his works and each setting is distinct from his previous works. If *A Suitable Boy* is based on India, *The Golden Gate* is set in a pure Californian setting, and the setting of *An Equal Music* happens to be European. None of the books reveal the cultural identity of author: only the name on the cover of the books informs the reader of the Indian lineage of the author. Seth's fondness for travel can be

deduced from the closely accumulated facts and realistic depictions of different cultural locations. This reflects that he is a traveller of the world. In fact, Seth has always resisted attempts to categorize him. In a television interview with leading theorist and critic Meenakshi Mukherjee he said that he was just a writer, not an Indian or a Commonwealth citizen or any another kind of writer. Seth was privileged to travel around the world, has made the world his home and he writes his works in that vein. And perhaps this makes him one amongst the truly global writers.

1.3 Introducing Globalization

Globalization is an often heard term in the contemporary age and it can be seen as the system of interaction among the countries of the world in order to develop global economy. Globalization refers to the integration of economics and societies all over the world. Globalization involves technological, economic, political, and cultural exchanges made possible largely by advances in communication, transportation, and infrastructure. Sociologists Martin Albrow and Elizabeth King in their book *Globalisation, Knowledge and Society* define globalization as "...all those processes by which the peoples of the world are incorporated into a single world society."(9) Due to globalization the world seems to have come closer. Today a person can communicate effortlessly with another person in any part of the globe. Globalization had its impact on literature too as writers gained knowledge not only about their native culture but also the cultures across the globe. The phenomenon of globalization has been taken up by many people and organizations all around the world. Noam Chomsky, Thomas L. Friedman, Roland Robertson, Anthony Giddens, Walden Bello, Francis Fukuyama, Manuel Castells, David Moore, John Kenneth Galbraith, David Held, Susan George, Marjorie Lister, Arundhati Roy, Douglas Kellner, and Frank Lechner are some of the leading theorists of globalization.

The impact of globalization can be perceived through the changes in society. Globalization is being studied across disciplines. It is not possible to have a single unifying ‘theory of globalization’. Globalization can be looked at from different perspectives. Due to globalization there is an amalgamation which touches all aspects of life whether it is economic, social, cultural or political. In the book *The World is Flat*, Thomas Friedman discusses how through the processes of globalization a hybrid culture is created. Many globalization theorists have discussed how the world is coming closer and the social relations are changing. Events happening in far off places have started impacting local cultures. World markets are forming and there is a constant flow of people, ideas, knowledge, and currency. Fluidity is an important aspect of globalization.

The focus of this thesis is on the cultural impact of globalization. Globalization theorists perceive cultural globalization in the lines of a positive or a negative approach. The positive impact of globalization is seen through the homogenization of cultures where ideas like cosmopolitanism, world cuisines, world tourism, and uniform patterns of consumption are appreciated. But this same homogeneity can be seen in a negative light when heterogeneous cultures are impacted. This happens because in the strife for homogeneity the uniqueness of individual cultures are wiped out. Globalization can be the cause of destruction of local cultures and cuisines. But there is another approach which can be seen as a middle path between the positive and negative consequences. It is the creation of a hybrid culture where new cultural forms evolve and transnational processes are seen.

The spread of globalization has led to a change in the ways of peoples and nations as a whole. Cultural globalization which refers to the intensification and expansion of cultural flows across the globe shows the changes taking place in the human experiences, but civilizational exchanges existed way ahead of the modern times. It is due to the technological advances in the modern society like the internet, air travel, and cellular connectivity among

others that people have become more aware of these cultural exchanges. The impact of cultural globalization can be perceived through the changes taking place in the idea of travel, the way the idea of a nation is evolving, the vicissitudes in the culture of food, the progress of the middle classes as well as the variations in gender relations. These aspects of cultural globalization will be further investigated in the thesis.

Globalizations impact can be seen in the huge migration taking place in the world. Globalization has opened up boundaries and people are more aware of the places where they can have better opportunities. Migration can be internal or external. Internal migration refers to the travel of citizens within the same country. External migration refers to travel undertaken by the citizens of one nation to another. Migration can occur due to a person seeking higher education, or for job opportunities, or to have a better standard of living or even to protect themselves from some threat to their lives. The influx of people has amplified due to the advances in the mode of transportation. Travel has become safer and with the spread of knowledge people have become aware of their destinations even before reaching them which was not possible earlier. The rise of awareness among people has ensured that migrants are treated well by the host country although there have been cases of ill-treatment all over the globe. Travel is an important aspect of the global world.

Another aspect of globalization is the emphasis on the concept of nation-state. The last few centuries have witnessed the human need to organize their political differences along provincial lines that create a sense of 'belonging' to a particular nation-state. Although globalization is thought of as the blurring of boundaries of a nation to create a global community, the fact still remains that it has also created a need for the nations to assert their individuality. There is a psychological foundation for the creation of the modern nation-state system as it provides a sense of security and historical continuity of a particular culture. The citizens are expected to remain loyal to their nationalities. There is a sense of superiority that

each nation feels and tries to show the other as inferior. This has been one of the main causes of war and the World Wars had led the human race to the brink of extinction. This had forced the countries to create global bodies like the United Nations to regulate the happenings in the world.

Due to globalization the cultural practices are not limited to fixed localities such as towns and nations. For example in today's world an authentic Indian restaurant can easily be found even in the heart of London. Cultural interactions acquire new meanings in the dominant global themes. Food cultures can define a community and at times a culture can penetrate other cultures through food. The McDonaldization of food has helped the spread of the American culture and their liberal views. Some cultures may resist this but in the long run the influence is much stronger. On the one hand, food can act as a tool for homogenization for different cultures but on the other it can create heterogeneity as food can become a source for alienation. Not every culture is tolerant of the particular food choices of a different culture. The preference for a specific type of food can lead to cultural clashes. Then again, there is a probability that a hybrid version may evolve with the coming together of two different food cultures like the Indian version of Chinese which is found in India. Hence, globalization opens up a lot of options for the food cultures of the world. New dishes are created on a regular basis and people get a lot of opportunity to try different cuisines and experiment with them which was not seen earlier.

Globalization has a major impact on the rise of the middle classes and its ever increasing population. Due to economic globalization, job opportunities were created throughout the world. There was much optimism at the beginning of the 1990's about the global turn to the market. This spread of economic globalization led to an increase in prosperity throughout the world and it particularly helped the developing world. Globalization of the Indian economy has strongly influenced social life in India. This has led

to the expansion of the middle class as more job opportunities were open to them. The middle classes then started travelling not just within India but also outside it as there was a huge demand for workforce. With increase in work there was an increase in the income and the standard of living of the house-hold of an average middle class person increased. These had a tremendous cultural impact as the middle class families began changing their way of living. The impact of globalization was evident in the middle classes even before the 1990's.

An advantage of globalization is the reduction of gender gap as a whole and the awareness created due to it. The economic opportunities have increased for women due to the openness in trade practices. Advancement in information and communication technologies has allowed women to have stronger ties with the markets and eased their access to the wide range of opportunities. In many countries the wages of men and women are the same. With the spread of information developing countries had the opportunity to learn about the liberal lives of people in other parts of the world. This has led to a shift in attitude towards gender. Women are more aware of their rights and there is also a change in the attitude towards alternative sexualities. The attitudes and behaviours of society are gradually changing and the rights of women as well as the queer community are widely discussed and the living conditions have improved tremendously from the earlier times. Individuals are more comfortable coming out in the open about their choices than they were earlier. This is largely due to the efforts of the global community.

It is because of globalization that the English language has become so popular and is now being used by major writers in the world irrespective of the country they belong to. The impact of globalization is profound in the works of creative writers like Vikram Seth, Salman Rushdie, Rohinton Mistry, Amitav Ghosh, Arundhati Roy and others. The very fact that these writers choose to write in English shows the urge in them to reach out the global audience as English has a far wider reach than any other language. The usage of English language opens

their works to a huge international market which is lucrative in terms of monetary benefits as well as prestigious awards. This synonymously leads to a blurring of the national boundaries as the works of the Indian writers are appreciated all over the world. Writers like Rushdie, Ghosh, Roy and Seth have created a space for themselves with their unique style of writing.

1.4 Scope

This thesis will examine how globalization harnesses a change in the culture of travel, brings modifications in the ideas of a nation and food culture of a society as seen through the fictional and non-fictional representations in the works of Vikram Seth. It also focuses through the author's works the impact globalization has on middle class and gender relations of a particular society.

The field of globalization is quite vast. In recent years globalization studies have become quite popular. There are various approaches with which a researcher can look at the different aspects of globalization. A general definition sees the processes of globalization through the lens of the economic, political and cultural aspects. Within these three broad categories there are multiple sub-categories through which the processes of globalization can be inspected. Tony Schirato and Jen Webb in their book *Understanding Globalization* view "globalization" as a "discursive regime, a kind of machine that eats up anyone and anything in its path" (199). They suggest that "globalization functions as a set of texts, ideas, goals, values, narratives, dispositions and prohibitions, a veritable template for ordering and evaluating activities, which is 'filled in' or infected with interests of whoever can access it" (200). Hence, the ideas of globalization and the way they are dealt will depend on the discretion of the researcher and the emphasis will vary with the choice of research area. Globalization has brought a lot of change in the societies and these changes are extensively

dealt with by the theorists. These changes can occur in the line of a political change, or the change in the economic situation of a society or a change in the cultural practices.

Within the scope of a thesis it is not possible to look at all the aspects of globalization in its entirety hence this study shall focus on a few of the cultural and social aspects of globalization and how they are reflected in the works of Vikram Seth. There is a 'cultural turn' in the contemporary period which is quite evident. Local cultures are being highlighted and hybrid cultures are evolving. Media and the progresses in technology played a crucial role in the advancement of the process of globalization.

Indian English literature, though has a recent origin as compared to other literatures, has managed to produce a vast body of literary works in different genres. Be it in the fields of fiction, non-fiction, poetry or drama, Indian writers who write in English have not been far behind their Western counterparts in churning out quality works which are fit for academic research. From its inception, there has been a unique flavour in the Indian writing in English and with the change in the Indian social scenario the writers stand and their topic of choice has been shifting. So there is a continuous experimentation happening in this field and writers are taking new challenging themes. The focus of this thesis will be on the contemporary Indian English writer Vikram Seth. To further support my arguments, I will be referring to the works of other contemporary Indian English writers.

In recent times Vikram Seth has managed to create a quite niche for himself in Indian English writing. He is a writer who likes to experiment with his creativity and his subjects, genre, and settings keeps changing quite often. On the one hand if he is an excellent poet, on the other his fiction has been quite popular. His dealing with non-fiction, in the form of a travelogue and a memoir, too has achieved success as does his creative talent in the writing of a libretto. But it is not possible to take into consideration all his creative works, hence, in this

thesis I have particularly taken Seth's fictional and non-fictional writings. In lieu with this, his three novels *The Golden Gate*, *A Suitable Boy*, and *An Equal Music* and his two non-fictional works *From Heaven Lake: Travels Through Sinkiang and Tibet* and *Two Lives* are dealt extensively.

1.5 Objectives

1. To understand the representation of the consequences of globalization in the areas of nation, travel, food, middle class and gender relations in the fictional and non-fictional works of Vikram Seth.
2. To understand the ideological constraints experienced by a post-colonial cosmopolitan writer like Vikram Seth when he percolates into an alien culture.
3. To probe whether an enmeshment of historical narrative and settings like Holocaust, war time Europe, post-World War II, and postcolonial India are a part of the strategic representation of the fluidity and borderlessness of the globalization era.
4. To explore if, within the critical and sympathetic narrative of Seth's notion of globalization and cosmopolitanism, there is an anti-globalization stance through which he manoeuvres into the world of the middle classes.
5. To attempt an examination of the impact of the globalization era on the culture of food.
6. To decipher society's treatment of the sections deemed as weak like women and the queer community through a global perspective.
7. To review Seth's fictional and non-fictional representations based on a particular society for a better comprehension of the impact and processes and patterns of globalization.

1.6 Limitations

1. The thesis takes into consideration only the social and cultural aspects of globalization. This research has not considered the economic and political aspects of globalization. Considering the economic and political aspects can give new direction to the research.
2. The research has been narrowed down only to the fictional and non-fictional works of Vikram Seth. The other works of Seth as well as his contemporary Indian English writers have not been deliberated upon.
3. Another limitation is that Vikram Seth's works could have been interrogated broadly in the line of a political novel, or through trauma studies or through caste relations which has not been done.

1.7 Research Methodology

In this thesis the inductive approach is used for the research methodology. Patterns, resemblances and regularities in experience (premises) are observed in Vikram Seth's works in order to reach specific conclusions (or to generate theory) in each chapter. The genre of Indian English literature can be approached through various theoretical frameworks. This study begins with an investigation of the works of Vikram Seth through the framework of the theories of social and cultural globalization. I have posited my analysis within the theoretical framework of postcolonial studies and gender discourses in specific chapters. The primary source for the thesis will be Seth's three novels *The Golden Gate*, *A Suitable Boy*, and *An Equal Music* and his two non-fictional works *From Heaven Lake: Travels Through Sinkiang and Tibet* and *Two Lives*. Seth's fictional and non-fictional works is analysed with the support of secondary sources which include; books, print and electronic journals, online

database, interviews, conferences/seminar proceedings, online content available in public domain and newspapers.

To comprehend and appreciate Vikram Seth's handling of travel writing the travel theories of theorists like William Zinsser, Thomas Swick, Levi-Strauss, and Jonathan Raban are swotted. In analysing the idea of nation in Seth's works post-colonial theorist like Edward Said, Partha Chatterjee and Homi Bhabha are referred. While focussing with the culture of food in the narratives of Seth the structuralist and post-structuralist theories like Saussure, Lévi-Strauss, Roland Barthes, and Jacques Derrida are taken into consideration. To deal with the representation of middle class in Seth's works theories of economists and sociologists like B.B. Misra, Pavan K. Varma, and Sudhir Kakar are mentioned. To understand Seth's dealing with gender studies feminist theorist like Judith Butler are explored.

In terms of structurally placing the chapters the thesis first dealt with the aspect of travel in the non-fictional works of Vikram Seth as the processes of globalization are much more evident through travel writing which is a huge area. The thesis then proceeds to study the idea of a nation in Seth's fictional and non-fictional work as the concept of nation has world-wide significance. After nation the thesis takes up the culture of food in Seth's works as globally food cultures are constantly evolving and it is a vast field for research. The study then narrows its focus to examine the consequences of globalization in the middle class through Seth's works and more emphasis is laid on the Indian middle class. Further, the thesis shifts its attention on the impact of globalization on the women and queer community and how Seth deals with these two specific sections of society in his works. Seth in his narrative deals with the idea of travel, nation and food on a global scale. His characters move back and forth to exemplify his world view. Whereas when it comes to the aspects like the middle class and gender Seth narrows his range and mostly deals with particular sections of the society.

1.8 Thesis structure

The thesis is divided into eight main chapters. The *first chapter* is the introduction which gives an overview of the Indian English literature as well as a brief idea of the writer Vikram Seth and his various works. It also introduces the concept of globalization and discusses the views of few of its proponents. This study has attempted to look into the major impact of globalization with all the chief areas of study namely travel, food, middle class, gender and nation to create a theoretical base with which I can co-relate it to Seth's fictional and non-fictional narrative.

The *second chapter* reviews the literature of concepts and theories propounded by researchers that are related to the area of globalization. In addition, there are reviews of the work of the different critics who have dealt with some of the aspects of Vikram Seth's works.

The *third chapter* looks at the implications of travel in the non-fictional works of Vikram Seth. It delves into the ways Vikram Seth deals with his personal travels in a globalized world.

The *fourth chapter* interrogates Vikram Seth's portrayal of the concept of nation. The idea of nation is fraught with complexities and this chapter views some of those through the lens of Seth.

The *fifth chapter* explores the cuisine and food culture that Vikram Seth has examined through his works. In the world of globalization, food culture of a community has its layers of complexity and those are deciphered and explored through Seth's works.

The *sixth chapter* looks at the representation of the middle class in the works of Vikram Seth. The middle class occupies an important position in the global world and the study examines how Seth portrays the problems and achievements of this class.

The *seventh chapter* deals with gender studies where problems of the women and queer community are seen. A closer look at Seth's depiction of the difficulties that the people deemed as belonging to the weaker sections of society face is attempted.

The *eighth chapter* concludes the thesis based on the findings of the earlier chapters. It also suggests recommendations for future research.

The following chapter is a reflection of the research work and texts of various scholars and prominent writers who deal with the concept of globalization. Several recent critical studies pertaining to the works of Vikram Seth are examined. Various doctoral theses undertaken on Seth's works have also been taken into account.

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Globalization as a concept is very vast. Its effects can be seen in every aspect of life- be it social, economic, cultural or religious. It is necessary to undertake an in-depth study to have a proper understanding of this concept and how it affects our everyday life. An extensive study of the existing theories concerning globalization is needed. Thomas Friedman in his book *The World is Flat* talks about the impact of globalization and how it is manifested. According to Friedman the phrase “The World is Flat” means that “the global competitive playing field is being levelled...It is now possible for more people than ever to collaborate and compete in real time with more other people on more different kinds of work from more different corners of the planet and on a more equal footing than at any previous time in the history of the world” (8). This has its implications in the world of literature too.

The concept of globalization can be seen from different perspectives. Scholars researching in the field of globalization have a range of theoretical discourses and William I. Robinson in “Theories of Globalization” discusses a few of them like: World-system Theory, Theories of Global Capitalism, The Network Society, Theories of Space, Place and Globalization, Theories Of Transnationality and Transnationalism, Modernity, Postmodernity and Globalization, and Theories of Global Culture. Referring to the effects of globalization on people from different cultural communities Robinson states that:

Members of cultural communities who live in different countries but remain connected to each other through their cultural taste or pastimes may also construct transnational communities. Transnational social spaces, hence, are

constructed through the accelerated pace of transnational practices of actors worldwide. These practices become routine to social life and may involve transient as well as more structured and permanent interactions and practices that connect people and institutions from different countries across the globe.

(137)

Robinson concludes that if one can contemplate more broadly the immense changes across the planet in the new century one can truly appreciate the real and prospective contribution of globalization theory.

The range of critical theories is very vast. Chamsy el-Ojeili and Partich Hayden in their book *Critical Theories of Globalization* identifies two primary ways of identifying and defining critical theory and its concerns. The first and most widely recognised version of critical theory is the work created by the members of the ‘Frankfurt School’ or the Institute of Social Research established in Frankfurt, Germany in 1923. This school included thinkers like Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Herbert Marcuse, Leo Lowenthal, Franz Neuman, and Jurgen Habermas. They researched within the broad areas of art and music, political economy, technology, the public sphere, and the rise of fascism. Critical theory has a second broad definition where it is understood as an assortment of the various approaches like the Frankfurt School, postmodernism, post structuralism, and feminism where the common view they share is that the dominant discourses of modernity emerging from Enlightenment, the social and political thought are in a state of crisis. Chamsy el-Ojeili and Partich Hayden argue that in essence, “critical theory aims to exploit the ‘immanent contradictions’ within globalization in order to foster greater human emancipation. So, for example, while the technological transformations associated with globalization may provide the state with more powerful tools for intrusive surveillance of its citizens, it may also provide citizens with alternative means for communicating, organizing and mobilizing” (10-

11). Chamsy el-Ojeili and Partich Hayden examines some of the main theories of social change, in order to illuminate the connection between globalization and the dimensions of societal change thought to accompany globalizing transformations. Chamsy el-Ojeili and Partich Hayden dedicated one chapter to explore cultural globalization. They began by looking at the global expansion of the power and reach of the cultural industries. One of their prominent arguments in the cultural imperialism thesis is that largely Western cultural industries are pushing us to the direction of cultural homogenization. After considering counter-arguments to this thesis, they have focused on the issue of identity. They have examined whether identities are changing under the pressures of growing world interconnectedness. Then they explore the argument that today's world is faced not with growing sameness but with clashes of incommensurable worlds or civilizations. The chapter closes with reflections on nationalism, ethnicity, and fundamentalism.

Globalization is reshaping how one has traditionally gone about studying the social world and human culture. The field of globalization studies is emerging across the disciplines. These globalization studies arose around several sets of phenomena that drew researchers' attention from the 1970s onwards. There is not a single 'theory of globalization' but many theoretical discourses. These tend to be grounded in broader theoretical traditions and perspectives, such as: Marxism, Weberianism, functionalism, postmodernism, critical and feminist theory, among others. They involve a number of distinct approaches to social inquiry, such as, cultural studies, international relations, post-colonial studies, literature and so on. In *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, Thomas L. Friedman describes the forces that are globalizing the world at the end of the twentieth century and their effects on environment, economics, politics, geopolitics, and culture.

I define globalization this way: it is the inexorable integration of markets, nation-states, and technologies to a degree never witnessed before – in a way

that is enabling individuals, corporations, and nation-states to reach around the world farther, faster, deeper, and cheaper than ever before, and in a way that is enabling the world to reach into individuals, corporations, and nation-states farther, faster, deeper than ever before”. (9)

In the book *The World is Flat*, Friedman refers to “the ten forces that flattened the world”(55). He argues that the world has been changed permanently by factors like globalized trade, outsourcing, supply-chaining, and political forces for both better and worse. He goes on to argue that globalization has a growing impact on business organization and practice as globalization is moving at an accelerated rate. Anthony Giddens in *The Consequences of Modernity* defines globalization “as the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa” (64). According to Fredric Jameson, “The concept of globalization reflects the sense of an immense enlargement of world communication, as well as of the horizon of a world market, both of which seem far more tangible and immediate than in earlier stages of modernity” (xi, *The Cultures of Globalization*). David Held in his book *Globalization / Anti-Globalization: Beyond the Great Divide* expresses the view that, “Globalization may be thought of as a process (or set of processes) which embodies a transformation in the spatial organization of social relations and transactions – assessed in terms of their extensity, intensity, velocity and impact - generating transcontinental or interregional flows and networks of activity, interaction, and the exercise of power” (16). There is no single unifying theory about globalization. It can be looked up at from different aspects.

In the realm of cultural globalization, there are primarily two approaches regarding the role of culture in the global process. The first approach delves into the positive consequences of globalization which Abril Trigo in his paper “What Do You Mean by

Cultural Globalization,” defines as “a process in which goods and people, ideas and behaviours, technology and information are freely exchanged and disseminated between different cultures worldwide” (6). Accordingly, then the economic side of globalization is “deemphasized” and just “another instance of cultural diffusion or hybridization” (6). The second approach as elaborated by Trigo posits that “cultural globalization, characterized by massive acculturation, worldwide homogenization, and ethnic annihilation, is an inevitable, though deplorable, side effect of the otherwise good economic globalization and its spin-offs – political modernization and global integration” (6). A number of theories are centrally, if not primarily, concerned with the subjective dimension of globalization and as Leslie Sklair in the article “Globalization” points out “tend to prioritize the cultural over political and/or the economic” (329). These theorists emphasize the rapid growth of the mass media and resultant global cultural flows and images in recent decades, evoking the image famously put forth by Marshall McLuhan of ‘the global village’. William I. Robinson in his article “Theories of Globalization” discusses that:

Homogenization theories see a global cultural convergence and would tend to highlight the rise of world beat, world cuisines, world tourism, uniform consumption patterns and cosmopolitanism. Heterogeneity approaches see continued cultural difference and highlight local cultural autonomy, cultural resistance to homogenization, cultural clashes and polarization, and distinct subjective experiences of globalization. Hybridization stresses new and constantly evolving cultural forms and identities produced by manifold transnational processes and the fusion of distinct cultural processes... Ritzer (1993, 2002) coined the now popularized term ‘McDonaldization’ to describe the sociocultural processes by which the principles of the fast-food restaurant came to dominate more and more sectors of US and later world society.

Ritzer, in this particular homogenization approach, suggests that Weber's process of rationalization became epitomized in the late twentieth century in the organization of McDonald's restaurants along seemingly efficient, predictable and standardized lines – an instrumental rationality (the most efficient means to a given end) – yet results in an ever deeper substantive irrationality, such as alienation, waste, low nutritional value and the risk of health problems, and so forth. This commodification and rationalization of social organization spreads throughout the gamut of social and cultural processes, giving us 'McJobs', 'McInformation', 'McUniversities', 'McCitizens' and so forth. (140)

This spread of globalization has led to a change in the ways of the people and nations as a whole. Cultural globalization which refers to the intensification and expansion of cultural flows across the globe shows the changes taking place in the human experiences.

There are many dangers of globalization. Due to the evolution of the modern world there is a danger that citizen rights may be infringed by arbitrary governmental action especially if the actions of America are considered. Richard Falk in his article "The Making of Global Citizenship" suggests the creation of the global citizen. He creates the image of a global citizen as a type of

global reformer, the most fundamental image of which is of an individual that intellectually perceives a better way of organizing the political life of the planet and favours a utopian scheme that is presented as a practical mechanism. Typically such a global citizen has been an advocate of world government or of a world state, or a stronger United Nations, accepting as necessary some kind of image of political centralization as indispensable to

overcome the chaotic dangers of the degree of political fragmentation and economic disparity that currently exists in the world today. (132)

Falk concludes with the thought that globalization of life and capital, depends on creating and endorsing a much tougher intercontinental agenda and sense of communal feeling. There is also the need for a widespread participation at the grass root level which would contribute to a process that could be called globalization from below. He agrees that global citizenship is ideal as a slightly absurd notion in today's political scenario. He seems to feel that if global citizenship is associated with the prospect of a 'future political community of global or species scope', then it adopts a far more constitutive and stimulating political atmosphere.

From the theories of globalization the study will move into the major areas dealt within the critical writings of India English literature. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar in his book *Indian Writing in English* has made an extensive survey of the emerging body of Indian English literature. This is one of the landmark books to deal with this literature and has received recognition both in India as well as abroad. Iyengar discusses the beginning of Indian English literature and gradually goes on to describe the impact of the writers and poets who has given direction to this literature. During the reign of the British period when the Indian writers began writing in English they imitated the British style of writing to depict Indian experiences. It was actually with writers like Raja Rao that English writing began to be influenced by the Indian language. In *Kanthapura* Raja Rao translates into English many Indian proverbs and makes use of traditional Indian speeches which gives an authenticity to his text and one can also get a feel of the life prevalent in the villages of India when Gandhi was urging the Indian people to fight against the Britishers. Then it was with writers like R.K. Narayan through which Indian writing in English was recognized by the Europeans. But post-independence many Indian writers had identity crisis which was

seen more prominently amongst the diasporic writers. Contact with the western world resulted in India's acceptance of western thought on the one hand, and rejection of it on the other, and resulted in an effort made to revive the ancient glory and Indian consciousness. A large number of writers opted for a synthesis between Indianization and Westernization, in their search for a national ideology. Iyengar traces all these developments through his book.

Author, Pavan K. Varma, in his book *The Great Indian Middle Class*, examines the evolution of the Indian middle class during the twentieth century, especially since Independence. He shows us how the middle class, guided by self-interest, is becoming increasingly insensitive to the plight of the underprivileged, and how economic liberalization has only heightened its tendency to withdraw from anything that does not relate directly to its material well-being. Varma analyses the transformation of the middle class in the decade since 1997 and seeks to reconcile the seemingly dichotomous aspects of our economy and polity. An instance of his assessment can be seen when he stresses the importance of education as a means to fulfil the aspirations of the middle class through the comments below:

Education was something the middle class always valued, but its importance has only grown in these last years. Traditionally, the feudal gentry had the insulation of landed wealth and the hereditary rich had money; for the average middle class person, however, education was the only means to move upwards, and maintain, if not widen the distance from those at the bottom of the ladder eking out a living from menial labour. Educational avenues had been increasing ever since 1947... (xxii)

Varma through his book shows the shortcomings of the middle class. It can be seen as a way to help this class improve so as to develop the whole nation.

Several writers and researchers have looked at the presence of cosmopolitan culture in the works of Vikram Seth and also headed to make a comparative study of Seth's work with M. G. Vassanji, Salman Rushdie and Amitav Ghosh. Barnita Bagchi in her article "Between history, fiction, and biography: Cosmopolitanism, migration, and intercultural relationships in Vikram Seth's *Two Lives*" argues that:

Seth's is a critical, affective, and situated cosmopolitanism, candid and yet sympathetic in showing the compulsions that shape human movements across borders, and the patterns that coalesce in keeping migrants in their new countries of residence. [...] The work furthers our understanding both of the classed cosmopolitanism of migrant or travelling white-collar professionals, and of gendered cosmopolitanism. (101)

Neelam Srivastava in her book *Secularism in the Postcolonial Indian Novel: National and Cosmopolitan Narratives in English* partly recognizes that Seth's work is an important exemplar of situated, critical cosmopolitanism. Srivastava argues that, in Seth's oeuvre, *Two Lives* marks a turn to a less statist, nationalist view of the world than one finds in his novel *A Suitable Boy*. In *Two Lives* one can say far more about cosmopolitanism where there is a constant intertwining of the private and public, and the human bonds of empathy and solidarity are avowed.

In the book *Rethinking Indian English Literature* edited by U.M. Nanavati and Prafulla C. Kar there are discussions about various writers of Indian English literature. Nanavati and Kar in the "Introduction" of the book trace the rise of the Indian English literature:

After a series of uncertain beginnings in mid-nineteenth century Indian English literature seems to have finally arrived at its destination. It has found proper articulation, a truer identity and an appropriate cultural context for

expression. But in order to reach its desired goal it had to go through periods of anxiety, trials of self-definition and an effort to distance itself from both its parents, English literature and Indian literature. Finally it has acquired a distinctive generic identity of its own. It is no longer caught up in the anxieties of self-definition or with questions about its Indianness. (9-10)

Nanavati and Kar then elaborate the role Salman Rushdie played in garnering world attention to Indian English literature. They also discussed the plethora of writers and their contributions to literature. They discuss the changing scenario of the Indian English literature. In *Rethinking Indian English Literature* Sarla Palkar's article on "Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy*: Return to the Old Paradigm" deals with Seth's style of writing which is more in tune to the realistic novels of the nineteenth century England like that of Jane Austen. Palkar discusses how Seth uses the theme of marriage and family in the traditional way. She writes that in the novel *A Suitable Boy* the readers return to the old traditions of the nineteenth century novel, where the self, by the very fact of its relation to the world and the other discovers itself in all its richness and unity.

Different academicians have taken interest and published articles on the wide range of works of Vikram Seth. GJV Prasad has edited one such anthology on the recent criticism on Seth. This volume includes essays by Nandini Chandra on Seth's journey through mainland China which he describes in his travelogue *From Heaven Lake*. Here Chandra discusses how "travel writing in some sense is about straddling incommensurate worlds, of bridging gaps, of making sense of the differences in culture" (21). She takes up the different aspects of travel writing. Angelie Multani in her article about Seth discusses the author's novel in verse *The Golden Gate* as a metro sexual love story. Multani argues that Seth has depicted a range of lovers, which is possibly acceptable in a 'modern' metropolis. The metropolis is a uniquely different location, which has its own unique culture and lifestyle.

According to her this metropolitan ideal is characterised as much by traditional values as it is by its side-stepping of the overtly political. Neelam Srivastava discusses that in Seth's *A Suitable Boy* a secularism founded on rationalistic premises emerges as the only viable approach to governance in the Indian polity. This rationalist secularism is reflected in Seth's representation of the multi-lingual reality of modern India. Srivastava addresses the ways in which a secular perspective underscores the novel's representation of postcolonial India, and what it means for Seth to recuperate a Nehruvian vision of state and society as a means of engaging with the "present needs" of the Indian context. Jon Mee looks at Seth's *A Suitable Boy* as a transition narrative where there is a change towards modernity. Priya Kumar offers a reading of Seth's *A Suitable Boy* in the light of her broader concerns around secularism and religious conflict in the Indian subcontinent. Kumar argues that Seth deploys the genre of the historical novel in order to make an oblique address to the contemporary intensification of religious intolerance in India, and to support it she takes up the inter-community romance in the novel. Kumar gestures towards the limits of Seth's secular nationalism as a paradigm of tolerance for the *present* of the subcontinent. Noted academician Mala Pandurang in her essay, reviews the literary career of Vikram Seth as that of a writer who has experienced considerable intercultural mobility. Seth has lived in three continents and has written in a variety of genres- poetry, fiction, non-fiction (a travelogue) and a libretto. Pandurang examines what position Seth speaks from at the point of creative output, as also who is his 'ideal' audience in each case. Pandurang also explores how Seth's *An Equal Music* is constant with a new, emerging category of international literature.

M.K. Naik and Shamala A. Narayan in their book *Indian English Literature 1980-2000: A Critical Survey* have reviewed the novels of Vikram Seth in terms of social realism. According to them:

Fiction of social realism has several ramifications. When the narrative is restricted mainly to a particular ethnic group it has a distinctive flavour of its own. Realism sharply focused on a distinctive social section bound by ties other than those of ethnicity, creates its own world. Political and historical fiction generate their own ambience; and so does regional fiction, which has the additional advantage of the setting being so evocatively realised that it becomes a fictional value itself. And when the main emphasis is less on action than on the depiction of states of mind, on the apprehension of their own experience by the major characters, realism travels inward. (55)

Naik and Narayan discuss in detail Seth's *A Suitable Boy* and *An Equal Music* in the context of a social novel and delve into Seth's treatment of the subject matter.

Prerana Sinha, in her book *Vikram Seth the Suitable Writer: A Critical Response*, gives a critical view on the different works of Seth. She introduces Seth in the Indo-European tradition of writing. Sinha looks at Seth's *A Suitable Boy* as a realist narrative and discusses it in details. The study further proceeds to trace Seth's use of the raga and metaphors and the verbal realism found in *A Suitable Boy*. Then she goes on to do a comparative study of the themes of Seth's two novels *The Golden Gate* and *An Equal Music*. Sinha then looks at Seth's usage of the sonata and the fugue in his novels. She also does a critical analysis of Seth's poetry. In one of her chapters she takes up Seth's reference of the beast in his fiction and poetry. Sinha then gives an overview of Seth's memoir *Two Lives* which she sees as a double biography of Seth's great uncle and aunt. Regarding Seth's sentiments for the world at large Sinha states that:

...Seth endorses this litany at the end of the German prayer-book which incorporated the teachings of Judaism aimed at universal love and brotherhood, which is no different from the teaching of Islam, Christianity of

Hinduism. He hopes that such humane ideals are put into practice by both sides of the divide; the universe would be a much better place to live in. Vikram Seth truly transgresses the geographical, historical and political divisions through his yearning to reach out several cultures so as to create harmonious zone. (246)

She concludes with praise aimed at Seth's creation of a place for himself in the literary world.

In the *Contemporary Indian Writers in English* series Rohini Mokashi-Punekar writes the book *Vikram Seth: An Introduction* where she introduces the readers to the life and works of Vikram Seth. In each of her chapters Punekar takes up the individual works of Seth and analyses the contents of the texts. In *A Suitable Boy* she examines Seth's use of social realism and themes such as 'nation' and the narrative form used. Punekar also explores the neo-formalism with its self-conscious distancing in Seth's poetry. She also shows the humanism in Seth's travelogue. In Seth's *The Golden Gate* Punekar explores themes such as romance, family, homosexuality, nuclear politics, and a critique of the academic world. Punekar talks about Seth's dealing of issues such as anxiety and loss, class and gender, narrative strategy, European legacy and postcolonial issues in *An Equal Music*. In *Two Lives* Seth's handling of the biographical subjects and his view on themes such as the Holocaust are explored by Punekar along with the depiction of language and the use of counterfactual history. Talking about Seth's experimentation with different genres she states that:

He is perhaps the only Indian writer today to experiment with so many genres of literature: poetry in metre and rhyme that eschew current practices of Indian poets who largely use free verse, a travelogue, a verse novel in sonnets, a classically realistic novel, a modernist novel and a biographic memoir. (197)

Punekar discusses the independence that Seth shows in his choice of form and theme which according to her are ‘anachronistically conservative’. She concludes with the international success of Seth as a writer.

Roopali Gupta in her book *Vikram Seth’s Art: An Appraisal* charts the development of Vikram Seth’s art, tracing in a chronological context its growth and correlating it with his personal life. Gupta follows various phases of Seth’s experiences, the stages of his mental and emotional maturity and subsequent changes undergone by his art. She critically writes about various poems of Seth.

Seth’s gift is that he combines the sensitivity of a poetic soul with the poetic soul with the narrative dexterity of a skilled raconteur. Also, he has this in common with the great writers of all time: his themes possess substantial value and a genuine human meaning, embracing life with all its passions, problems, and vicissitudes. Seth’s literary output is supported by this ample knowledge of life. (126)

Gupta discusses Seth’s handling of the characters in his novels and how they are placed in the text. Seth literary digressions are also discussed like his travelogue. She concludes by saying that Seth’s works have a timeless quality.

The book *A Critical Analysis of Vikram Seth’s Poetry and Fiction* by Seemita Mohanty introduces Vikram Seth in the context of Indian English literature. She gives a comprehensive analysis of Vikram Seth’s poetry. Mohanty further gives a critical review of *The Golden Gate* where she discusses Seth portrayal of his characters within the parameters of profession, personal life, whims, family, social conditions and connections. She goes on to do a social and political study of Seth’s *A Suitable Boy*. Additionally, she takes up the critical analysis of *An Equal Music* where Seth examines the impact of Western classical music on

the lives of the European protagonist. Referring to the bulk of Seth's work, Mohanty states that:

In Seth is a self-contained and independent account and exposition in each case, and they join together in a complementary way, to communicate what he understands as the available life-conditions in the world as a whole. This is not the world-view as such, but differently can be termed as the view of the world as available in many forms, and Seth's credit lies in its integrating in complementary relevance and signification. In this Seth's creative achievement is almost unique not only in Indian English Literature, but in Indian Literature as a whole. (257)

Mohanty concludes with the statement that Seth is one of the finest writers of the post-1980 Indian English Literature and the creative totality of Indian Literature as a whole.

Researchers too have dealt with Seth in their works. The researcher C. Thomas John in his doctoral thesis "Nonconformity in Indian English Fiction: A Study in Salman Rushdie, Vikram Seth and Arundhati Roy" focuses on the various aspects of nonconformity in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy* and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*. It explores the attempt of those novelists' rebellion against the accepted and existing social norms, linguistic principles and epistemological bias. It also encompasses how they demand redress in these realms. As part of the study, nonconformity is held as a basic principle bringing about a change in historiographical, linguistic *and* social aspects. Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy* is analysed to show its language of irony in its attempt to resist the established marital custom. The subtlety of expression pervading the whole novel is central to the study. 'Dissimulation' of irony is applied to the structure of the novel and its chief characters in order to explore the novel's subtle meanings. For this, the 'naive spokesman'

with his 'invincible simplicity' is brought forth. The study also refutes a set of critiques viewing the novel as a clarion call for social conformity by bringing out the difference between 'the explicit expression' and 'the implicit meaning.'

Masood Rana in his Ph.D thesis titled "Thematic preoccupations in the novels of Vikram Seth" deals with three of Seth's works. He is concerned with the various thematic concerns of Seth's *A Suitable Boy*, *The Golden Gate* and *An Equal Music*.

P R Sabitha in her doctoral thesis "Story and history: The dynamics of narration in Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy*" examines how the dynamics of narration bring about an effective fusion of 'history' and 'fiction' in *A Suitable Boy*, and whether this play of narration contributes towards putting the novel into the category of historical novels. She elaborates the contribution of the dynamics of narration in the fusion of history and fiction. She surveyed the whole novel and examines whether *A Suitable Boy* comes under the genre of historical novel.

Chandrima Sen in her Ph.D thesis "Landscape culture and adventure" does a comparative study between Bibhutibhushan Bandopadhyay and Vikram Seth. She deals with the fictional world of both Bandopadhyay and Seth. She also deals with the issues of landscape, culture and adventure in the writings of both Bandopadhyay and Seth along with the eco-critical concern in the work of the writers. She examines the post-colonial aspect of the novels of both Bandopadhyay and Seth and the aspect of intertextuality in their novels.

J Srihari Rao in his doctoral thesis titled "Tradition and experiment in Vikaram Seth" studies Vikram Seth's writings in terms of tradition which he has imbibed from his birth, upbringing and education and his creative experiments which are due to his originality, talent or his genius. He shifts the elements of tradition from those of the experiment. By isolating

them, they are studied in opposition to each other where the tradition and experiment lend new dimensions of depth, meaning and relevance.

There are scholars who have shown interest in Vikram Seth's writings. Annie Cottier aims at an aesthetic and political investigation of the interaction between cosmopolitanism, nationalism and post-colonialism in twenty-first century Indian English narrative fiction. Her thesis argues that the concept of cosmopolitanism has emerged as a new topic of interest in contemporary Indian English novels. Cottier contends that the concept of cosmopolitanism offers a new and engaging approach to literary texts written in English which are concerned with postcolonial topics, yet which are, due to the process of globalization and migration, equally invested with new perspectives on nation, nationalism and community. This corpus includes *The Assassin's Song* (2008) by M.G. Vassanji, *The Enchantress of Florence* (2008) by Salman Rushdie, *Sea of Poppies* (2008) by Amitav Ghosh as well as *Two Lives* (2007) by Vikram Seth.

2.1 Gap in Existing Research

From the above literature review it is amply clear that there is a dearth of exploration of Vikram Seth's works in the light of the processes of globalization. This aspect has not been covered in any of the critical studies, surveys or Ph.D thesis. There are no prominent works which connects the globalization theories to Seth's fiction and non-fiction.

There have been many debates and theories in academic circles on globalization. These theories articulate the different positions of globalization in its myriad forms. But there is a lack of analysis of the lived experiences amidst the globalization process. The examples of lived experiences of globalization are found in abundance in the works of Vikram Seth and have not been explored by the critical thinkers to its fullest extent. This research focuses on achieving a synthesis of the theories and the lived experiences of globalization so as to come to grips with the way in which globalization affects us. This thesis will help in understanding

the ideological constraints experienced by a post-colonial cosmopolitan writer like Vikram Seth while percolating an alien culture to fictionalise and theorize the implications of globalization. There is an exploration of whether within the critical and sympathetic narrative of Seth's notion of globalization and cosmopolitanism, there is an underlying subtext which manoeuvres into anti-globalization principles or of 'closing the borders'.

Most of the available critical analysis on Vikram Seth's works deal with his individual works. This thesis will take a holistic approach to Seth's fictional and non-fictional works while showing the different cultural positions of the writer. On being asked about the various global settings of his novels, Seth in an interview to the *Atlantic Unbound* states that "there is something common -- a sort of affinity, a sort of common experience." This thesis will try to identify the common experiences in his different works that Seth talks about in the interview. There has been no research done on the affinity of the writer from an overall view point and this aspect will be undertaken in this thesis. This study will consider and probe into the claims made by Vikram Seth in one of his interviews to the *Atlantic Unbound* where he says:

Although my books are set in different countries, I don't feel that it makes me one of those stereotypical cosmopolitans who have a sort of mixed cultural experience in every book and feel they have to lay their ethnicity on thick. I think that the characters are so much more important than the writer. To be brought up short by the ethnicity of a particular writer throughout each book – that's not my style.

Probing into the different perspectives of the works of Seth's contemporaries regarding globalization will help in making a comparative study of these writers with Seth.

None of the researchers have applied the theory of food linked to the processes of globalization to the works of Vikram Seth. Interrogating the idea of globalization through the culture of food in Seth's fictional and non-fictional works in this thesis is interesting as well as challenging.

By undertaking this research the aim is to gain a comprehensive understanding of how Vikram Seth as a creative writer grapples with the problems of globalization. This study will throw new light on the implications of globalization in the works of Seth. This research should help the students and researchers who work in the area of Indian English literature to understand and appreciate Seth's work from a different perspective.

Due to the processes of globalization there is fluidity which can be perceived and this is evident in the aspect of travel. Travel is intimately linked with globalization. The next chapter describes how Vikram Seth deals with the idea of travel in the era of globalization.

Chapter 3

IMPLICATIONS OF TRAVEL IN THE NON-FICTIONAL WRITINGS OF VIKRAM SETH

The idea of travel has been there since time immemorial. Along with travel comes the associated experiences, memories, recollections and documentations of the traveller. Travel writing documents the places visited and experiences encountered by the traveller in the form of a narrative, public lecture, slide show, or motion picture. Travel literature typically records the experiences of an author touring a place for pleasure or academic purposes. Travel literature is travel writing aspiring to literary value. An individual work is sometimes called a travelogue or itinerary. Travel literature may be cross-cultural or transnational in focus, or may involve travel to different regions within the same country. Accounts of spaceflight may also be considered travel literature. "What raises travel writing to literature," says William Zinsser in *The Writer Who Stayed*, "is not what the writer brings to the place, but what the place draws out of the writer" (105-106).

Travel has been intimately connected with writing. The traveller's tale is as old as fiction itself. One of the earliest stories can be traced to Egypt in the Twelfth Dynasty about a shipwrecked sailor alone in a marvellous land. This is a thousand years before the *Odyssey*. Biblical and classical traditions are full with examples of travel like the punishment of Cain in the Bible. Homer's *Odyssey* describes an epic journey and Odysseus's epic adventures offer a blueprint for the romance of travel as well as the dangers of it. The attitude of society towards travel has always been uncertain. Travel can broaden the mind and knowledge of an individual but the individual might return as a changed person or not return at all. This creates an aura of uncertainty towards the idea of travel. But in Christianity, pilgrimage is an

important path towards salvation and hence it is carefully controlled. John Bunyan's allegorical work *The Pilgrim's Progress* shows life symbolised as a journey. Pilgrimage is central in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* too. Two medieval texts which still provoke fascination and controversy are the narratives of Marco Polo and John Mandeville. Their texts contain themes which are relevant to the modern travel writing along with the problematics of it. Marco Polo travelled to Cathay (China) in the second half of the thirteenth century. On his return to Venice, his stories were written down by Rustichello who is a writer of romances. Nothing much is known about John Mandeville but his stories of travel were read widely. A huge influence of Marco Polo and John Mandeville can be seen in the writings of Christopher Columbus about the Caribbean islands. Columbus's first voyage to America in 1492 is usually seen as a new beginning for travel writing. According to *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*:

During the sixteenth century, writing became an essential part of travelling; documentation an integral aspect of the activity. Political or commercial sponsors wanted reports and maps, often kept secret, but the public interest aroused by stories of faraway places was an important way of attracting investment and- once colonies started- settlers. Rivalry between European nation-states meant that publication of travel accounts was often a semi-official business in which the beginnings of imperial history were constructed.

(3)

Thus, travel writing became a site of interest not just for the common masses looking out for adventure, but also became the first step towards mapping cultural territories to support and further imperialist tendencies. Examples of such writings which exhibit an unprecedented interest can be seen in Thomas More's *Utopia* where the fictional traveller travels to the New World. The influence of More can be seen in Joseph Conrad's novel *Heart of Darkness*.

There have been innumerable texts written on travel where some have been fiction and some non-fiction. Literary writers like Dickens, Trollope, Stendhal, and Flaubert have written their fair share about travel in the nineteenth century. But travel writing became travel literature and was taken seriously when writers like Robert Louis Stevenson, Henry James, Edith Wharton, and D.H. Lawrence began to commit large chunks of their time to travelling and travel writing. In the contemporary era books like Bruce Chatwin's *In Patagonia*, James Clifford's *Routes*, Hugh Brody's *Maps and Dreams* among others have garnered an interest in travel writing. The credibility of contemporary travel writing is maintained as many of them have been written by journalists. But travel writing is a broad and ever-shifting genre which had a complex history. A vast amount of study is required to have full knowledge of its history.

Indian culture has a rich heritage of travel. Instances of travel can be found in the epics like the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. Travel literature has been dealt with abundantly by the regional writers of India. Regional writers like Sashibhusan Rai in his work *Dakshinatya Bhramana* (Travels in South India, 1896), Narasimhalu Naidu in *Arya Divya Desa Yatari Sarithiram* (experiences beyond the Vindhyas, 1889) among others, deal with travel within India. Sake Dean Mahomet was the pioneer from India to write the first book on travel in English titled *Travels of Dean Mahomet*. Mahomet's travel narrative was published in 1793 in England. This text explores the life of Dean Mahomet, a soldier with the East India Company's Bengal Army during 1780-1781. In his book Mahomet gives an account of his experiences in the Army. It also traces his emigration to Ireland where he ends up marrying a local Anglo-Irish woman. He shares his ensuing conversion to the Protestant faith. Travel writing has often been connected and simultaneously studied along with other domains. Amitav Ghosh's *In an Antique Land* (1992) is an example of such amalgamation of two different genres. It is a meandering tale between travelogue and history, where Ghosh

creates a vivid picture of Egypt and Middle East. Although it may not exist today, it becomes a unique platform for discovery and learning. The main purpose of *In an Antique Land* is to trace the path of a Jewish slave of an Arab merchant in the Medieval Middle East and Egypt. However, a major part of the work is a recollection of Ghosh's time in two Egyptian villages in the northern Delta region where he learnt the ways and customs of the village, the *falaheen* (native peasant or labourer) and what it means to be an Egyptian. Ghosh's Egypt stands in stark contrast to the representation provided by most Western media and pundits. On the other hand, Pankaj Mishra's travelogue *Butter Chicken in Ludhiana: Travels in Small Town India* (1995) describes the changing face of India, during globalization. This book is sprinkled with diverse stories of people from across the small towns and the single common underlying theme of *Butter Chicken in Ludhiana* is the aspirations of the middle class and the erstwhile feudal rich. In each of the stories, there is a motivation amongst the people to climb up the social ladder. William Dalrymple merges the genre of travel writing with history. In his first book *In Xanadu* (1989), Dalrymple follows the route taken by Marco Polo from Jerusalem to Mongolia. The book covers his travels from the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem to the site of Shangdu (now part of Inner Mongolia) and long referred to as Xanadu in English literature. To undertake this journey Dalrymple passed through Turkey, Israel, Syria, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan & China in the 1980s. Turkey was not as hospitable towards foreigners during that time as it is today. Israel was as fragile during that time as it is at present and entering Syria from the Israel border was never a cakewalk. Iran was in the middle of its revolution at that point and Afghanistan was still recovering from Russian invasion. The Swat Valley of Pakistan has always been difficult to get into and China was not very open to tourist at that point. The result was a series of adventures and challenges that Dalrymple went through which were as interesting as that of Marco Polo whose journey he traced.

This chapter will focus on Vikram Seth's travelogue *From Heaven Lake: Travels Through Sinkiang and Tibet* and his memoir *Two Lives* where he deals with the theme of travel. There are instances of travel in his fictional works (*An Equal Music* and *A Suitable Boy*). However, these works will not be touched upon in the course of this discussion because this chapter is exclusively dedicated to Seth's non-fictional works. The idea of authenticity of a text has always been a problematic one and a probe will be undertaken with respect to Seth's works. I will try to locate how Seth effectively uses this genre of travel writing to articulate his thoughts on globalization through his narration. His outlook on the impact of globalization in different parts of the world will be explored through both the voices of natives and the traveller. The cross-cultural love-hate relationship fostered in the psyche of the people from India and China will also be deciphered and critically analysed through travel writing. Seth's works stand a testimony to the fact as to how an impulsive and unplanned expedition leads to a deeper understanding of a specific culture. Social reality is seen without distortions. Travel becomes a mode of escape for the author and a reader can easily co-relate his works and the biographical elements of his life.

Vikram Seth is a writer who has travelled extensively. His studies have taken him to various parts of the world. Seth has based many of his books on the experiences gathered during his time abroad. Both his *From Heaven Lake* and *Two Lives* are fine examples of his love and perseverance towards travel. The concept of travel writing is a political one. There may be representations and misrepresentations. A reader has to be very careful as to what they choose to believe as fact or fiction. In "Not a Tourist" the critic Thomas Swick maintains that:

The best writers in the field [of travel writing] bring to it an indefatigable curiosity, a fierce intelligence that enables them to interpret, and a generous

heart that allows them to connect. Without resorting to invention, they make ample use of their imaginations. (9)

This idea of imagination can be a dangerous one as it may raise issues on the authenticity of the text. Forgery and parody have specifically and at times even parasitic relationship with travel writing. A person who brings far-fetched facts from remote climes and travelling alone offers the perfect alibi for the forger and a tempting target for the parodist. Lucian's *True History*, written in the first century AD, was so supremely written that subsequent travel parodies were variations of its themes like Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*. Authenticity and forgery are issues that still arise when dealing with travel writing. Texts like *Madagascar: or Robert Drury's Journal, during Fifteen Years Captivity on that Island* still causes problems to researchers about their authenticity. Many readers hope for a literal truthfulness from travel writing that is not expected in the novel. But every writer has their own unique perspective. The critic Meenakshi Mukherjee is of the view that genuine writers as a species are individualistic in any language refusing to fall into predictable models. Whether the writers are vernacular, diasporic or native, whether privileged or subaltern, each writer comes from a specific socio-historical background. Therefore the experiences of this writers and their sense of perception will be unique. Hence creative writers cannot be easily ignored or bracketed under a particular category.

When the writer connects with the people he writes about, there is a penetration and glimpses of the locale culture can be seen. It can be seen how Seth in his text *From Heaven Lake* recollects his attempts to form bonds with the locals. Being from a globalized age and having prior knowledge of the native language, it is easier for Seth to look at the natives from a neutral point of view. Seth while taking a ride in a truck from Liuyuan to Lhasa learns a lot from his companions and he even gets invited to stay with the native people. In Niranjana Mohanty's view:

Any creative writer, whether writing in the regional language or English, has an unwritten, unconscious responsibility to the society, culture, country, tradition, linguistic heritage he belongs to or shares with. One can disapprove of or dismantle this hiatus, this inviolable, insurmountable relationship, the relationship that ultimately goes into the making of a literature which acquires the condition of music, or of fire or silence or of timelessness. (7)

Creative artists may have different insights and different set of experiences and also might be dealing with themes they feel strongly about. It can also be seen as a strong conviction of the writer about his/her culture, nation or institution. Unless the entire text becomes jargonized to the extent of obscurity, such descriptions should not be challenged or dismissed as mere exoticization to grab the attention of the Western audience. Vikram Seth in *Two Lives* gives his perspective on the different aspects of his family. But this never means that he is trying to show an exotic India or Germany or London. His take on the description of his family and his travels abroad rely on his memory and it can at times be called selective but there is always a feeling of bonding that he shows.

Travel has been a part of Seth's family. Travel has opened Seth's mind to the impacts of globalization and he and his family live their lives like global citizens. In *Two Lives* he describes the traditions followed in his house when someone is travelling out of India:

It is something of a tradition in our family that we spend the last evening before anyone goes on a foreign trip at home together, usually seated on and around my parents' bed. On the walls are photographs of the family, on the dressing-table are my mother's perfume and bangles. We try to ignore the telephone. (41)

These lines indicate that the idea of travel in his family is not novel and in fact it is welcomed as a matter of prestige to explore the world around. The idea of travel is so ingrained in the life of the Seth family that a tradition has formed around it. This can be seen as one of the impacts of globalization where traditions change due to the culture of travel.

In the travelogue *From Heaven Lake* Seth has extensively dealt with the Chinese and Tibetan culture. The style of narration is objective at first where Seth observes everything around him and then later he correlates it with his past making it subjective. The self-analytical passage from the books shows his way of narration:

Increasingly of late, and particularly when I drink, I find my thoughts drawn into the past rather than impelled into the future. I recall drinking sherry in California and dreaming of my earlier student days in England, where I ate dalmoth and dreamed of Delhi. What is the purpose, I wonder, of all this restlessness? I sometimes seem to myself to wander around the world merely accumulating material for future nostalgias. (35)

Seth travel route takes him from China to Tibet and he objectively describes whatever he encounters on his path. But such descriptions are infused with his personal thoughts. He articulates his thoughts about life and his family. While finding similarities in China with his home, he shows a longing to go back to his family. He has been constantly trotting all over the world and finally there is an urge in him to return home, which becomes stronger as he comes nearer to Tibet and then to the Nepal border. Although Seth is very much open to travel and crossing over boundaries, at times his urge to assert his own identity and longing for home creeps in. His subjectivity gives the reader glimpses of the person behind the traveller. Seth's genuine interest and his acceptance of the new culture he encounters

smoothens his passage as the natives warm up to him. These are the traits of a truly global writer who not only accepts the culture of the other but also appreciates it.

Globalization had a huge impact on all countries of the world. It was due to the advances in the mode of transportation that has seen an influx of people. Travel has become safer and with the spread of knowledge, people have become aware of their destinations even before reaching, which was not possible earlier. Vikram Seth and his uncle are two of the examples of the spread of globalization as they have travelled to various countries and been accepted into those countries without much difficulty. This is due to a level of acceptance that has occurred with the spread of knowledge about other cultures. And it is perhaps the influence and tutoring of his uncle that Seth becomes more open to the idea of travelling abroad and taking up challenges. With generations of individual travelling abroad, the future ones become more confident to become 'global citizens'. If perhaps Seth was the first one in his family his thoughts would have been infringed with scepticism and disillusionment. Although travel and globalization broaden an individual's vision and horizon, it is difficult to absolutely rule out the surfacing of alienation and the compulsive need to return home and identify with one's native traditions.

Borders have been opened and diplomatic ties are constantly strengthened to ensure smooth passage of the globalized products: be it people, goods or knowledge. Due to the global impact China opened itself to foreigners, but foreigners were treated with caution as discussed by Seth in *From Heaven Lake*. However, Seth's unconventional style of travelling and his brown skin helped him to see a world not explored by the other foreign tourists. He writes from the point of view of an Indian yet he does not pass judgements on the Chinese or Tibetan cultures. Seth's sensitivity can be seen when he describes the Tibetan ritual of chopping the dead body, mixing it with meal, and feeding the eagles, as seen in the Sera monastery in Tibet. Here the non-judgemental attitude of Seth is worth applauding. When he

comes across a native tradition, he does not criticize it and designate it as an act of irrationality or barbarism. Seth acts as a true cosmopolitan writer and objectively describes the ritual without disdain or being critical. This accommodative attitude makes Seth a truly global traveller and writer whose ideas are worth reflecting upon. Seth allows the people he encounters on his journey through Tibet to speak out their mind regarding their customs, rituals, and even the political situation. An example of it can be seen when he lets Norbu, a local resident of Lhasa voice his political stand on the political turmoil brewing up in Tibet over the past decades:

It's different now; we can talk to you freely, you can come to our house, we aren't afraid. But a few years ago if you had talked to us, if you had even approached us on the street, we would have turned to avoid you. We couldn't dare to speak to a foreigner. We would be observed. The contact would brand us as counter-revolutionaries, unrepentant children of a counter-revolutionary... In those days, you know, in this area, even the people on the streets would turn away when we went past, would pretend not to know us, children of counter-revolutionaries, even those we had thought of as friends.

(145)

The Cultural Revolution had a huge impact on the life of the Chinese people. Millions of people were persecuted in the violent struggles that ensued across the country, and suffered a wide range of abuses including public humiliation, arbitrary imprisonment, torture, sustained harassment, and seizure of property. In Tibet, over 6,000 monasteries were destroyed, often with the complicity of local ethnic Tibetan Red Guards. Even today public discussion of the Cultural Revolution is limited in China. The Chinese government continues to prohibit news organizations from mentioning the details of Cultural Revolution. Official scrutiny is done on the online discussions and books about the topic. But Seth in his

travelogue does not go into the intricacies of the Revolution. Although at times he insidiously mourns the destruction of rich heritage of the past, he just shows the colossal impact of the same through his discussions with the natives and the ruins that he comes across. It was due to globalization that such discussions could even be held in public places. There was a dissemination of ideas and knowledge became more accessible due to globalization. Communist China has always been jittery about the influx of foreigners. But global pressure forbade them to completely close their boundaries although going through the bureaucracy for permits is a nightmare for any traveller. Seth with his ingenious ways managed to pass through the bureaucratic channels and undertook the arduous journey. Thus, he showed his skills at collecting vital information. Seth's journey became possible also because under the pressures of globalization China loosened its grip and opened its borders for foreigners.

In his travelogue *From Heaven Lake* Seth does not assign an inferior status to other countries which are economically and socially backward to his own country. Several of his narratives bear testimony as to how he treats the culture of another country with respect and a sense of wonder. His narrative upholds the dignity and diversity of the explored country. He does not exoticize his journey in China like the other Western narratives. In the same year when Seth's book was published, another book *Down the Yangtze* by Paul Theroux was also published in 1995 about his journey in China. Theroux identified the Chinese as a racial category and went on to say that:

...the Chinese were practical, unspiritual, materialistic, baffled and hungry, and these qualities had brought a crudity and terrible fatigue to their country. In order to stay alive, they had to kill the imagination; the result was a vegetable economy and a monochrome culture. (50)

Theroux made these observations while sailing down the Yangtze in a luxury cruise. Vikram Seth on the other hand never makes such overt judgements. Seth interacts with the natives and only then gives his accounts about them. While Seth is open with his exploration of the Chinese and Tibetan culture, Theroux comes with a preconceived Western mind-set of cultural superiority. This can be seen when Theroux compares the group of extremely rich American tourist who are cruising with him on the Yangtze with the Chinese labour force who supposedly represent the mass of China working slavishly. Theroux considers the rich Americans better than the Chinese workforce although he never interacts with the latter. Seth is totally different in his attitude towards the Chinese masses. He interacts with them and highlights their good as well as their bad qualities. Seth befriends a lot of people and makes the readers fall in love with the kindness and hospitality shown by the Chinese that he comes into contact with.

Seth's narrative is filled with extracts from Confucius' *Analects*, Lao-Tzu and other poets and painters. This is a great contrast to Theroux's description of an unimaginative and materialistic people given to mindless consumerism. Even to this day most of the major sectors of production are maintained by the Chinese government although, since the 1978 reforms, commodity fetishism and the rapid growth of market forces have made swift inroads into the Chinese lifestyle. As derived from Bin Zhao's work the Western media either celebrates the economic boom which is ascribed to the mutually reinforcing processes of privatisation and de-ideologising, or it seeks to reduce the whole course of reforms to a series of its worst results such as corruption, crime, and prostitution. Theroux goes for the negative aspects. He condemns as bourgeois all that was fine in the Chinese past like the name "Pine and Crane" for the oldest restaurant in Suchow. Seth, on the other hand, respects the Chinese past. He mourns the loss of beautiful temples, mosques and other religious buildings that were destroyed during the Cultural Revolution. Seth, in the process of gathering information

cuts across this binary of the 'other' that has been created by the first world countries. His views do not possess the Orientalist vigour and observation. The global traveller should not visit a place with preconceived notions of their own superiority. It is the neutrality of Seth in dealing with other cultures that makes him a cosmopolitan writer.

Seth tries to find similarities between China and India in his work *From Heaven Lake*. The Chinese and Indian civilisations can be seen as two of the world's oldest civilisations and they have co-existed in peace for epochs. Since ancient times there have been cultural and economic relations between China and India. However, the relations between contemporary China and India have been characterised by border disputes. This has resulted in three major military conflicts — the Sino-Indian War of 1962, the Chola incident in 1967, and the 1987 Sino-Indian skirmish. But since the late 1980s the diplomatic and economic ties between these two countries have been successfully reignited. China emerged as India's largest trading partner in 2008 and the two countries have also attempted to extend their strategic and military relations. There is an inevitable contemporary comparison of India with China. The two biggest countries in the world are so different. Seth meditates on the relation and lifestyle of both the Chinese and the Indian people. It is very interesting to get this unique Indian perspective on the region, which is not filtered through the prism of western ideas and institutions.

In *From Heaven Lake* Seth compares and contrasts the successes and failures of India and China in the second half of the twentieth century. Just before he enters Tibet on August 14 (a day before India's Independence Day) and while reading V.S Naipaul, Seth thinks seriously about the two countries. "The Chinese have a better system of social care and of distribution than we do. Their aged do not starve. Their children are basically healthy. By and large, the people are well clothed, very occasionally in rags" (102). Seth leaves the readers to decide whether they would prefer a life in China or in India with its chaos, lower standards of

living, but greater personal freedoms. Seth attempts to closely study the demographic effects on Chinese economy and for a better study he came to Nanjing University. Seth's gaze is different from the civilizing mission of many Western travel writers and perhaps it is this aspect which makes the reader to attempt a true appreciation of the heterogeneous cultures of different countries. In his *Foreword* to the 1990 edition Seth himself says that his *From Heaven Lake* is an account of what he saw, thought and felt as he travelled through various parts of the People's Republic of China as a student. Despite the past tensions between the two countries the general population of China has no qualms about an Indian traveller. Most of the people that Seth met have been friendly and helpful towards him. Seth says that, "When I think of China, I first think of my friends and only then of Qin Huang's tomb" (36). The suspicions and tensions that China and India feel towards each other is obvious only in the diplomatic level and the general population does not share these feelings. Seth gives a positive feel through his amicable nature. He creates a good image of India in the minds of the Chinese natives through his interactions with them. The embedded hostility between the two countries is at a political front. Seth makes his readers realise that at the ground level the locals are hardly bothered about the political tensions aroused due to the border disputes. Seth on his part too travels with an open mind. He does not let his Indian identity get in the way of his exploration of China. Like in the words of Levi-Strauss in his work *Tristes Tropiques*: "The first thing we see as we travel round the world is our own garbage, flung into the face of mankind" (38). Seth escapes this attitude and approaches China with total abandon and brings to the readers the undiscovered part of it.

In *From Heaven Lake* Vikram Seth with his imageries invests a place with a distinct personality of its own. Xingiang is described as crystal channels of running water (called karez) that play hide and seek by disappearing underground and surfacing at some point. Tian Chi or Heaven Lake is "an area of such natural beauty" (20) that poets chocked for space

elsewhere in China, could enjoy solitude and ease. Xian brings a sense of dejavu for Seth as the place reminds him of Delhi with its broad streets, shop-fronts with small canopies leaning out over the pavements and the bicycle-riding, white-shirted population. While speaking about the relation between India and China, Seth remarks that: “on a personal level, to learn about another great culture is to enrich one’s life, to understand one’s own country better, to feel more at home in the world, and indirectly to add to that reservoir of goodwill that may, generations from now, temper the cynical use of national power” (178). Seth’s sensitivity to understand and appreciate another culture makes his travel an enriching experience. One of the positive impacts of globalization is the existence of multiculturalism. Here, Seth shows through his work that he has followed this trend of multiculturalism where he shows respect for another culture and accepts it.

Seth was not a paid traveller; hence he derives realistic experiences in an undiluted form. Seth cherishes the idea of heterogeneity or diversity which adds to the flavour of a particular culture. Thus although Seth adopts a global approach he appreciates the quintessential aspects of a particular culture which makes it unique and strives to preserve and articulate the same to his readers through his travelogue. One can discern in the book *From Heaven Lake* that it is written in the spirit of a true traveller. A tourist accustomed to Thomas Cook tours would never hitchhike and even if he did he would probably complain about the inconveniences and the hardships of travelling cross-country in an unplanned and spur-of-the moment manner. As Jonathan Raban explains in his article "Why Travel?":

Travel in its purest form requires no certain destination, no fixed itinerary, no advance reservation and no return ticket, for you are trying to launch yourself onto the haphazard drift of things, and put yourself in the way of whatever changes the journey may throw up. It's when you miss the one flight of the week, when the expected friend fails to show, when the pre-booked hotel

reveals itself as a collection of steel joists stuck into a ravaged hillside, when a stranger asks you to share the cost of a hired car to a town whose name you've never heard, that you begin to travel in earnest. (63)

Seth follows this notion of travel. He never went to the intricate details of his journey. He took public transport whenever he could and hitch-hiked a ride wherever he could find one. Seth got lucky to get a pass to travel to Lhasa as travelling to Tibet was closely monitored. But after that he just fulfilled the basic requirements and took off without much thought. Had he planned too much he never would have been able to undertake the journey. Seth did face a lot of difficulties during his travel but he did not let that come into his way. With his charming personality and songs from the film *Awara* he got his way with the locales as well as the government officials. This aspect of Seth where he forms bonds with the locals depicts another aspect of globalization. Seth finds beauty in his journey despite the hardships. In spite of extremely trying circumstances he never complains. Even when he is accosted by strangers and delayed by unforeseen circumstances, he shows a perseverance which is rare. He finally fulfils his goal to see Lhasa unhindered by closely monitored tourist excursions.

In *Two Lives*, the journeys that Seth and his great uncle undertake are for the purpose of education. This gives them an opportunity to come in contact with the locals and be a part of the culture they are residing in. Shanti Seth goes to study in Germany and he comes across the German culture. He befriends his landlady's daughters and their friends, and through them Seth introduces to his readers a slice of the German life before the Holocaust. The people of Germany had been friendly and hospitable towards Shanti. This attitude reflects on how cultural interactions lead to faith and respect to infuse a new meaning to the concept of borderlessness.

Shanti is seen participating in the Second World War and the readers also get a glimpse of London during the war. But the London that Vikram Seth visited had changed and the difference could be found in the narration. *Two Lives* traces the extensive travels that Vikram Seth and his uncle Shanti Seth undertook. Shanti had left India to study dentistry and he never returned. He made London his home and one sees how well he is accepted there. He rose in his profession as a dentist in spite of losing an arm in the battle. Shanti then married Henny, who was Jew, and they were friends for a major part of their life. Referring to their life Vikram Seth muses that:

Shanti and Henny's lives were almost coeval with that arbitrary unit, the twentieth century. Both were born in 1908; Henny died in 1989, Shanti in 1998. Many of the great currents and movements of the century are reflected through the events of their lives and those of their friends and family: the Raj, the Indian freedom movement, post-Independence India; the Third Reich; the Second World War; postwar Germany, including the division of Berlin and the blockade and airlift; the emigration of Jews from Germany in the 1930s (with some of Henny's going as far as afield as Shanghai, South Africa and California); the Holocaust; Israel and Palestine; British politics, economics and society. Many powerful 'isms'- imperialism, Nazism, anti-Semitism, racism, conservatism, liberalism, socialism, communism, totalitarianism-worked through (and sometimes battered) their lives or those of their family and friends. (491)

Thus, social reality is seen without distortions. Vikram Seth too leaves India to study and he travels to London, America and then China to do research. He used all his travel experiences in his writings. His works reflect his in-depth knowledge of different cultures. Seth is not critical about the various places he has visited. Even in his work *From Heaven Lake* Seth

shows us the ground reality of the China he has encountered. He does not show us a China that the West sees through rose-tinted glasses. Jacques Derrida's in his theories related to ethics and hospitality embraces the possibility of an acceptance of the 'other' as different but of equal standing. This is a marker of the globalized world. It takes one a lot of understanding and empathy to regard the other as equal. Both Vikram Seth and his great uncle Shanti Seth have been able to achieve that state of mental development where the other culture is seen as an equal. This is a positive aspect of globalization seen through the real life of Vikram Seth and his family.

The readers can trace the trajectory of Vikram Seth's travels through the various genres that he dabbles with. In *Two Lives* Seth tells us how he began writing his various works and how his travel helped him. Murale Padma in the article "Cultural Dialogue through Travel Writing" states that:

Travel writing has come of age with the de-centering of canons and attempts to dislocate the borderlines of fiction and non-fiction. Accounts of travel constitute important documents of culture and the travel writer occupies a position between a historian, a journalist and a biographer as he explores the other alien culture and its past, while at the same time recording his own experiences and perceptions through the cultural dialogue of the 'contact zone'. (4)

Seth in *Two Lives* mixes the elements of travel in his memoir about the life of his uncle and aunt. Amitav Ghosh too *In an Antique Land* looks at Egypt both from the perspective of a traveller as well as a historian. There is an overlapping of genres here. William Dalrymple in most of his works amalgamates the genre of travel writing with history. According to the travel theory, travel writers construct and interpret reality from their individual angles of

vision, and travel writing is an exercise in introducing the 'self' to the 'other', and an attempt to build bridges that link humanity through an understanding of diverse cultures. In Dalrymple's works an orientalist project is seen of locating the difference and this positing of other's culture designates later a marginalised status whereas Seth's *From Heaven Lake* has marvellously introduced his 'self' to the 'other' that is to the Chinese and Tibetan people and his perceptions of the 'contact zone' has been very sympathetic. The 'other' culture too has welcomed him with open arms. Hence, the processes of globalization are at work here, where two different cultures are seen mingling without any clashes.

Another interesting fact which can be noticed here is that Vikram Seth's travelogue becomes a means to peek into the author's life. It incorporates biographical aspects. Sigmund Freud speculated that "a great part of the pleasure of travel lies in the fulfilment of these early wishes to escape the family and especially the father." It can be deduced that travel may be viewed as a subversive act, an act of rebellion, even part of the process of self-actualization. Existential identity can be defined and asserted through travel. Shanti Seth's and Vikram Seth's travels have been exhaustive as seen in *Two Lives*. Vikram Seth first travels to London to study in Oxford for his graduation. There are instances of him travelling to escape loneliness as seen in the lines below:

I took my German O-level in the spring of my first year in England, and decided to spend part of the summer hitch-hiking with an Indian friend around the German-speaking countries. It would be an adventure... and I wouldn't be stuck in London, glum and alone. (16)

Seth gives us a description in *Two Lives* of his travel in Germany and also mentions in passing his brief romantic interest on a girl named Helga. From that point onwards Seth had used travel as a means to escape. In his second year in London he becomes homesick and

took a year off to return to India. He then goes to Stanford to continue his studies in economics but “the cello, poetry and once again the Chinese language” (27) distracts him from Economics. When towards his second year Seth won a scholarship to stay in Stanford and write poetry for a year his whole family, although pleased, considers it a diversion from his true course. Seth then says, “I returned to Economics in 1978, after my year of truancy, and decided for a dissertation subject that would take me to China” (28). It seems that Seth had the tendency to jump from places and subjects. He constantly wants to be on the move. He left for China in the summer of 1980 for two years. It was during this time that he explored China and Tibet and collected materials for his travelogue *From Heaven Lake*. After his stay in China he returns to India and then travelled to Stanford via England. But when he returns to Stanford his dissertation work fell by the wayside and he devotes his time to write his novel in verse *The Golden Gate*. Later he left his dissertation unwritten after spending eleven years on it and returns to India to write a novel on India. Thus, one finds Seth treating travel as a mode of escape. He has the inherent qualities of a global traveller. Seth has rebelled against the notion of education that the society holds dear. He pursued the highest education but left it in the end to follow his passion for writing and the others arts. He freely discusses the biographical aspects of his life in *Two Lives*. Even in *From Heaven Lake* one gets a glimpse of the personality of Seth through his interactions with the people he encounters.

From the above discussion it is found that Vikram Seth has been an exemplary cosmopolitan traveller which makes his works crucial in furthering a reader’s understanding of globalization. His texts *Two Lives* and *From Heaven Lake* show a Seth who is not only sympathetic to the culture that he explores but also blends oneself into the sights and sounds of the place. In his narration Seth amalgamates the facts that he discovered in the places with his own perceptive reality and this makes for an interesting mix. This negates any questions

of authenticity that may have been raised as he never pretends to be accurate in his perceptions nor does he take a superior attitude like other Western writers. A major portion of *From Heaven Lake* is devoted to the voice of the native Chinese and Tibetan population that he encounters and through them Seth shows us the impact of globalization. Even in his *Two Lives* the workings of the impact of globalization is clearly discernable. The relationship between India and China has been discussed but Seth refrains from taking positions or giving an elevated status to either of the countries. *From Heaven Lake* stands testimony to the fact as to how Seth's impulsive and unplanned expedition leads to a deeper understanding of the Chinese culture. Both *Two Lives* and *From Heaven Lake* give us an undistorted multicultural view of the social reality of the countries that he has explored. Travel also became a means of escape for the author as seen in the earlier discussion and he unapologetically accepts his own flaws which can be seen in the biographical aspect that the author reveals in his writing. For the readers as well as for scholars reading Seth's writing can be an enriching experience in learning how to be a true global traveller.

After dealing with the broad area of travel the next chapter presents the analysis of the idea of nation seen through the works of Vikram Seth. It also sees how this idea forwards or retards the processes of globalization.

Chapter 4

THE PORTRAYAL OF NATION IN VIKRAM SETH'S WORKS

The concept of nation has generated a lot of debate over the years. In an age where there are ideas like a global world, a global nation, global communities, to define a single nation is fraught with complexities. A nation may be a geographical territory, a construct, or as Edward Said maintains, an 'imaginative geography'. There are different discourses about how a nation can be defined. There is a constant change in the idea of a nation and according to Said in *Orientalism*, "a nation as an 'imaginative geography' helps the mind to intensify its own sense of itself" (55). Nation can be seen as a form of identity. Individuals have a sense of their identity linked with their nation like the way that they might identify with other forms of collective identity, such as culture, religion, tribe, race, and ethnicity.

It is through the telling and retelling of their pasts that nations are created, nourished, and sustained. This includes the process of repeating myths, recalling heroisms, the unsurpassed achievements and the many obstacles that are challenged and overcome in the creation of a nation. Language and literature plays a major role in this creation. Further, there is the process of forgetting the social disasters like self-inflicted wounds, civil wars, massacres, and human atrocities. The ethnic, linguistic, and religious differences are hidden along with the dislocations that might have happened. It is with the creation of similar grand narratives within literary representation that the imagined collective identities known as nations are formulated. This forms a part of the history of the nation. The concept of nationalism is not simple as seen in the point undertaken by Ernest Gellner in *Nations and Nationalism*:

Nationalism is not what it seems, and above all not what it seems to itself... The cultural shreds and patches used by nationalism are often arbitrary historical inventions. Any old shred would have served as well. But in no way does it follow that the principle of nationalism... is itself in the least contingent and accidental. (56)

The representation of the nation can be arbitrary and dependent on the personal choice of an author. Nationalism can also be seen as a cultural prerogative. It is actually the cultural diversities that create identities at a particular political or historical juncture. In addition, it will be preposterous to go with the view that a 'nation' came into existence only at a specified historical moment. This view will deny a whole set of people their collective memory. Nation can be seen as a growth of communal experience and not as an excrescence. To reject the idea of a nation is to disown the heritage of a country. Hence, a rejection, or refusal to discriminate between nationalisms would lead to shutting oneself off an effective cultural engagement.

The idea of a nation differs from country to country. In today's globalized world the ideology of a nation does have a wide range of impact: not just within itself but on other nations as well. The concern of this chapter is to explore the dominant trends in the works of Vikram Seth in imaging the concept of a nation. Emphasis will be laid on the different cultural diversities and how this diversity creates hurdles in promoting the concept of one nation. The role of narration in the imagining of a nation and its accompanying problems will be seen through Seth's works.

In the works of Vikram Seth, one finds him dealing with different continents and cultures. For instance, he takes up different countries like India, China, the United States, Germany and England which reflects his cross-cultural affinities. Each of his works is true to

the backdrop in which Seth places them and he negates his self as an Indian when he is not dealing with an Indian theme. *A Suitable Boy* deals with a particular version of the Indian nationalism. The novel is set in the Nehruvian era. The novel is set against the background of the formative years of India after independence. Within the larger framework of a family drama, *A Suitable Boy* explores issues of national politics in the period leading up to the first post-independence national election of 1952, inter-sectarian animosity, the status of lower caste peoples such as the *jatav* community, land reform and the eclipse of the feudal princes and landlords, and also academic affairs. *The Golden Gate* has an all-American cast of characters based in northern California. This novel in verse offers a perspective look at the 1980s Yuppie lifestyle. Seth depicts an America where people from all over the world shed their ethnic dimensions after sometime and acquire a new American identity. In his memoir *Two Lives*, which deals with Shanti Behari Seth who was Vikram Seth's great uncle, one can see how an Indian adjusts to the two different cultures of Germany and Britain, and ends up creating a unique and purposeful life for himself in the midst of the Holocaust and World Wars. For Seth, who is a product of globalization and a world traveller, it is easier to distance himself from the immediate community that he is dealing in his work, and give an unbiased view.

The concept of the Indian nation is different from other nations as the building of India was done under different circumstances. Hence, the India that is seen in literary narratives is different and complex as there is no general consensus regarding the perception of the Indian nation. The idea of India as a nation had existed before the colonizers came but the British laid a claim that it was they who had imagined and created the Indian nation that is known today. India has always been a site for massive settlements. Even in the fourteenth century India was famous for its trade and commerce. This attracted a lot of merchants from across the globe and its riches were also the cause for a massive number of invasions.

Mercantile relations gradually transformed to colonial tendencies and steadily ended in subjugation of the Indian sub-continent. It was a herculean task for the nationalist to redeem nation from the clutches of the British empire. The foremost agenda was to create the idea of a unified India. This was achieved by nationalist through political writings, pamphlets, and patriotic verses. In their project of reclaiming their roots, and national identity they escalated the symbolic image of a helpless mother namely *Bharat-mata* who was suffering under the tyranny of colonial power. Further, national leaders put their energies together to remove the image of nation as an ‘infantile civilization’ by reducing malpractices like Sati and caste-discriminations. But above all in spite of the deep chasm on the lines of caste, religion, linguistic affinity; the desire for freedom and consolidation of power to fight the common enemy charted out and strengthened and embedded out the idea of nation in the Indian sub-consciousness. Hence, to define India in the lines of a particular class, community, language or religion is not possible. Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities* defines the nation as an “imagined political community - and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. It is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion (7)”. This definition holds true for India. India is a vast country and the idea of the nation is there in the minds of its citizens. It is hardly possible for the population to meet or know about one another but they are bonded by the notion of their belonging to the Indian nation. When Jawaharlal Nehru wrote his book on the cultural civilization of India, he called it *The Discovery of India*, for he was conscious of the fact that he was making a discovery, and not an invention. Nehru discovered India in the sense of an intellectual or imaginative construction. Thus, it is not possible to give one concrete definition of the Indian nation. It is an amalgamation of a lot of ideas some of which are imaginative. In this era of globalization although people have come closer, there is a need in them to feel bonded to a

particular class, creed or community. The idea of belonging to a nation gives the people a sense of identity.

The West believed that nation was not something that could be scientifically defined and hence it was constructed as imaginary. So for its very existence, the idea of a nation depended upon an apparatus of cultural fictions in which imaginative literature played a decisive role. The origin of the rise of European nationalism was seen parallel with the rise of the Novel. In the non-western cultures like that of India, the rise of the novel saw emergence of nationalist and pan-Indian ideologies in colonial and "post- colonial" India. The initial Indian writers in English tried to imbibe the British way of writing but with the rise of Indian nationalism that changed. The new writers like Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand, and R. K. Narayan tried to refute the colonialist constructions of India. These writers tried to give a glimpse of the real India. In doing so they used arbitrary signs and symbols which they deemed fit to be seen as the national culture.

The contemporary Indian English authors are no longer concerned with an essentialist India but have shifted towards a pluralistic Indian culture. As John Mee in the book *Vikram Seth: An Anthology of Recent Criticism* has pointed out:

Various economic and social pressures have led to the end of the so-called Nehruvite consensus in India. The idea of "unity within" (Boehmer, 1995:191)—so central to the years of nationalist struggle and building of the new nation state—has been displaced by an urgent need to question the nature of that unity. The issue of imagining the nation... has been a pressing one throughout India of late. (35)

Indian English authors like Amitav Ghosh in their works dealt with the multiplicity and fluidity of the Indian national character. Ghosh is seen challenging the nationalist discourse

presupposing the notions of fixed culture and identity. The contemporary Indian-English fiction writers dwell on the gaps and discontinuities within the essential identity of a nation-state. These writers refute the claim that it was the national history that created a base for identification of its people, resulting in consolidation of their national sensibilities. As a result, their writings dwelt upon the interplay of historical details and the private lives of the characters while displaying an attempt to get rid of the ghostly demarcations- the public and the private, realism and fantasy (Nanavati and Kar, 12). This trend of collapsing the distinction between the public and the private drew its strength from the global conviction that it was not possible or desirable to write a grand history of a nation. Vikram Seth follows this trend in his works. In *A Suitable Boy*, Seth gives a lot of historical details and shows how these affect the private lives of the characters. The idea of India that emerges from the novel consists of a process of idealization and selection of historical events, religious traditions and languages. This leads to the construction of an organic social imagery which can claim to be a part of the national representation with an impact on both the location and the characters. Seth chose to write his novel around the 1950s, which saw the rise of the independent modern Indian-nation, when the political systems were under the process of construction. In this period the rise of the liberal Indian nation was seen under the leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Indian Prime Minister. During this period the energy of the nationalist was used in building a new India to lead it towards the path of progress, whereas earlier it was used in protesting against the British rule. Seth was awarded the Commonwealth writers prize in 1994 and he has been called a reliable spokesman of the Indian cultural heritage and national identity.

Vikram Seth through his fictional narrative gives us a glimpse of how globalization impacts the social fabric of a nation. He conveys it by creating a hybridized culture which is a pastiche of different cultures. Seth in *A Suitable Boy* uses the method of selective

representativeness where he creates an imagined city of Brahmpur which is used to represent India. Seth goes with the conviction that the creation of a nation has meaning and is desired. Salman Rushdie, on the other hand in his novel *Midnight's Children*, which is placed in the same time frame as Seth's novel, questions the legitimacy of the ideas of Indian history, nation and its representation. Seth believes in the legitimacy of the nation and represents the functioning of it through the lived experiences of his characters. Brahmpur is made to resemble North Indian cities and it can be taken as a representative of India as a whole. It is well reflected in the following lines from *A Suitable Boy*:

...this little fire was indeed the centre of the universe. For here it burned, in the middle of this fragrant garden, itself in the heart of Pasand Bagh, the pleasantest locality of Brahmpur, which was the capital of the state of Purva Pradesh, which lay in the centre of the Gangetic planes, which was itself the heartland of India... and so on through the galaxies to the outer limits of perception and knowledge. (15)

Seth creates an organic idea of India through the microcosm of Brahmpur. The state of Purva Pradesh that Seth creates embodies several historical features of the north Indian states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar of the 1950s. Seth claims that Brahmpur is based on a mixture of Delhi, Lucknow, Agra, Benares, Patna, and Ayodhya, because "I realized quite early on that I would run into trouble if I didn't create my own city" (Woodward, 32). The national representativeness of Brahmpur and Purva Pradesh depends on the fact that they are typical, rather than real North Indian localities. The characters in the novel too act as the symbolic representation of the entire nation.

The plot of *A Suitable Boy* revolves around four families who grapple with the problems and issues of a newly independent India. The Mehra's, represent the Indian middle

class, who climb up the social ladder with their Western education and try to imbibe the British way of life. The Kapoors represent the Hindi-speaking elite who are charting out a new territory in the society through politics. The Khans represent the Muslim feudal lords whose wealth and culture is affected by the new laws created by the Indian state. The Chatterjis are members of the Bengali intelligentsia who live in a world of their own. Seth, thus, creates an organic social imagery which constructs a part of the national representation and its impact is seen on both the location and the characters in the novel. Through the representation of diverse cultures with the help of his fictional characters Seth shows the hybrid culture of the Indian nation which is a global concept. Louis James Block in his article "The Organization of Literary Study Author" mentions that; "The nation is the genuine unit of history, and the deepest national idea is the genuine unit of literary history. The great tasks of the really world historical people are reflected completely in their literatures" (427). Thus, history and literature go hand in hand. Vikram Seth in his novel gives the readers a slice of the Indian history of the period immediately after its Independence. In an interview Seth gives a list of the different methods he had adopted to give an accurate idea of India during the 1950s:

...reading just to get a spirit of those times...Meeting people, ex-freedom fighters, people who'd visited courtesans at that time... And then staying in different places like Banaras, Allahabad, or in the countryside, or staying with a shoe-making family in Agra. Just a few years doing this sort of thing because how can you claim to write about something unless you know it, if not from the heart of it, then somewhere from the inside of it. (Mohanty, 216)

Traditions are highlighted and sometimes even "invented", to create a collective identity among cultures. This gives a historical continuity and even a sense of permanence is achieved. One of the key features of globalization is the creation of a hybrid culture. Here in

the creation of a nation through an amalgamation of different cultures is the perfect example of the hybridity of a culture. Hence, Seth gives an idea of the processes of globalization through his representation of the hybrid Indian culture.

Vikram Seth in his work *A Suitable Boy* shows how the nation builders (politicians) choice of English as a common language ushered in the process of globalization. Liah Greenfeld, for example, in *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* talks about the creation of a language for a nation: "No clear line separates selection from artificial construction. A language of a part may be imposed on the entire population and declared native to the latter (or, if no part of the population has a language to speak of, it may be outright invented). An 'ancestral' territory may be acquired in conquest, 'common' history fabricated, traditions imagined and projected into the past" (13). Ernest Gellner agrees in *Nations and Nationalism*, saying, "Nationalism uses the pre-existing, historically inherited proliferation of cultures or cultural wealth, though it uses them very selectively, and it most often transforms them radically. Dead languages can be revived, traditions invented, quite fictitious pristine purities restored" (55-56). This has been the case in India. The Indian politicians tried to give India a national language in the form of Hindi to create a sense of collective identity. But this became a ground for contestation as giving importance to a single language meant disregarding other languages of a vast country like India where every state used multiple mother tongues. This issue is taken up by Vikram Seth in *A Suitable Boy* where he discusses the issue of Hindi becoming the state language in the Legislative Assembly of Brahmipur. In the novel, one of the politicians "L.N. Agarwal had sponsored a bill that would make Hindi the state language from the beginning of the new year, and the Muslim legislators were rising one by one to appeal to him and to the Chief Minister and to the House to protect the status of Urdu" (1016). The issue of making Hindi the state language had generated a lot of debate all over the country. Even the southern part of India was unhappy with the place given to

Hindi as the national language as the south had very minimal ties with the Hindi language. Even till date Hindi has not been accepted in many part of India and the official language used is English. When English was chosen as a common language due to various political and regional issues, the doors for globalization were automatically opened. But the plan initially was to replace Hindi as the official language in place of English. Regarding this phenomenon Partha Chatterjee in his book *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* states that:

The bilingual intelligentsia came to think of its own language as belonging to that inner domain of cultural identity, from which the colonial intruder had to be kept out; language therefore became a zone over which the nation first had to declare its sovereignty and then had to transform in order to make it adequate for the modern world. (7)

Hence, Hindi was being adopted as a national language to create an identity away from the language of the coloniser. But one finds in the long run, the plan did not work and English continued to exert its influence. Hindi is a major language in the northern part of India but the failure of Hindi as the official language is due to its rejection by the other parts of India like the South and the North-East. Even in the North everyone is not educated in Hindi as seen in the case of the politician Mahesh Kapoor in *A Suitable Boy*. “The real difficulty was that Mahesh Kapoor was not very familiar with the Hindi—or Devanagiri –script. He had been brought up at a time when boys were taught to read and write the Urdu –or Arabic –script” (327). Before Independence the *Proceedings of the Protected Provinces Legislative Assembly* in the 1930s were printed in English, Urdu and Hindi. So, Mahesh Kapoor did not face a problem as his own speeches were printed in Urdu like many of the others. But after Independence the *Proceedings* were printed entirely in Hindi which was the official language of the state. This created difficulty for Mahesh Kapoor as he could not openly tell about his

inability to read Hindi. So, he had to rely on his wife to read him out the proceedings as she was educated in Hindi. Thus, it is seen that even within the politicians the use of the Hindi language posed a problem. Homi Bhabha in his work *Nation and Narration* reiterates this fact when he states that the “exclusive concern with language... has its dangers and drawbacks. Such exaggeration enclose one within a specific culture, considered as national; one limits oneself, one hems oneself in” (17).

With a lot of migrations and the vast impact of globalization no country can claim to exclusively use a single language. Even in Britain, where English saw its first emergence, there are different dialects of English. America saw the emergence of the American English being spoken among its population although there are different variations of it. Even Indian English is now being recognised as a type of language. All these are different varieties of English and this creates a kind of unity among these countries. Indian writers are producing huge amounts of literature and because of the use of English language; there is a global demand for it. Thus, one can see that it is not possible for a nation to insist on a single language in today’s globalized world. Seth has a wide readership all over the world due to his choice of language.

In India caste-based politics has an adverse impact on the concept of the Indian national identity. The politicians use this to their advantage, and to gain support they exploit religious sentiments of the people. The political culture has resulted in a fractured Indian national consciousness. Paul Brass in his book *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Theory and Comparison* asserts that:

The study of ethnicity and nationality is in large part the study of politically-induced cultural change . . . , of the process by which elites and counter elites within ethnic groups select aspects of the group's culture, attach new value and

meaning to them, and use them as symbols to mobilize the group, to defend its interests, and to compete with other groups. (75)

The politician's exploitation of the religious sentiments of people can be seen in Vikram Seth *A Suitable Boy*. It is due to the religious feeling of anti-Muslim image that had been created against Mr Mahesh Kapoor that led to his loss in the legislative assembly elections. It was of little consequence that Mr Kapoor was the advocate of religious tolerance as seen during his tenure as a Minister. There was an altercation between Mahesh Kapoor's son, Mann and the Nawab's son, Firoz although they were the best of friends and Firoz got wounded badly. Taking advantage of the situation just before the day of the election it was rumoured that Firoz had been murdered and this led the Muslim population to vote against Mahesh Kapoor. Although later Firoz saves Mann, Mahesh Kapoor loses the election to Waris Khan, who was the servant of the Nawab, and had a hand in twisting the religious sentiments of the voters. Vikram Seth depicts the reality of the Indian political scenario where religion is used as a tool to gain political mileage. Regarding the politics of religion M.K. Bhatnagar states that, "In a society characterized by widespread ignorance and illiteracy, with fatalistic and other worldly attitudes, religion becomes a tool of exploitation" (63). Salman Rushdie too in his novel *The Moor's Last Sigh* infringes on the orthodoxy of language, religion and the law through the voice of the Moor. A secret story of disgrace is told by the Moor's right hand with which he has to eat and wash and clean his behind, a sacrilege in many religions and countries and this multiplies his exile. This intertwining of religion and politics is seen by Vikram Seth as a form of radicalism, narrow-mindedness and a sense of disgust towards the other religions. This is amply visible in *A Suitable Boy* in the incident where the Raja of Marh had decided to construct a Shiva temple on a piece of land adjoining a mosque. He had the passive support of the Hindu officials and politicians. The place where the mosque stood was supposedly built on the ruins of an ancient, long-forgotten temple. Since the Raja of Marh

could not destroy the mosques, he takes the next best option of having the temple built in the land adjacent to the mosque. The Muslims of the area are against this and the maulvi delivers an inflammatory sermon,

Their religion was in danger. The barbarians were at the gates...The land that the kafirs sought to build on –why sought? were at this very moment building on –was disputed land –disputed in God’s eyes... but not in the eyes of animals who spend their time blowing conches and worshipping parts of the body whose very names it was shameful to mention... and now the infidels who held power in the land wanted Muslim, when they turned their faces westwards in prayer to the Kabba, to face these same idols and these same obscene objects with their heads bowed. (233)

The Hindus refuse to withdraw from their plan of building the temple. In spite of being aware of the tense situation the government fail to provide sufficient police protection at the disputed site. As a result communal riots break out between the Hindus and Muslims. This incident has an uncanny resemblance to the Ramjanamabhoomi- Babri Masjid incident that took place on 6th December 1992 although *A Suitable Boy* was written before that event. This shows how the volatile issue of religion keeps on repeating along the same lines. The riots led to a lot of bloodshed although later a temporary calm was attained. But as the capricious nature of religion goes the issue got further aggravated during the Dussehera festival which clashed with the Moharram celebrations. Riots broke out and both Hindus and Muslims were slaughtered. The friends Mann and Firoz were caught in the middle of the riots. But amongst the madness came the light of friendship where Mann saved Firoz from the Hindu mob risking his own life in the process. Maan hid Firoz in his sister’s house in a Hindu colony till it was safe to venture out. Thus, the inter-religious friendship between Mann and Firoz and

their fathers Mahesh Kapoor and Nawab Sahib can be seen as a counterbalance to the religious fanaticism of the mob.

Vikram Seth's stand against religious fanaticism can be seen in the portrayal of the failure of the Raja of Marh's ambition to raise the "Shiva-linga" from the bottom of the Ganges and revive it in the plot near the mosque. The huge "Shiva-linga" during the process of lifting it through the ghats rolls back down the rivers crushing a priest in its wake.

Down the rollers rolled the great linga, past the next step, and the next, and the next, gathering speed as it rolled. The tree-trunks cracked under the impact of its weight, it veered to left and right, but it kept rolling on, down, down, swifter and swifter towards the Ganga, crushing the pujari who now stood in its downward path with his arms upraised, smashing into the burning pyres of the cremation ghat, and sinking into the water of the Ganga at last, down its submerged stone steps, and into its muddy bed. The Shiva-linga rested on the bed of the Ganga once more, the turbid waters passing over it, its bloodstains slowly washed away. (1319)

Vikram Seth thus condemns the extreme passion shown in the name of religion. Such religious fanaticism can lead to the downfall of a nation. It is important that a nation like India, which is home to a variety of religions, maintain religious tolerance or else it would lead to a great loss of life and property as seen during the riots. This would hamper the nation building process and the politicians should work for the welfare of the country as a whole and not just for their own personal gains. In the cultural context religious intolerance can be seen as hampering the growth of a multicultural society which is an important tenant of globalization. Seth shows how religious fanaticism impedes the project of globalization. His disdain is clearly reflected through his representations.

The State Legislative Assembly is an important site to see the construction of the Indian identity in *A Suitable Boy*. The parliament is the place where policies are passed which leads to the building of a nation. Neelam Srivastava in the book *Vikram Seth: An Anthology of Recent Criticism* takes up this point when she states that:

The various voices making up the novel's religious, political, and linguistic diversity are given a representative space within its democratic confines. Indeed the purpose of the parliamentary debates between Agarwal (right-wing congress member), Abida Khan (representative of the zamindars and of "sectarian" Muslims more generally), the Socialist Member of the Legislative Assembly, and Mahesh Kapoor (left-wing, Nehruvite Congress member), seems to be that of showing exactly how the democratic process is essential in toning down the more strident communal elements in each of these voices.

(94)

This arrangement in the Parliament shows how in a nation full of diversity, the different members from society represent their culture, community, religion and state, and maintain a balance. This balance is important in upholding the unity in the democracy of the Indian nation. Seth has balanced the political representation in his novel. He shows the working of the nation through a realistic picture of the Parliament. The creation of a multicultural society is important as it leads to harmony in a nation as well as the world at large. In the globalized world this aspect of multiculturalism acts as an integral element in world peace.

The claims of globalization theorists of the 'local' becoming global are well reflected in the fictional narrative of Seth. He shows how the choices that a nation makes have impact not just on its citizens but also the whole world. In a bid to reinforce own security, a nation might actually compromise on the security of other nations. The personal choice of a few

individual leaders can change the course of history. In Hannah Arendt's view, the society of nation in the modern world is “that curiously hybrid realm where private interests assume public significance' and the two realms flow unceasingly and uncertainly into each other 'like waves in the never-ending stream of the life-process itself’ (33-35). This was very much evident during the two World Wars. The flight between a few nations brought the human race on the verge of extinction. Seth goes back to the historical past to decipher how internal politics of a nation lead to a tremendous destruction of several nations. The dropping of nuclear bombs in the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki killed at least 129,000 people. The impact of those bombs was seen even after two generations. Vikram Seth deprecates the making and use of such weapons of mass destruction. In his work *The Golden Gate*, he describes the gruesome impact of the nuclear bombs:

If clouds of dust occlude their sun

From them, it still shines undiminished

In its small galaxy. No change

Of note is likely when this strange

Irradiated beast has finished

Vomiting filth upon its bed

Of inhumanity, and is dead. (147)

The American people themselves are tired of this mass devastation created by the political leaders. These people have lost the life of their near and dear ones in the name of war and the fear of a nuclear war in the Cold War period has made them wary. But the problem was the lack of responsibility among those who make bombs and those who use it. There was

hostility within the civil citizens for the covert and destructive tendencies of the bomb makers and their dispatchers. Seth describes in *The Golden Gate* the people who work in the laboratory where these weapons of mass destruction are manufactured. These people are decent and family-minded and they create bombs and the most recent was named “the cookie cutter”, as a joke, which batters live cells. Such bombs have the potential to wipe out huge populations but for the people who create them it’s “just a job”. There is a lack of empathy among these people. The spokesperson of the Labs where the bombs were created, termed as Lungless Labs by Seth, was unapologetic and defended the creation of such bombs. Seth shows the protest of the people of America against the creation of such bombs of mass destruction. In one of the speeches during the protest Father O’Hare, a priest passionately sums up the political condition of America.

England and Germany were both
Our bitterest enemies; we hated
Each of them. Yet when we had sated
Our enmity and made them friends,
Hate found new sustenance for its ends.
The English gone, it found the Spanish.
Japan defeated, China served
To keep its lethal life preserved.
Its victim crushed, it would not vanish.
Even before we’d reach Berlin,

Moscow was our new sump of sin. (156)

This shows how the political scenario keeps changing according to the profit of the leaders. Father O'Hare speech in *The Golden Gate* which was full of biblical eloquence seems to be relevant even today. The world is still increasingly facing international conflicts due to the contemporary American policy. The protest was against the making of such bombs where it did not see any religion, race or culture and razed humanity to the ground. The protest march was organised in the form of a Gandhian march which was done peacefully but with conviction. The protesters in large numbers broke the law peacefully and voluntarily went for arrest and pleaded guilty in the court. The prosecution as a result had to watch the protesters go free,

...the embattled

Jailbirds, bedraggled but unclipped,

Sang their way out of their own script. (173)

Vikram Seth in *The Golden Gate* devotes a full chapter to the political issue of nuclear proliferation. He highlights the fact of how a common man insidiously becomes a victim of terror and power politics. There is also a unanimous strife for peace and harmony across borders by the civil citizens. This can be seen as an example of the impact of globalization where the citizens of a nation come out to protest the atrocities against other nations. Chapter Seven of the novel offers a critique of the military and defence foundation of America. The rat race that America had started, to attain nuclear arms, has led to a change in the global warfare. Now every country wants to have its own nuclear weapon to feel secure and deter threats from other countries. But this has led to an increase in the threat of terrorism. Any nuclear weapons in the hands of terrorist can have catastrophic consequences.

A nation's security is at risk here. Seth through his character Phil criticizes the American nuclear armament. Phil is positioned as a liberal humanist who is sensitive about the concerns of the nation. Even the lawyer Liz when asked to give a speech at the protest passionately speaks against nuclear armament. She speaks about the devastation that a nuclear bomb can do on the life of other creatures on earth. Due to the human beings' selfish nature the flora and fauna of earth will suffer. She adds that:

If only half our bombs explode

...we'll have created

A quite sufficient overload

Of nitrogen oxides to gobble

Up half our ozone. (169)

The human population will be either dead or suffering the worst kind of life possible. This will be a result of our own doing. Thus, one sees that the choice of a single nation can have global consequences. Vikram Seth in *The Golden Gate* shows his concern for the possible end of the world due to the aggressive policies taken up by nations like America. He is also worried about the future condition of the environment and what circumstances the future generation will face due to the workings of the current generation. As a product of globalization, Seth is worried about the whole globe rather than a particular country.

Nations tend to think more about their individual interests. The policies of a nation may at times go against the welfare of its citizens. In *The Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha discusses the dangers of focusing too narrowly, or too persistently, or too myopically on the idea of national identity. He writes that "the hideous extremity of Serbian nationalism proves that the very idea of a pure, 'ethnically cleansed' national identity can only be achieved

through the death, literal and figurative, of the complex interweaving of history, and the culturally contingent borderlines of modern nationhood” (7). Bhabha’s point is that an extreme focus on identity as being permanent, geographically rigid, elite and biologically based, as well as policed can lead to unproductive or destructive individual and political behaviours. This can be seen in the case of Germany during the Holocaust. When Hitler became the chancellor on January 30, 1933, and the Nazi party came into power the political upheaval in Germany began. According to the ideology of the Nazi party the Germanic people (the Nordic race) were regarded as the purest of the Aryan race. Hence, they believed that they were the master race. So to maintain and create a pure Aryan national race, millions of Jews and others were persecuted and murdered as they were considered unwanted, and this period of the Hitler regime is known as the Holocaust. Initially, Hitler ordered the arrest of 1000 communists and imprisoned them in the Concentration Camps. The major impact of Hitler’s policies fell on the Jews as they faced various atrocities and they were murdered in different parts of the country. The Jews were detested and compared to germs and vermin as being dangerous to the health of a nascent nation. In *Two Lives*, Vikram Seth shows the atrocities of the German nation against the Jews under a tyrant like Hitler. The vested interest of one nation leads another to the brink of destruction.

‘Nationality’ though not very conspicuous is pivotal to Seth’s text. On the basis of nationality the Germans tried to wipe out a complete race. A pure ‘ethnically cleansed’ national identity was attempted to achieve through the death of the Jews. This creates problems in the global community as well. The Jews faced exclusion and isolation in a nation which they had regarded as their own. Seth in *Two Lives* gives an account of the process of systematic and official robbery of the Jews by the Germans.

Jewish businessman had been ‘Aryanised’ (sold to non-Jews) for a ridiculous price. The property of emigrants was confiscated by the state. In February

1939, it was announced that Jews were not allowed to keep any silver. Any valuables they owned had to be delivered to the municipal 'Pawn Institutions' for the greater good of the German treasury... As the war progressed more and more deprivations were imposed upon them. Within a month of the war starting, their radios would have been taken away. In due course their telephone would have been ripped out... Later the use of even public telephones would be prohibited. (210)

Vikram Seth then goes on to give a detailed account of the outrages that the Jews faced. The Jews were made to survive on a meagre ration of food which could be brought only for one hour of the day. They were confined to their homes and public transport was not allowed to them. The Jews were not allowed to remain in contact with any Aryan and if it was ignored both the Aryan and the Jews would have been punished although the punishment for the Jews was more severe. Berlin was emptied of the Jewish population. The Gestapo (the Secret State Police) did the job of rounding-up of the Jews. The Jews were finally sent to the concentration camps where either disease or the gas chambers killed them. This gives us a brief picture of how due to a narrow idea of the concept of nationalism a whole race had to suffer. The Jewish race had to pay the price with their life and property for the creation of a pure Germany nationality. The atrocities on one race can have a ripple effect and global peace could be affected.

In the role of making a nation, trauma plays a very significant part. A nation's history marked by traumatic events form a dominant and looming presence in the memories and the imagination of the population related to it. In literature the trauma of the nation is enacted through the trauma of the family. In *Two Lives*, Vikram Seth shows the trauma of the Jewish population through his great aunt Henny Greda Caro. The family of Henny can be seen as a metaphor for the nation that becomes a site for trauma as well as the fragmentation that

occurs in the wake of an event like the Holocaust. Vikram Seth subtly resists the events of the Holocaust by showing the trauma associated with it. He gives a detailed account of how his aunt Henny's family, her mother and sister Lola, who were Jews, would have been treated in Germany during the Holocaust. From the beginning of the Nazi regime, Jewish families would have been isolated. Their friends with whom they had grown up would have deserted them for fear of repercussions. The family would have been forced to give up their property and live in deplorable conditions. At the end of it, they would have been sent to the concentration camps. Seth in *Two Lives* gives an insight of what Lola must have felt in one of those concentration camps: "Miserable and filthy, hungry and weak, far from help or hope and deprived of any news of any loved one, Lola might well have felt alone in a universe created by the most bestial of humans and presided over by a pitiless power" (223). Seth shows how a family is torn apart and Henny leads a fragmented life. Henny's mother Gabriele is killed in a concentration camp in Theresienstadt, Henny's sister Lola is killed in the concentration camp of Berkenau, part of Auschwitz, and their brother emigrates to South America and Henny to England. The whole family is scattered, and Henny and her brother are left to deal with the trauma of the Holocaust. Henny never discussed her family and her feelings about them with her husband and it was only after her death that Vikram Seth comes across the letters she had written to her German friends where she gives a glimpse of her sorrow which Seth has attached in *Two Lives*. In one of Henny's letters she talks about her trauma:

I simply cannot grasp that my mother and sister has fallen victim to this ruthless murder, and the thought of it lets me find no peace. It is just unimaginable how my loved ones, who had such fine souls and who were so noble in their character and way of thinking, must have suffered. The

‘thousand year Reich’ will not last, but even after 1000 years Germany’s shame will not be forgotten... (208-209)

This shows the way trauma has a looming presence in the way a nation is perceived. This trauma will form a part of the German national identity. Seth critiques the Nazi regime and its senseless inhumanity by showing as realistically as possible the little stories of the people and families destroyed by it. The acts of Nazi Germany left a black mark in the global community. It hampered world peace and left generations of sufferers.

In *Two Lives* Vikram Seth creates a historical narrative of India, the Third-Reich Germany, wartime Europe, post-World War II England and post-colonial India. It depicts how the clash of borders led to the Second World War. In the thirst to expand their nations the world came almost on the brink of extinction with the use of nuclear bombs. Through Shanti Seth the reader can see how a person transcends borders and creates a new identity for himself. An Indian by birth Shanti goes to Germany to study dentistry. In Germany he meets his future wife Henny and learns the German language which he uses throughout his life. When the borders of Germany get closed for him due to the new regulations implemented by the Nazi regime, Shanti shifts to England where later he ends up joining the Second World War. After losing an arm in the war he settles in England and sets up his own practice as a dentist. Shanti becomes the symbol of a world citizen where he transcends the geographical boundaries and creates multiple identities for himself. He is an Indian by birth although he loses touch with the country but continues to be fond of his relatives. He prefers to stay in England with a German-Jewish wife and continues speaking in German with her. Thus, he plays multiple roles and effortlessly creates a hybrid identity not exclusively linked to any particular nation.

Through his narration of different countries Vikram Seth creates an idea of a nation in different locations in the minds of his readers. Furthermore it will be wrong on the part of the reader to take his ideas as absolute. It is just a particular way of representation. Another writer like Salman Rushdie might narrate the same period in a different way. Seth's version regarding the idea of a nation is an individual perception. Through an imaginative mode Seth looks at the theories of globalization. Seth being a globalized writer effortlessly shifts between different nations and cultures. Be it the Indian culture, the British, German or American, Seth is at equal ease in depicting them. He shows the drawbacks of the excessive focus on the idea of nationalism which might consequently lead to a kind of jingoism. Through his fictional characters and his memoir Seth depicts his take on the national politics and policies, and their impact on the lives of common man. This helps reader's grapple with the emerging ideas in the theories of globalization. In a global world all countries are inter-related and the policies implemented in one country have repercussion on the other countries too.

The following chapter explores the different cultures of food that Vikram Seth has shown through his works and how these cultures are placed within the processes of globalization. After dealing with the concept of nation it will be interesting to see the culture of food in different parts of the world through the representations in Seth's works.

Chapter 5

EXPLORING CUISINE AND FOOD CULTURE IN VIKRAM SETH'S WORKS

Mankind has had a rich heritage of food which is its basic need. Food can be seen as the key element to maintain a physical and emotional well-being. It is extremely essential for human existence. Each culture, with its own tradition of literature, also maintains its own distinct cuisine and traditional rules that govern their gastronomy. Feast and food in literature go beyond the mere physical appetite. The food traditions of a community are composed not just of recipes, but of the know-hows about how foods are grown, gathered, stored, prepared, served and thrown out. Amita Baviskar in *The Cambridge Companion To Modern Indian Culture* states:

In essence, food is a way of fulfilling a biological need – nutrition – within an ecologically and culturally defined context. At the same time, it is a way of expressing one's sense of self – individually and collectively – in relation to the past, present and future. Concerns about authenticity and belonging, taste and distinction, health and safety converge when food is at issue, as do embodied feelings like comfort, pleasure, craving and deprivation. (49)

The history of food can be seen reflected in the world of fiction. A narrative can have particularly powerful effects when it involves culinary and alimentary signifiers. According to Gian-Paolo Biasin in *Flavors of Modernity*, “when the novel deals with food, a culinary sign, it adds richness to richness, it superimposes its own system of signs and meanings onto the signifying system, variously codified, of cooking” (3). To explore literary narration, food

can act as a particularly good instrument. Sarah Sceats writes in *Food, Consumption and the Body in Contemporary Women's Fiction* that eating is “the arena of our earliest education and enculturation” (1). Food is one of the earliest introductions into the host country for a migrant. The individual can access the wider community through food and this is one of the key ideas surrounding food literature.

Food has been the favourite topic for many Indian English writers. Anita Desai's *Fasting, Feasting* revolves around the theme of food. Desai breaks down the binaries of India and the United States and constructs the gendered subject through hunger and appetite. For the characters in the book, food becomes almost an obsession. Their attitudes towards food help the readers define them. Food is used as a tool for entrapment as well as liberation. Salman Rushdie uses food as a recurring motif in his novel *Midnight's Children*. With the narration, the narrator of Rushdie's novel fills in the jars of chutney in each chapter. Different dishes of memory and experience are set before the reader. The representation of food can also give readers a glimpse of the class affiliations of the characters as seen in Lavanya Sankaran's *The Hope Factory*. In *The Hope Factory* one sees that the protagonist Anand's family, hailing from the middle class background, prefers a simple vegetarian meal. His father-in-law, on the other hand, belonging to the upper class insists on exotic non-vegetarian menu for Diwali party.

Jumpha Lahiri in her works places a lot of emphasis on food. It can be seen how food serves both to solidify group membership as well as to set groups apart. For instance, in *The Namesake*, Gogol and his sister reject their ethnic food and prefer the food of the host country to which their parents migrated and which the two children see as ‘home’. In Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies* which is a collection of short stories, food acts as a common theme. Food also serves the purpose of creating a sense of identity in the characters of Lahiri as it helps them keep their own identity intact in a foreign land. Food has been a favored topic for

the writers who deal with diaspora. The pure ethnic dishes are reminisced and then re-created in the foreign land, which helps to reclaim and repossess the past. Amongst the diaspora, food becomes an element which creates nostalgia about homeland and gets translated into fond memories and cravings for certain foods and the loved ones. In Anita Nair's *Lessons in Forgetting*, Jak recalls while in the U.S how he often dreamt about Kala Chitti's *Beans Pappu Usili* – a unique dish made from chopped tender french beans made with steamed lentils and sautéed with mustard and curry leaves. Jak's wife Nina, the savvy western academician with a globalized attitude and demeanor, casually dismisses her husband and daughter's favorite *Urunda Kozhambu* as nothing more than mere vegetarian dumplings. Vikram Seth in his works has used food to secure the place of his characters in the surroundings he has created. The theme of food blends into the narrative and an identity is created for the characters.

In this chapter, the approach is to look at whether food preferences and consumption patterns insidiously pose a challenge to the process of globalization. The study also tries to decipher the extent of change the local undergoes in preparation, re-naming and such, to adapt to the global scenario. A probe is done as to whether Vikram Seth, through his depiction of food in his literary works, is creating solidarity or is he creating dissent among the characters. In the works of Seth, food is not central to the story but accounts of food are given at regular intervals as a marker of a way of life. The focus in this chapter would be on Seth's *A Suitable Boy*, *An Equal Music*, *The Golden Gate* and *Two Lives*. In the process an examination will be done as how the deliberate food choices an individual makes, bears tremendous impact on his/her life and the life of the people around. An in-depth analysis of Seth's works, viz. the critical discourses on food will be attempted.

In the Hindu society food can be regarded as an essential tool for cultural representation. The culture of food has its origin in the ancient customs. In the Hindu society

soon after birth, the ceremonial feast begins. The ‘weaning ceremony’ known as the *annaprasan* where the baby is ritually given the taste of its first solid food in the form of rice is similar to the Western tradition of baptism. Even death or demise of the physical body is ritually marked through food in the form of *pindadan*. *Pindadan* is a ceremonial offering of food to the spirit of the dead person in a ritual called *shraddha*. A community’s social and cultural identity can be defined with the help of food and the events in which food is served. An Indian marriage cannot be complete without the crowd fixating about food. Seth’s *A Suitable Boy* opens with a wedding where the guest can think only about food or some relative they haven’t met since the last wedding or funeral. Seth gives a description of events during the wedding and activities of guest that gathered in the lawns of Prem Nivas for Pran Kapoor and Savita Mehra’s wedding:

...they breathed deeply the scent of flowers and perfume and cooked spices; they exchanged births and deaths and politics and scandal under the brightly-coloured cloth canopy...they sat down exhaustedly on chairs and their plates full and tucked in inexhaustibly. Servants, some in white livery, some in khaki, brought around fruit juice and tea and coffee and snacks to those who were standing in the garden: samosas, kachauris, laddus, gulab-jamuns, barfis and gajak and ice-cream were consumed and replenished along with puris and six kinds of vegetables. (14)

Indian weddings are known for their sumptuous meals and gorging of food by the guest is a common sight. The lines above from *A Suitable Boy* amply show this. In an Indian wedding preparation or discussion about food is the favourite topic. Acclaimed writer Shashi Tharoor in *The Guardian* states: “If America is a melting-pot, then to me India is a *thali*, a selection of sumptuous dishes in different bowls. Each tastes different, and does not necessarily mix with the next, but they belong together on the same plate ... That, to me, is the notion or metaphor

of the Indian identity.” The members of the family and the whole community irrespective of their gender, caste and religion attend these functions where the different aspects of life and death are marked. This coming together of the community around various acts of eating creates solidarity among them. Food acts as the building blocks of a culture. Seth being a global writer appreciates the phenomenon of the culture of food and sees the myriad aspects of it.

The power relationships which emerge into play through food behaviour and consumption patterns remains mostly unnoticed by the parties involved. Without food a body cannot survive. But, when the body of the individual is under stress the food behaviour changes. According to the political theorist Hanna Fenichel Pitkin, in the article “Food and Freedom in the Flounder”:

Only with their living bodies pumping blood and digesting food can people speak, write poems, formulate ideals, and make history. Intellectuals and ideologues tend to forget that. But that doesn't mean that ideals are pointless, or that only digestion matters. People need meaning in their lives as much as they need food. They need the connection between meaning and food. (484)

The food behaviour can reflect the mental condition of an individual. Like in *An Equal Music* when Michael gets a letter from his music teacher Carl Käll with whom he had a difficult relation he is troubled. It is well reflected in Michael's behavioural tendencies: “The kettle clicked itself off minutes ago. I go to the kitchen and find myself unable to remember where the teabags are. There is something troubling in the letter. Carl Käll is dying; I feel sure of it” (15). When a person is in pain or stress it is difficult to have food. In *Two Lives* Vikram Seth tells about the case of his uncle Shanti during the Second World War. When Shanti lost his arm in the battlefield where he was working as a doctor he “had no appetite at all, but the

staff insisted he eat something” (154). Since Shanti was in so much pain he could not bring himself to eat. Food on the other hand can also act as a way of coping with stress or relieving pain. The staff at the hospital tried to help him eat by bringing his favourite food and drinks as a way of helping him. Shanti himself tells that the staffs at the hospital tried to take his mind off his problems and were really good with him. “They gave me whiskey, they gave me eggs, and what more could they do?” (154) Shanti goes on to say. The staff knew about Shanti’s love for whiskey and to relieve his pain they gave him that drink. Thus food can hold a lot of power over an individual. The acceptance or rejection of food can have a lot of impact on the mental and physical health of a person. It is a global phenomenon and not restricted to any particular individual.

There are different theories on food. In a 1915-lecture, published posthumously as “Course in General Linguistics”, Ferdinand de Saussure describes the fundamentals of linguistic systems. He makes a vital distinction between *langue* and *parole*. *Langue* is “language” defined as a general term for specific languages. *Parole*, “speech”, is the concrete utterances that constitute all acts of language. The atom of language is the sign, which is functionally split into two parts: a signifier (sound-image) and a signified (concept). Language’s essence is that it is a structured system of signs: the signifier (sound-image) connects and associates to a signified (concept in the mind, an idea, an understanding). The relationship between the signifier and signified is arbitrary and is not motivated by natural resemblance. For example an object like a table can be referred to by different words in different languages. According to Saussure, the arbitrariness of the sign renders the sign both relational and constitutive. The meaning of the signs exists in the difference to the signs surrounding them which makes them relational. The sign’s supposed relation to reality makes it constitutive. The same food item takes up different names based on the culture they are consumed in. A failure to recognise the name of the food item can lead to an embarrassment

for a person like in the case of Julia in Seth's *An Equal Music*. Julia being partially deaf had to rely on her lip reading skills whenever she is with unknown people. While on a luncheon with Michael she asks the waiter what they had for vegetables. The waiter replies:

“Broccoli, courgettes, beans, leeks, spinach,”...

“I'd like peas,” says Julia.

The waiter looks at her with obvious puzzlement. Julia, noticing this, looks anxious.

“I'm afraid, madam,” says the waiter, “we do not have peas on the menu.”

A look of momentary bafflement passes over her face. “I meant beans-French beans,” she says quickly. (187)

Since Julia was unable to properly lip read the waiter she could not relate the signifier to the signified. This leads to confusion and makes her upset. So when a person orders food in a particular culture it is important to know the signs related to that culture or it creates dissent. Knowledge about a food culture becomes an essential tool to get integrated seamlessly into the global food culture. It is through the creation of food cultures that a community comes together and hence they try to stick to it rigidly. But the impact of globalization has penetrated this and hybrid food cultures have evolved.

Based on Saussure's idea that the structure of language is applicable to other signifying systems, the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss applies the principles of structural linguistics in other fields. Lévi-Strauss defines the choice and preparation of food as a signifying system. In “The Culinary Triangle” Lévi-Strauss claims that cooking is one of the most fundamental cultural signifying systems:

It would seem that the methodological principle which inspires such distinctions [as identified by structuralism] is transposable to other domains, notably that of cooking which, it has never been sufficiently emphasized, is

with language a truly universal form of human activity: if there is no society without a language, nor is there any which does not cook in some manner. (28)

Lévi-Strauss demonstrates the transformative cultural power of cooking by a culinary triangle with three points, the raw, the cooked and the rotten that “delimit the semantic field”. He believes that the three cooking modes in the triangle, boiling, roasting and smoking are based on nature or culture. Strauss argues that the “art of cooking is not located entirely on the side of culture” by comparing the three cooking modes. He states, some nations believed that boiling the food is a civilized act and roasting is an ancient form of cooking. This is so, as boiling requires a receptacle which is seen as a “cultural object” while roasting is directly exposed to the fire. However, he also contradicts these examples with other cultures that favoured roasting over boiling. For instance, boiling conserves entirely the meat and its juices, while roasting destroys the meat, or boiled meat is flesh without its juice. Therefore, the ambiguity of the roasted and boiled depends on the way people think about them.

<http://trout201-extracts.blogspot.in/2010/09/summary-of-culinary-triangle-and.html>) Lévi-Strauss argues that the culinary sign is so vital to a culture that its members often perceive it as natural and react to the practices of the other with incredulity and disgust. According to Saussure in his “General Linguistics” arbitrary and differential are two correlative qualities. With the culinary triangle, Lévi-Strauss visualises the relationality of culinary signs; it is an illustration of the belief that each culinary category exists in relation to the others. Lévi-Strauss thus differentiates between a culinary *langue* and an individual’s or a particular culture’s culinary *parole*. The culinary triangle is seen as an abstract structure into which each culture inserts meanings by its alimentary practice. For Lévi-Strauss, food behaviour is a language of arbitrary, relational and constitutive culinary signs. This study elucidates that the culinary sign acts as a significant interpretative tool in literary analysis. In Vikram Seth’s *Two Lives* when Shanti Seth goes to study medicine and dentistry in Germany, for the final

exam in Physiology, he was asked why patients suffering from stomach trouble were given boiled rather than fried food to which he replied

If you boil food, the temperature never goes above a hundred degrees, while if you fry it, the temperature goes much higher and the fibres of the meat may get burned, and though it sometimes tastes better, it is not so easily absorbed by the stomach. (86)

The German professor who asked the question was very happy with Shanti's answer and although the professor regarded the Indian culture as old, he frowns upon the other students for not being able to answer in spite of belonging to the German culture which is supposedly advanced. Here one finds that solidarity has been created between two cultures based on the answer to a simple question of whether a person with stomach trouble should be given boiled or fried meat to consume. Thus, it is seen how food transcends the barriers of cultural superiority and creates unity. This is an important cultural aspect of globalization which is found in Seth's writing.

Roland Barthes in "Toward a Psychosociology of Contemporary Food Consumption" explains how food acts as a system of communication and provides a body of images that mark eating situations. Food goes beyond the mere acts of eating. Different people have different ways of preparing and eating food which are defined by their culture. In many of the cultures food has not been given the emphasis it deserves. The identity of an individual or a particular culture can be gauged by the food preferences they make. For example in most of the Bengali families fish is one of the important components of food culture. In fact, Bengali's are known for their love of fish and different ways of preparing fish. Food preferences can differ between classes and according to the tastes of an individual. Barthes identifies three main groups of values concerning food, the commemorative, anthropological,

and health. He explains the invention of the snack bar to meet peoples' fast paced lives and the function of advertising to portray coffee not as caffeine but as a break. His theory is that food "transforms itself into situation" (34). Roland Barthes concludes that as our culture changes our foods change and as our foods change they also shape our culture and lives. This aspect can be seen reflected in the life of Shanti when he moves to Germany from India and then to London in Vikram Seth's *Two Lives*. Although Shanti was habituated with the Indian food, when he shifts to London he manages to change his food habits to the British culture. Vikram Seth tells us about Shanti's changed food habits:

For breakfast he ate Ryvita and tomatoes, toast and marmalade, and occasionally cornflakes. In the evening he had ham, cheese, salad and fruit: again all cold. But since he was working with the Amalgamated, he had a hot lunch in town during the day, and at least twice a week he ate a decent dinner at Henry and Nita's. (177-178)

The food that is described here is typically staple British food. Shanti being used to Indian food changes his food preferences to blend with the alien British tastes. Yet one finds him craving for hot food which is essentially how all Indian meals are. So here one finds the traces of dissent being created as he was unable to get his normal preference of food. However, Shanti gradually adjusts to the British way of living and this has a great impact on his future life as he spends the rest of his life in London and gets married to Henny, a German girl. Shanti imbibes a hybrid food culture gradually which is the stepping stone to cultural globalization. He is able to move beyond the food barriers of his own culture and become a global citizen.

In the realm of structuralism if Lévi-Strauss's approach to food is taken, it leads to a focus on the implications of the conceptual nature/ culture opposition. But food behaviour

does not fit snugly into the category of nature or culture although it is used to justify the differentiation between them. In structuralist terms, culture is defined in opposition to nature. Culture is referred to as that which is not common to all humans, has to be learnt, and depends on social life and its collective norms. This renders nature necessary and absolute while culture is arbitrary. But such distinctions are highly questionable. According to Kate Soper, nature is the idea through which people conceptualise what the “other” is to them, and by conceptualising the other, they conceptualise their own identity. The function of nature/culture opposition is that of human self-definition. According to Horigan, the opposition is symptomatic of a certain ‘desire to draw a circle around the human’. Soper in the book *What is Nature?* finds that:

In its commonest and most fundamental sense, the term “nature” refers to everything which is not human and distinguished from the work of humanity. Thus, “nature” is opposed to culture, to history, to convention, to what is artificially worked or produced, in short, to everything which is defining of the order of humanity. (15)

This makes, the nature/ culture division highly enthralling. This nature/ culture opposition seems to cover human behaviour but there are various areas where the binary opposition cannot cover adequately. These are located on the border between the concepts of culture and nature, such as food behaviour.

Food and food behaviour can be seen as a way to reinforce the sense of a distinction between nature and culture. In *The Anthropology of Food and Body* Carole Counihan states that, “humans construct their relationship to nature through their foodways” (24), and cooking as well as the use of cutlery is regarded as ways to create a distance to the aspects of food and eating, regarded as natural. Resistance to accept alien food culture proves as a great

barrier in the trajectory of 'borderlessness'. For example, the food that a culture prefers stays with them regardless of the preferences of an individual. Turkey is an important part of Christmas for the Western population. So even if an individual prefers not to have it, the culture lures it into submission to have it. This can be seen in the case of Michael in Seth's *An Equal Music*. Michael's father was a butcher and Michael from a young age saw him selling turkeys for Christmas. In his own words he says:

When I was ten or thereabouts, Dad and I drove down in a van to collect a number of birds from a turkey farm. Some turkeys were having their heads chopped off, some their feathers plucked, some were still running around gobbling. I was so unhappy at the thought of the very birds I was looking at turning to lifeless mounds that stocked our fridge that I promised I wouldn't eat my Christmas turkey, then or ever. Despite the aroma of the stuffing to tempt me and my father's scoffing to goad me, I kept my resolve for one Christmas. (64)

This example shows how as a child an individual is coaxed into accepting certain food habits regardless of their will. In time these food choices become a natural part of the food habit of the individual. Traditions are formed around acts of eating as a way to make a sense of life, time and space. Hence identity of a culture is formed through their food habits.

Food choice is considered cultural while the need to eat is seen as a basic drive. Like in Seth's novel *An Equal Music*, Michael tells how the change of sauce after the death of his mother is disliked by the father. "My mother's apple sauce has given way, under Auntie Joan's regime to cranberry sauce, and Dad invariably complains about this. It's not really Christmas without apple sauce; Cranberry sauce is an American import..." (64). Michael's father likes to follow the British tradition during Christmas and any change in the menu, even

if it is the sauce, tends to upset him. He regards the cranberry sauce as an American import and places apple sauce in the British food culture.

The role of cook as a catalyst is very important as the cook prepares the inmates to swap their inherent preferences according to the demands of the culture. For example, if a Punjabi family employs a Bengali cook, the cook might prepare the food according to his/her traditional Bengali culture. Here the Punjabi family will be shifting from its natural Punjabi food to the Bengali cultural food. In Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy* one finds Mrs. Rupa Mehra's elder son Arun Mehra who is from North India marrying Meenakshi Chatterji who is a Bengali. Here a change in the cultural practice is underway. Both Arun and Meenakshi instead of taking their native cultures fall back on the British way of life. This helps them overcome their cultural differences. This brings into light that food preferences change for a family based on the cooking done by the cook. In a globalized world this leads to a multicultural society. Acceptance of different food cultures brings about overall peace and harmony.

Poststructuralist perspectives on food suggest that food and food behaviour do not fit structuralist binary oppositions such as the nature/ culture dichotomy. Poststructuralism asserts that, as nature and culture are defined in opposition to one another, neither culture nor nature can be said to be independent of its opposite. Rejection of the possibility of existence of objectivity destabilises concepts of binary oppositions, resonating with Jacques Derrida's poststructuralist view that: "there is nothing outside of the text". Where the literary analysis of food by the structuralist perspective is done by defining it as signifying system, the poststructuralist views perceives the ability of food and its related activities to destabilize the borders between nature and culture, inside and outside, self and other, body and mind and of female and male social roles.

The theories of food and gender that suggest the binary opposition of woman/ man can be easily destabilized as they often rely on the signifying system of food and can be seen as a construct. The concepts of the relationship between women and nourishment highlight the social relevance of constructs of binary opposites which can be viewed as a relationship of gender. They at the same time show that these are less straightforward than commonly perceived. For example in *The Golden Gate* the process of pickle making is described. Phil, Ed, Mr and Mrs. Craven and other friends join in plucking and gathering the olives. Later they help her in the processing of the olives:

The salt's mixed as the water's heated.

An egg's released upon the brine.

It floats! The first stage is completed.

Phase two: In stratified design,

Bands of plump olives and thick slices

Of lemon, dusted well with spices,

Are laid inside each picking jar. (119)

This simple task of pickle making shows the workings of the day to day life of the characters and places them in a Californian background. Here men help the women in the task of pickle making and each takes a share in the produce. This represents a society where men are given a place inside the kitchen. In an Indian setting it is usually the women of the house who manage such affairs and men are oblivious to it. Seth thus in a subtle way positions his characters in the American culture and creates a communal identity for them. The difference in culinary practices and consumption patterns creates more polarization in the Indian

society. But then again gender roles are changing and it is not possible to situate the role of woman and man into cartels of binary opposites. In a globalized world, the lines are blurred and hence one can see that a bond is created through food amongst the two genders.

T.S. Eliot, in his *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*, claims that one of the indicators of the culture of a nation is its “proper and particular cuisine” (27). For a man of culture good food, high-quality music and excellent books are essential. For such a lifestyle a person should have the means to support and sustain it. Such indulgences can be seen in the lifestyle of the Nawab in Seth’s *A Suitable Boy*. The Nawab’s family who has been in power for generations can afford high quality of life where the table is filled with rich food and the library is well stocked. Allocation of resources like food can create dissent and this becomes prominent between the upper and lower classes. Though the Nawab can afford to have a lavish lifestyle his employees are not so fortunate. This creates a rift amongst them. The processes of globalization bring to light these jarring class differences through mediums like mass media, documentary films and other sources of public knowledge which creates awareness about such conditions.

Globalization has a lot of impact on food that is seen to be the representation of a culture. Like, for example, curry is synonymous with the concept of the Indian culture and an important ingredient of that curry is chillies. Yet chillies were introduced to India from South America by the Portuguese. Prior to that Indians used pepper to make their food hot and spicy. Not only chillies, but many other important favourite foods of Indians were introduced by the Europeans into India like *rajma* (kidney beans), tomatoes, cashew nuts, papaya and significantly the potato. Food is an important part of culture but the culture itself is a construct created to give meaning to life. Hence, it is imperative that people see their culture through a global perspective.

One of the important aspects of globalization is the immigration of people and food habits of the immigrants. In search of a better life a stereotypical migrant moves abroad. In a foreign land the immigrant through food seeks to revisit own cultural and culinary past. These people have to first acclimatise themselves to the habits of the foreign land which can be fraught with difficulties. The bicultural immigrants are influenced by their interaction with multiple geographical and cartographical entities as well as historical realities. Since the immigrants inherit all the contradictions with which the foreign land is invested, the food they eat or desire become one of the prime locations of contradiction and conflict. In his seminal essay “Imaginary Homelands” Salman Rushdie wrote that the present is foreign and that “the past is home albeit a lost home in a lost city in the mists of lost time” (1). Glimpses of the problems of the immigrant is seen in Seth’s *Two Lives* when Shanti first shifts from India and goes to Paris via Athens and Marseilles. In Marseilles a simple meal of “boiled eggs, omelettes and tomatoes” had cost him a lot and then, when he reached Paris he was pickpocketed and his keys stolen. For a student with limited resources it was difficult for Shanti to bear such expenses in the name of food. He was intimidated by the women and decided against staying in Paris and moved to Germany for his studies. However, when Shanti landed in Germany he was again facing trouble as he did not know German. But a German student helped him and directed him towards a Bengali restaurant where he could dine and also receive help. He could relate to the food and the culture of the Bengali restaurant. Thus one sees how even in a foreign country Shanti received help from a person who belonged to his native land. Vikram Seth shows in his works what it is to live with a food culture.

The way in which food is consumed or not consumed communicates the manner in which the consumers define themselves. In her essay “The Migrant’s Feast” academician Nayana Chakrabarti states that food can reveal an immigrants “socio-political beliefs and also

the way that their attitudes to their ethnicity, gender and class identity have been shaped. It can also further reveal how they, as individuals, have been informed by food which is the everyday reminder of their cultural history” (150). Vikram Seth gives an instance of such a revelation when he first goes to the United States from India to study at Tonbridge. Seth’s housemaster Mr McCrum invited him for lunch along with some other students. As Seth was not very informed about the British way of eating or handling cutlery he had to covertly look at his fellow students for guidance.

A surreptitious glance or two told me which implement everyone else was using, and I followed suit. But at some stage of the meal, I relaxed my vigilance. Shrimps were served inside scooped-out apples. I ate both. As I ate, I became aware that the conversation around me had grown muted. People were staring at me, and when I turned to look at them I noticed something else. On each plate, the shrimps had all been extracted and consumed; the enclosing apples, however, had been left intact. A shocked silence had descended upon the table. My fellow schoolboys glanced anxiously towards Mr McCrum. I looked down at my plate. After a pause, he said, ‘Yes, I’ve always thought it rather wasteful not to eat the apple,’ and in due course, the plates and my mortification were cleared unpainfully away. (9)

This incident shows us how a person coming from a different culture finds it difficult to enjoy even a meal in the foreign land. The conflict that was created with Seth’s consumption of the apple which was supposed to be discarded left him mortified. In India stuffed fruits or vegetables are fully consumed and Seth had followed that tradition. But in the British tradition of eating, the stuffing is consumed and the enclosing apple is left. When Seth comes in contact with a foreign culture the food that he was offered became a source of contradiction and conflict. Seth shows the phenomenon of food from a very impersonal

aspect. He is not judgemental and as a world traveller he is conversant with the processes of globalization that are at play. He learned about a different food culture with his experiences and although he was embarrassed initially he is not bitter about it.

In the recent times a global food network have been created as the local, regional and national food systems have become intertwined. At the time of war or political turmoil food can be used as an instrument of power. Food can be a means of abuse too by people who wish to spread global terrorism. In the past few centuries the ways humans get food have changed dramatically. Beginning in the late nineteenth century these changes have been especially rapid and impactful. According to the writer Harvey Levenstein factors such as the rise of the science of nutrition, the formation of large food processors and global brands, as well as the development of increasingly active social movements around food have resulted in the convergence of material, social, and ideological forces to shape new ways of eating and new attitudes toward food. Although the fact remains that most food production, processing and consumption remains national in scale, globalization has its impact. Due to globalization there has been a change in a range of activities and processes related to food and this has given rise to a complex, transnational network of food systems. But this emergence of the networked global food systems has raised substantial challenges to ensuring food security although it has brought significant benefits.

Food can be used to spread terrorism. During the Holocaust food was used as a means to break the prisoners. The prisoners were given only as much food as was required to keep them alive. In *Two Lives* Seth gives an account of a woman prisoner who testified in 1946 as follows

We received our food in large red enamel dishes which were merely rinsed in cold water after each meal. This was a direct cause of mortality and epidemics,

for as all the women were ill and could not go out at night to the indescribably filthy trench to perform their natural functions, they used their dishes for this purpose. The next day they collected up the dishes and emptied their contents into the washing-up tubs. During the day another batch of women used the same dishes for food. (223)

This example shows the pathetic condition of the prisoners in the concentration camps. There was mass contamination of food and food at times was the cause of death. Even today when food is becoming globalized due to the advancement of technology, there are high risks of contamination. Many deadly viruses could be spread across the globe through food. There are global chains as well as food imports and exports happening regularly. This could act as a means of terrorism and it is important to take appropriate means of security. This is a negative impact of globalization.

From the above analysis it is seen that the consumption of food is fraught with layers of complexity. Our basic tool for survival has been wrapped up with different cultural and identity issues. On the one hand food can create a unity amongst communities or cultures, yet on the other hand, food can be a cause of dissent if there is a clash of cultures. Both the structuralists as well as the poststructuralists have examined the issue of food and both their views hold ground. Food can be looked at from a nature/ culture binary. The food habits can not only show the class distinction but also the mental health of a person. The impact of globalization is also found adequately in the type and manner of consumption of food. But there are negative impacts of globalization too, as food can be used as a means of terror. To sum up, it can be seen that although food can create dissent at times, yet solidarity can be achieved with a little effort from an individual or community. Even the threats on food can be dealt with and the pangs of immigration can be softened if as individuals and as a community, level of vigilance is increased and the horizons of acceptance are broadened.

Through the works of Vikram Seth the importance of food cultures can be seen in the time of globalization.

After an in-depth study of the impact of globalization on the culture of food the next chapter will deal with Seth's representation of the middle classes in his works. Emphasis will be laid on the Indian middle class and their impact on a globalized world.

REPRESENTATION OF THE MIDDLE CLASS IN THE WORKS OF VIKRAM SETH

The middle class holds a very prominent place in society. According to the economist John Parker “For the first time in history more than half the world is middle-class—thanks to rapid growth in emerging countries” (“Burgeoning Bourgeoisie”, 3). Broadly speaking, middle class is seen as the class in the middle of a social pyramid. In social and economic terms middle class lies between the upper and the lower classes. But the boundaries between the classes remain fluid and un-demarcated. There is a constant overlapping happening between the three classes. Middle class can be defined through various classifications. The size of the middle class depends on how it is defined, whether by education, wealth, environment of upbringing, social network, manners or values. From the time of emergence of the middle class, it has been represented in the world of fiction. In fact rise of novel has often been linked with rise of middle classes. Globalization of Indian economy has strongly influenced the social life in India and it has been one of the greatest factors for the rise of middle class in India.

Rise of the middle class has been quite dramatic in the European history. The middle class played a significant role in the transformation of society. The rulers supported this class to resist the feudal lords who defied their authority and agitated against them. The rulers granted the middle class licenses to trade overseas and to take charge of the management of cities where they established municipalities. This empowered the middle class. Gradually, the emerging class or the bourgeois became protuberant in the cities. They started building their

own social and cultural setup and succeeded in changing the prevalent feudal culture. The middle class emphasized on promotion of education. This led to the creation of a trained professional class which included bankers, accountants, doctors, lawyers, artists and scholars. Cities became the hub of trade, commerce and educational activities. A significant role was played by the middle class in making Renaissance successful. The role of the middle class moved to central and western Europe after reformation. The merchant classes of England, France and Holland were involved in overseas trade in the seventeenth century. From the trading and shipping companies emerged new professions such as insurance agents, shareholders and clerks. This impacted the structure of market. The middle class became rich, talented and useful to society although the political power still lay with the ruling feudal lords. But in 1789 began a period of radical, social and political upheaval in France that had a major impact on the political, social, and economic structure. The old regime was overthrown by the middle class with the help of the masses. The wave of revolution continued through 1830 to 1848. Similarly, the English parliament was forced to pass the Great Reform Act in 1832 which changed the British electoral system.

The rise of the Indian middle class has been a quiet phenomenon unlike its Western counterpart. Before Independence the middle class was created mostly by the interaction of Indians with the Britishers and it was a small and exclusive club. B.B. Misra in his book *The Indian Middle Classes: Their Growth in Modern Times* traces the growth of the Indian middle-classes, i e, "the class of people which arose as a result of changes in the British social policy and with the introduction of the new economic system and industry and with the subsequent growth of new professions" (438) from the mid-eighteenth century to modern times. The Indian middle class has an important social and historical role in modern India. It has been celebrated for its steady economic growth. Especially in global economy the middle class provides a steady growth and a consumer base for the competing markets.

Literature is littered with characters belonging to the middle classes. Daniel Defoe in his literary works shows the rising middle class. In Defoe's work one sees that as the English nation expands and progresses, traditional leadership roles fall increasingly on tradesmen, in cultural as well as economic areas. Charles Dickens has extensively dealt with middle class characters. For example, Dickens's acclaimed novel *Bleak House* is a scathing critique of Victorian England. The book emphasizes the futile struggle of the middle class to climb the social ladder in pursuit of money and status at a time of continuing industrialization and changing social structure. In the contemporary era it is a common practice among writers to have middle class characters. R.K. Narayan used a plethora of middle class characters in his works. The dramas of middle class life were enacted in Narayan's fictional town Malgudi. The rise of the Indian middle class and its accompanying problems can be seen vividly in the Indian Fiction of the 21st century. Writers like Salman Rushdie and Amitav Ghosh have produced numerous middle-class caricatures well-known for their idiosyncrasies. In Ghosh's novel *The Shadow Lines* the protagonist Tridib is a boy who grows up in a middle-class family. Rushdie in his works, like the *Midnight's Children* among others, incorporates many middle class characters. Anita Desai chronicles the disturbed lives of middle class women in an efficiently poetic and redolent language. Shashi Deshpande also wrote poignantly of the domestic lives of middle class women.

The struggle between the classes and the narrow demarcation between the lower, middle and upper classes are amply found in modern Indian English fiction. There is in fact a lot of overlapping happening between these three classes. Contemporary writers like Lavanya Sankaran and Jerry Pinto too have dealt with this class. In *The Hope Factory*, Sankaran traces the journey of a normal middle class family on the road to economic prosperity who struggles with the system of New India. Jerry Pinto's novel *EM and the big HOOM* traces the life of a

family who stays in a one-bedroom-hall-kitchen in Mahim, Bombay which is the condition for the majority of the middle classes face.

The focus of this chapter is to see how Vikram Seth represents the impact of globalization on the middle class in his literary works. I would examine how education paves the way for a brighter future for the middle class. An interrogation would be attempted of the paradoxical impact of globalization among the middle classes with the increase in living standards and consumerist tendencies which the so called progress leads along with a reduced sense of social awareness. Furthermore, a study will be undertaken as to how that progress leads to reduced sense of awareness about the contemporary issues and an increase in consumerism among the middle class. Additionally, a study will be done on how this class meddles with state policies and their tendency to stick with their own value systems. More emphasis will be laid on the Indian middle class and their accompanying problems.

Vikram Seth in his fictional writings deals with a lot of middle class characters. His protagonists mostly belong to the middle classes. In his novel *A Suitable Boy*, Seth uses an omniscient third person narrator to describe the post-independence period of the early 1950's, which saw the rise of the Indian middle class. The characters in his novel *The Golden Gate* too belong to the middle classes. Many of the characters in *The Golden Gate* are educated who are placed in good positions and who lead a comfortable life. One of the guiding aspects of the middle class is the use of education to further their social status. Educational qualifications help to define the middle class. They are not like the few 'wealthy and powerful' who have assets that can be passed down to the next generation regardless of their qualifications. Members of the middle class largely depend upon the credentials conferred by the education system in order to attain or hold on to their position. Indeed, the sociologist, A. Giddens in *The Class Structure of Advanced Societies* argues that the middle class is defined by education, in as much as its market power is based principally upon educational

qualifications. In *An Equal Music*, Michael's father, who was a butcher by profession, wanted that their only son escape the rural life of Rochdale with the help of higher education. But, Michael was more inclined towards music and instead goes to a music school. His decision leaves his parents "bewildered and betrayed" and "deprived of a happiness that they were due" (22). The choice of vocation increased manifold with globalization. It offered a wide array of job opportunities and people could easily move out of the bracket of conventional jobs.

Education does not merely have an economic value for the middle class; it is an important component of middle-class's cultural and social lifestyles. Throughout the world the middle classes give a lot of prominence to education. Ashok Lahiri, a former chief economic advisor to the Government of India, gives his view on the middle classes in his article "The Middle Class and Economic Reforms": "While there is a sense of hopelessness and resignation among the extremely poor, the middle class is a more determined lot, ready to better themselves on their own through struggle as well as by educating their children" (39). This is the case with the character Mrs. Rupa Mehra in Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy*. Although Mrs. Rupa Mehra lost her husband at an early age and had to take care of four children she did not give up. She ensured that all her children rose in social status through education. Author Pavan K. Varma reinstates the aspirations of the middle class in his book *The Great Indian Middle Class* in a similar fashion:

Education was something the middle class always valued, but its importance has only grown in these last years. Traditionally, the feudal gentry had the insulation of landed wealth and the hereditary rich had money; for the average middle class person, however, education was the only means to move upwards, and maintain, if not widen the distance from those at the bottom of

the ladder eking out a living from menial labour. Educational avenues had been increasing ever since 1947... (xxii)

In *A Suitable Boy*, Lata is allowed to study in a conservative post-independence India. In fact, all the Mehra children use education as a means to improve their social condition after the death of their father. Due to economic globalization, job opportunities were created for women throughout the world. The parents frequently provided positive encouragement to girls to opt for higher education. Education became a means to enter the workforce and consequently procure gainful employment. Such expectations were previously absent among middle class families especially before the independence of India. Amongst all the classes, it is the middle class which tremendously profited from globalization. Nowadays, not only is women's education a source of pride for parents, it also stands as a safety net. In the contemporary era, education is not just a means to secure livelihood but also a social status enhancer. Education acts as an insurance against a woman's failed marriage or widowhood. In a country like India, for a widow, there are provisions for state-sector employees to take over their husbands' posts provided they are suitably qualified. Lata, in *A Suitable Boy*, is encouraged to complete her education. Mrs Rupa Mehra tells her daughter that, "you must study hard, Lata, there are so few days left... or you will never have your Daddy's academic success. You should not let your wedding and other things distract you" (1331). Education becomes a tool to attract a good groom in the Indian marriage market and her mother Mrs Rupa Mehra is well aware of this fact. Educated brides are in demand as they are expected to impart good values to their children. It is a societal belief that educated brides can become a good wife and mother as they have knowledge about the world around them and are better caregivers. Thus, Lata who is well educated has a string of suitors.

In *A Suitable Boy*, Seth carves out the changes in the Indian middle class of the post-independence period of the early 1950's. In a scholarly article titled "Denationalised Middle Class: Global Escape from Mandal", Rajesh Kochhar discusses that:

In the early days of British rule over India, number of British officers was small and they had a genuine interest in, and desire to interact with, the natives. As British numbers and power increased, their attitude changed to that of contempt and aloofness. The evolution of the Indian middle class has proceeded along similar lines. In the years immediately after in-dependence, the middle class was still compact, its cultural distance from elected representatives was small, and there was idealism in the air. The middle class considered itself to be duty bound to use its privileged position for common good. Over the decades, as middle class numbers have swelled, it has become more and more self-absorbed. (20)

This tendency of self-absorbance is seen in the case of Arun Mehra and his in-laws in *A Suitable Boy*. Arun's mother had struggled to raise him and his three siblings after the death of his father. But after he gets a good job as an officer in a multinational company and marries Meenakshi he seemed to be more concerned about his personal life and occasionally visited his family. Arun rarely bothers to support his mother and siblings. The self-centredness that the middle class showed, the exclusive focus on nuclear family, relieving themselves of family responsibility, all these came as repercussions of adopting a global lifestyle which is popular in the West.

The middle class, after the Indian independence in 1947, tried to replicate the British lifestyle. This was evident among the group of Indians that worked in the private sector in senior management positions like Arun. These people worked in well-known British firms in

India whose headquarters were mostly in Calcutta and this group of middle class Indians was considered achievers fit for impersonation by others who wanted to climb the corporate ladder. This section of the Indian population was prone to blind adherence to British culture whereby they spent their leisure time visiting clubs and partying. Discussing this aspect of the middle class Varma in his book *The Great Indian Middle Class* comments that:

Perhaps the most stubbornly insular in the continuity of the British milieu were the private sector box-wallahs in Calcutta, who, at least in the early years after 1947, continued to work under English CEOs and measured their own progress in terms of the extent to which they could emulate their masters' mannerisms and lifestyle. (39)

This idea of consumerism is borrowed from the West and through a critique of it Seth warns us of the potential dangers of globalization. Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy* which portrays the early years after 1947, demonstrates this consumerist attitude of the middle class perfectly through the character Arun Mehra. Arun works in a British firm with a British boss. He has imbibed the British way of life where his evenings are mostly occupied with either going to the club or partying. Although Arun and Meenakshi found it difficult to follow the lavish British lifestyle, they tried to appropriate the same. While Arun and Meenakshi were dancing in the 300 Club with their friends the omniscient narrator of the novel in a sarcastic tone remarks that "Meenakshi and Arun were not really able to afford all this... but it seemed intolerable that they, for whom this kind of life was so obviously intended, should be deprived of it by a mere lack of funds" (63). In the process of acculturation of British social life, Arun and Meenakshi hardly spend time with their young daughter Aparna. Even Arun's in-laws the Chatterjees who are anglicized upper middle class Bengalis are full of vanity and the Chatterjee Mansion is a closed small world. The elder daughter Meenakshi like her family is ostentatious and prefers to get her provisions from a shop in the Middleton Row rather than

the local market. Meenakshi never misses her canasta classes. Thus here one can notice the emergence of a new young breed of Eurocentric subjects which almost looks like a denationalised middle class. If this class were asked to choose between a Padma Shri and a US visa, there can hardly be any doubt that they would opt the latter. This holds true for the character Arun Mehra in *A Suitable Boy* as he is obsessed with the British way of life. These characters grab on to the ostentatious symbols of modernity to prove their position as an elite class of the society. According to the critic Mala Pandurang “Policies and economic liberalisation and the entry of the multi-national corporations into the Indian market have led to fast changing lifestyles and a growing culture of consumerism among the growing Indian middle class” (*Vikram Seth: Multiple Locations, Multiple Affiliations*, 77). Although this happens a decade later, the germs of consumerism are seen at quite an early stage. Seth portrays this aspect of consumerism through the character of Meenakshi. She is so addicted to maintain a particular standard of life that she does not hesitate to even melt her dead father-in-laws gold medal to make herself a pair of gold earrings. The gold medal was one of the last symbols of Mr. Mehra and his academic achievements and it was given to Meenakshi as a present by her mother-in-law. This incident upsets her mother-in-law, Mrs Rupa Mehra a lot. The Chatterjees too adhere to the growing trend of consumerism as seen through their lifestyle.

The middle class has a prominent presence in the middle to upper levels of public sectors jobs. Role of public sector increases with expanding role of government to meet macroeconomic and microeconomic requirements. This adds to rise in number of middle class. The government intervention in the economy has led to a rapid increase in public sector employment. Commenting on the urban middle classes, Partha Chatterjee in his article “Democracy and Economic Transformation in India” states that this class “exercises its considerable influence over both the central and the state governments not through electoral

mobilisation of political parties and movements but largely through the bureaucratic-managerial class...” (57). Varun Mehra, in *A Suitable Boy*, is the best example to depict the mobility among the marginalised. Varun, who was constantly criticised and bullied by his elder brother, ends up getting a government job in the bureaucratic level. He becomes an IAS officer and thus ends up having a considerable social standing. This gives him a certain authority and confidence. Vikram Seth shows this new found power of Varun very subtly, during his sister Lata’s wedding. The middle class exerts a lot of influence by taking up jobs in the public sector as they are the ones who would implement the policies of the government. They form backbone of the government by running day-to-day workings of the country. This is a global phenomenon, not just limited to India. The middle classes influence on the policy making process has global consequences.

In a middle class family, the income of the family as a whole posits them in a particular class structure. According to the article “The Emergence of the Middle Class in ASEAN Countries” by Helen Hughes and Berhanu Woldekidan, “In high income countries the incomes of individuals are increasingly important in economic and social behaviour. But in developing countries, households tend to determine the patterns of behaviour. Much of the identification of the middle class is therefore in family terms” (141). In *A Suitable Boy* which is based on India, a developing country, this is the case with the Mehra family, considered as a whole. After the death of Mr. Mehra the family starts facing economic problems but after the elder son Arun gets a job in a good position the status of the family is restored irrespective of the income and expenditure of the individual members. A family in India can be called middle class even if one member is well placed. Whether that member actually helps in the household expenses is a different matter. In *A Suitable Boy* Mrs Rupa Mehra performs the role of a traditional matchmaker, which is nowadays being increasingly played by matrimonial columns of national newspapers, especially among the educated Indian

middle and upper middle class people. Mrs Rupa Mehra tries to portray that she is socially well off but the reality is completely different. This is seen when her daughter Lata's potential groom Haresh came to drop them at the railway station. Mrs Rupa Mehra buys tickets for the first class coach although, it is not their preferred coach, just to portray that they are financially well off. This depicts the pretentiousness of the middle class. By depicting the shortcomings of this class Seth shows his readers what they should avoid in order to be better citizens not just of the country but the world at large.

Nuclear family structure and individualism are off-shoots of the process of modernity. While ushering modernity, individuals often tend to ignore the cost at which it is procured. The breaking of the joint family system is a factor that affects the middle class. Vikram Seth gives the readers a peek view of the modern family through his representation of the nuclear family of Arun and Meenakshi. Writer and critic Varma puts forth in *The Great Indian Middle Class* that, "The demise of the joint family has given place to the nuclear family, where traditional family values of support and a sense of belonging and togetherness have often given way to individual pursuits and ambitions" (175). This aspect of the nuclear family is seen in the case of Arun and Meenakshi. Both of them prefer to stay away from their families. The individuals prefer a nuclear family as they find it easy to pursue their dreams without the interference of their elders but the children ultimately bear the brunt of it without a strong anchor. Arun and Meenakshi's young daughter Aparna bears the consequences of her parents' choice of staying away from their family. Aparna is mostly left alone when her parents go out in the evenings. She is deprived of the love and time of her parents as well as her grandmother. Thus, one finds that the children miss a lot when they are made to stay in a nuclear family. The tendency of the middle class to adopt nuclear family patterns is suggestive of 'modernity'. This concept is a Western import and can be seen as an impact of globalization.

Language is another factor that defines the middle class. After independence, use of English language was held in high esteem by the growing Indian middle class. English was the language of the colonisers and the middle class in imbibing the same has placed the tongue of the colonisers on a pedestal. It was seen as a passport for social status and success. Vikram Seth points out the fallacies of blindly falling into the trap of modernity and globalization by depicting the alienation and moral decline it brings upon the future generations. After independence, India saw a swell in the growth of English-medium schools. This has led to a decrease in the popularity of regional language schools. As a result, the local languages got increasingly side-lined. But the fact also remains that English became a language of social exclusion. Varma in his book *The Great Indian Middle Class* notes that: “The ability to speak English with the right accent, fluency and pronunciation was the touchstone for entry into the charmed circle of the ruling elite” (64). In Seth’s *A Suitable Boy* example can be found of how the use of English by a particular character can include or exclude that person from a social group. For example, when the female protagonist Lata chooses to marry Haresh towards the end of the novel, one of the objections that her brother Arun gives against the prospective bridegroom is:

Despite his having studied English at St Stephen’s and having lived in England for two years, his use of the English language leaves a great deal to be desired. This is no trivial point... This is not merely a question of his accent, which immediately betrays the fact that English is very far from being his first language; it is a question of his idiom and diction, of his very sense, sometimes, of what is being said. (1293)

Thus, Arun rejects Haresh for his sister on the basis of use of English language. In the social circles and in job interviews fluency in English has become a passport to success. English has become a global language. The proper use of the English language acts as a status symbol.

People create their public identity around the accurate use of English language. If a character like Haresh does not use the proper English, he is relegated as a failure irrespective of his actual social standing. Arun does not regard Haresh to be socially equal in spite of the fact that Haresh is highly educated and well placed. The points that Arun gives his sister in his letter for the rejection of Haresh seems frivolous to the readers. This brings out the superficial nature of the middle class character Arun who fails miserably at the pretence of being like a Britisher. Seth critiques this aspect of the middle class and through this he shows the shortcomings of the process of globalization. Every culture has some positive as well as negative qualities and as a product of globalization it is important to identify the good and imbibe it and leave behind the negatives.

The middle classes, furthermore, overtly or covertly had a hand in the making and implementation of states policies in India. An example of it can be seen in case of the implementation of the Zamindari Abolition Act that was enacted in 1955. India, which is mostly an agricultural country, has a vast majority of poor and landless peasants. The government hence, tried to implement structural reforms through policies like the Zamindari Abolition Act which was meant to redistribute the land from the rich feudal lords (*zamindars*) to the poor peasants who worked as tenants on a particular plot of land for a fixed number of years. But, as Varma in *The Great Indian Middle Class* states, “the interests of the rich and middle-level peasantry, dominant both in the Congress and the State apparatus, stood in opposition to the achievement of these goals” (53). This aspect is taken up by Seth in his novel *A Suitable Boy*. One sees the impact of this act through the characterisation of Rasheed. Rasheed’s father and grandfather are *zamindars* and when they come to know about this act they alter the documents with the help of the *patwari* (person who keeps the land records) so that Kachheru, a worker, who tilled the same field for years does not get a share of the land. Although Rasheed tries to help Kachheru, he ends up making Kachheru’s situation worse.

Kachheru becomes a destitute and has nowhere to go and Rasheed ends his life. Thus, the Zamindari Abolition Act failed to make any significant improvement in the lives of the poor farmers and they end up being worse after the act than they were before. Here, the middle classes too played a role in the failure of the act. The middle class government servants acted in the interest of the *zamindars*. The political parties too, did not take the matter seriously. Here, one finds the middle classes playing a role in shaping the future of the other classes along with their own. Mulk Raj Anand's *The Private Life of an Indian Prince* and Manohar Malgaonkar's *The Princes* in their works too have dealt with the issue of the Land Reform Bill. But Seth's handling of the issue is different from the other novelists as he looks at the issue from the perspective of a global writer.

A typical feature of Seth, which is seen in the novel *A Suitable Boy*, is that the characters are still focused on their middle class values. This can be seen as an instance of Seth's tendency to fall back on the traditions. The characters do not turn to the route of escapism as seen in the case of the female protagonist Lata. Although Lata falls in love with a Muslim boy, Kabir Durrani, she rejects him. Lata does not go against the wishes of her family. She instead chose Haresh whom her mother had picked for her. In spite of the initial activism that Lata shows, she subscribes to the middle class family values in the end. But Lata willingly enters into the marriage with a complete stranger. She even sent her prospective groom Haresh a letter informing him of her acceptance of his marriage proposal without the knowledge of her mother. Lata in this sense resists her mother and takes her own decision. Thus, one finds her charting her own life within the family structure. The psychoanalyst Sudhir Kakar explains this attitude of the Indian family system in his article "Hinduism: A Fettering Faith":

The mother functions as the external ego of the child for a much longer period than is customary in the West and many of the ego functions concerned with

reality are later transferred from mother to the family and other social institutions. Caste and clan are more than brotherhoods; they define the individual completely. The individual is never on his own; he is always fundamentally a member of his group within a complex apparatus of rules, rituals or taboos. Every detail of behaviour is regulated. (59)

Lata upholds the middle class values and she gives more importance to her family than herself. She does not let go of her morals that her mother had brought her up with. This aspect of Lata's choice has been criticised by Seth's critics like AK Singh who comments in the article "*A Suitable Boy: A Critique*", that Seth's *A Suitable Boy* "suffers from coldness and underplay of emotions and passions...He shows no romantic adventurism in Lata (Hindu) and Kabir (Muslim relationship)". Lata's choice is actually a manifestation of her middle class upbringing. Most of Seth's middle class characters subscribe to the middle class value system. It can be said that Lata's decision was due to a heightened sense of duty towards her family. The middle class has an uncompromising attitude towards morality and Lata does subscribe to it. Even when she was alone with her lover Kabir, she never crossed her limits although she accepts she was tempted to her friend Malati. It is due to this sense of morality that she resists being near Kabir as she was afraid she would give in to the temptations. Later, Lata asserts that with Haresh she feels she has a control over her passions and would not make a fool of herself. This is the middle class upbringing talking through her where passion is frowned upon. It can be seen as a sacrifice on the part of Lata that she chose what the society expected out of her. Even one week before her wedding she was in a dilemma about her choice of the groom. She felt like escaping but eventually settled with her chosen fate. This can be seen as an instance of the hybrid global culture that the character is leading. Initially she is influenced by the Western ideals of love but later she decides to fall back on the Indian middle class traditions.

From the above critical analysis and consequent discussion it can be concluded that Seth has a deep understanding of the middle classes. He has accurately depicted this class in his fictional works. Although the middle class has been a driving force behind the globalized economy, there are a few aspects where this class is found deficient. One of the positive aspects is the spread of education with the spread of the middle classes irrespective of gender. Perhaps he seems to be hinting through his works that the leaning of this class towards self-absorbance and consumerism needs to be altered and more positive state policies need to be pushed forward by the middle classes for the all-round development of a country and the world at large, as this class is turning to be a major player in the politics of representation. As seen in the works of Seth, the middle class has a lot of impact in the social, economic and cultural spheres of a country and they have the potential to take a country like India forward in the global economy in a positive manner.

After a study of the middle classes the subsequent chapter will look into Vikram Seth's handling of the gender issues in his works and how these issues have a global significance.

Chapter 7

THE QUEER AND THE LADIES: GENDER STUDIES WITH VIKRAM SETH

Gender study examines gender identity and gendered representations of the society and is an academic field. It is an interdisciplinary study. In the broader sense gender studies includes women's studies, men's studies, and LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) studies. The issues of sexual orientation and gender identity are taken up by Queer studies, or Sexual Diversity Studies, or LGBT studies. Many Indian English writers have taken up the issues pertaining to gender studies. In society, the attitudes of intolerance and subjugation towards women and queer sexualities have become embedded in institutions such as the family, work-place, law, and media. These conditions the ways in which society understands and speaks about women and queer people. Every day the newspaper is full of instances of gay bashing and women committing suicide or being killed for dowry. Rape has become a matter of global concern and hardly a day passes without the emergence of a new rape story. In the age of globalization these issues seem like a setback to a fast moving society. Fiction can become an excellent way to stir up the issue of the domination of the sexes.

In the realm of the theories that are being generated around the issues of sexuality, one finds classifications like queer theory which analyses lesbian and gay studies. In this chapter I would refrain from negotiating using these demarcations. Judith Butler, one of queer theory's most celebrated foremothers in her work "Imitation and Gender Insubordination" objects to "lesbian" and "gay" designations, and "lesbian theories" and "gay theories". Butler writes that she is not at ease "with lesbian theories, gay theories, for ...

identity categories tend to be instruments of regulatory regimes whether as the normalizing categories of oppressive structures or as the rallying points for a liberatory contestation of that very oppression" (14). Butler goes on to argue that heterosexuality itself is an impossible imitation - a compulsory performance that is doomed to failure. As a consequence of this ontological failure, Butler suggests that categories of sexuality and gender are merely the products of straight men and women "panicked" over the uncertainty of their heterosexuality (15). She writes:

(H)eterosexuality is always in the process of imitating and approximating its own phantasmatic idealization of itself - and failing. Precisely because it is bound to fail, and yet endeavours to succeed, the project of heterosexual identity is propelled into an endless repetition of itself. Indeed, in its efforts to naturalize itself as the original, heterosexuality must be understood as a compulsive and compulsory representation that can only produce the effects of its own originality; in other words, compulsory heterosexual identities, those ontologically consolidated phantasms of "man" and "woman," are theatrically produced effects that posture as grounds, origins, the normative measure of the real. (16)

Butler theorizes that gender and sexual identification are only provisional intra-psychic compromises or "melancholic incorporations" that result from a much earlier psychic loss or separation. She draws this from psychoanalytic discourse. Categories of sexuality as a result are grossly oversimplified. Butler thus deconstructs and dismisses "gay" and "lesbian" identity and adds that:

Such a consideration of psychic identification would vitiate the possibility of any stable set of typologies that explain or describe something like gay or

lesbian identities. And any efforts to supply one... suffer from simplification, and conform, with alarming ease, to the regulatory requirements of diagnostic epistemic regimes. (17)

In this chapter a distinction will not be drawn between persons perceived as belonging to the queer group and women. Taking Butler's cue, the thesis approaches the characters that have been marginalized, based on their gender and sexual preferences and looks at how they have been perceived in a globalized world. Regardless of their sexual orientation, women and men share the same ranges of socialization as children and young adults, and may share a multitude of social characteristics, ideologies, and experiences. Alongside this, there are a lot of discriminations that happen to both men and women who seem weak in the eyes of the 'supposed' heterosexual males. Instances of this can be seen in Vikram Seth's novel *The Golden Gate* when John lashes out when he gets to know that his friend Phil was having a gay relationship with Ed. John is equally unhappy with his girlfriend. John sees himself as the heterosexual man but he is neither happy with his own heterosexual relationship nor with the idea of his best friend being in a homosexual relationship. He assigns himself a hegemonic stand as a result of his ideologues concerning gender which are considered 'normal' by the external world.

Gender Studies highlight the fact that gender is a system of differentiation and domination at the heart of every society. In this chapter introspection will be done on Vikram Seth's handling of the problematics of women and queer issues. I will look if the modernity discourses in the era of globalization has brought about a distinct change in the way the world looks and treats them. An interrogation will be done as to how violence becomes one of the tools in the quest for domination over these groups of people within the framework of women and queer studies. A detailed analysis will be done into how society and culture discriminate between people who are perceived as weak; be it a women or individuals with queer

tendencies. Further, I shall also look into the aspect of how Seth being a male writer deals with his characters specifically women and individuals possessing queer tendencies.

The issues of gender and queer inequality have been a burning topic for many Indian English writers. Writers like Anita Desai, Sashi Despande, Arundhati Roy, Anita Nair, Mahesh Dattani, Hosang Merchant, Shohini Ghosh, Minal Hajratwala, and R Raja Rao among others have in their works shown how women and queer people are abused in their homes as well as by society as a whole. Anita Desai for a long time has been an advocate of the issues that women face in contemporary India. She is recognized as the first Indian author writing in English who addresses feminist themes seriously. For instance, in her works like *Cry, the Peacock* and *Fasting, Feasting* Desai portrays the subjugation a women faces at the hands of patriarchy. Desai investigates the psychological condition of the oppressed female protagonists. In her novel *Fasting, Feasting*, Desai explores the condition of women in India as well as women in general. In *Cry, the Peacock*, Desai portrays the psychic tumult of a young and sensitive married girl Maya who is struggling in her marriage. Sashi Despande too in her works like *The Dark Holds No Terrors* shows the struggles of woman in the context of contemporary Indian society, her effort to find and preserve her identity as a wife, mother, and most of all as a human being. The novel *Dark Holds No Terrors* shows how the protagonist Saru undergoes a trauma when her professional success has cast a shadow on her married life and how boldly she stands up to the situation and audaciously accepts the challenges of her own protégé. Arundhati Roy in her novel *The God of Small Things* discusses at length society's ill-treatment towards women. Mahesh Dattani, in his plays has brought the life of the middle class on stage with all its complications of gender. Dattani has equally dealt with problems of female as well as queer community. Hosang Merchant through his poetry has given new insight into the queer world. Shohini Ghosh has published a number of academic papers on gender, violence against women, and censorship in India, including

"Censorship Myths and Imagined Harms" and "Looking in Fascination and Horror, Sex Violence and Spectatorship in India". Minal Hajratwala's anthology *Out! Stories of the New Queer India*, is breaking new ground with thirty contemporary stories of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender Indians. R. Raja Rao and Dibyajyoti Sharma in their book *Whistling in the Dark*, through their interviews of the queer community focus on issues like sexuality, sexual identity, marriage, gay marriage, heteronormativity, gay utopia, gay activism, gay bashing, police atrocities and the laws stand on these issues. All these writers in their own ways have tried to bring about a change in gender perceptions and work for the betterment of society.

Vikram Seth in most of his works gives a lot of space to the personal life of his characters and how they deal with people around them. Although his characters may be brought up in different cultures and traditions, the human need to connect and forge bonds with one another is the same in all of them. An interesting factor in Seth's fiction is the use of violence as a tool of domination over the people perceived as weak. For a patriarch, violence is the easiest tool used in showing their superior status. Instances of violence are not limited to a particular state, region or culture but is a global nuisance. Although there have been innumerable laws passed to protect women, they have been hardly effective in curbing the oppressions against them or people with queer leanings. However, according to Flavia Agnes, a legal scholar, author, women's rights activist and lawyer, "if oppression could be tackled by passing laws, then the decade of the 1980s would be adjudged a golden period for Indian women, when protective laws were offered on a platter. Almost every single campaign against violence on women resulted in new legislation. The successive enactment would seem to provide a positive picture of achievement" ("Protecting Women Against Violence? Review of a Decade of Legislation", 521). However, in reality it seems that law too is blind to the actual needs of women and whenever it exists the loopholes override the cause. The

use of violence is common in all communities be it in India or abroad. In Vikram Seth's fiction there is a continuous emphasis on love and relationship. He explores their many dimensions in a shifting, changing and corroding background. In the novel *An Equal Music*, Seth describes a little over a year in the protagonist Michael Holmes' life in which he reunites with Julia McNicholl, a former love and accompanist he left behind a decade before in Vienna. Seth situates *An Equal Music* in a patriarchal setting. Michael can be seen as the reigning patriarch in the novel. Michael and Julia were inseparable as lovers in their youth when they met each other while studying music at Vienna. Michael treacherously deserts Julia and the reason behind it was his egoistical clash with his mentor Carl Kall. Julia tries to help Michael with his problems with his mentor but this only leads to the end of their youthful romance. Julia vanishes from the life of Michael and only after ten years in a very dramatic setting Michael meets Julia again. He continues pursuing her in spite of the fact that she is married and has a six year old son. Julia is drawn to Michael and unable to refuse a liaison with him but unwilling to give up her home life. When Julia finally decides to return to her family and leave Michael, it brings out the worst in him.

Psychologists Link and Stueve proposed that the relationship between violence and psychotic symptoms exists because "violence is more likely when psychotic symptoms cause a person to feel personally threatened or involve the intrusion of thoughts that can override self-controls" ("Psychotic symptoms and the violent/illegal behaviour of mental patients compared to community controls", 155). This can be seen when Michael, in *An Equal Music*, after secretly reading Julia's letter to her husband while in Venice bites her badly during their love-making knowing well that it would leave marks and she would have to face her husband the next day. Michael himself is unable to understand his behaviour and he speaks in the novel, "but tonight in the bitterness of my passion I don't know what happened. I hardly felt it was love I was making to her- I was not in my mind" (291-292). Love can be exceedingly

destructive and Michael's excessive passion for Julia destroys their relation. When Julia breaks off the affair, Michael refuses to accept her wants and needs. For him there can be no friendship with her, only violent passion. Michael is more concerned about his own emotions and does not bother to see what Julia faces and even refuses to see how his actions can disrupt her family life. Thus, it is seen how Michael uses violence as a tool to exert control over Julia. Such incidents of violence are very rampant in today's world and needs a lot of awareness.

Violence, however, is not limited to patriarchy alone. Even between women there can be instances where one turns against the other. It can be seen as a way for one to gain superiority over the other or a need to take the patriarchal position. In *An Equal Music*, one does find some female bonding between Julia and her fellow musician, Maria Novotny. Julia and Maria have been friends even before the protagonist Michael came to Julia's life in Vienna. They had remained true to each other and Maria has always been supportive of Julia. But even Maria can be brutal when she says, "I am glad I'm not deaf" (246) on the issue of Julia's deafness. None of the relations in the novel is without complexities as one can see that the females too turn against themselves. Seth's depiction of the woman turning against each other makes one suspicious that he is subscribing to the representations of the mass media. In fact, many scenes of *An Equal Music*, makes the readers feel that they are representations happening in the popular serials where perfect relations take a complete U-turn for the worse. Relationships become quite volatile and people end up mindlessly hurting one another.

Another manifestation of violence is rape. Rape is so rampant in society that people hardly take notice when a new case is reported. But there is mass hysteria that is created among the people who are the target groups be it women or children. Women are wary of going out alone or staying out late in the night. Parents rarely leave their children unattended and are suspicious of people approaching their children. Although tougher laws like the

Nirbhaya Act are newly passed in India, this has not deterred the potential rapist from seeking out their next victims. This is the case not just in India but throughout the world. According to Wallace Loh who examines criminal laws:

Rape traditionally has been treated as a heinous crime with no culture sanctioning its intrasocietal occurrence. The severe penalties and social opprobrium visited upon offenders made rape along with murder and kidnapping the most serious of common law offenses. The sexual violation of a female was seen as undermining the family unit which, with its concomitant rights and responsibilities, was necessary for a stable society. Therefore, rape was seen as an act that could not be tolerated in a civilized society. (“The impact of common law and reform rape statutes on prosecution”, 55)

In the world of globalization, where news travels faster than light, the dual face of society has been exposed. While discussing the effects of globalization on gender relations violence against women is an important aspect. For centuries violence against women has been the biggest and strongest issues on women’s movements and groups and continues being so. This form of violence is “due to unequal gender power relations” and affects men as well because as a result of changes in these relations “they fail to live up to dominant forms of masculinity” (True, *The political economy of violence against women*, 9). R.K. Murthy in the article “Organisational Strategy in India and diverse identities of women” argues that the change of working patterns and locations “threatens men’s status as heads of households” (13) and this has led to an increase in violence against women. On the one hand, the patriarchal setting wants to assert their domination by keeping their women behind the protective ambiance of the house yet the same people go out and outrage the modesty of the women and people perceived as weak. Through social media and public gatherings although a lot of campaigns are taken out against this kind of behaviour, it seems these does not have

much impact. According to the critics Giacopassi and Wilkinson, “the legal history of rape is the history of male domination. Definitions of offense, evidence, legal defences, and appropriate penalties were passed by males in accordance with traditional perspectives of propriety and the nature and character of females” (“Rape and the Devalued Victim”, 368). As such, even though a victim might come out with the accusation of rape, to prove that a wrong has been committed is difficult. In some cases the victim is not even sure of the support of own family.

In Vikram Seth’s novel *A Suitable Boy*, there is an instance of a potential attempt to rape the main character Lata when she visits the house of her relative with her mother. Lata’s *mausaji* (uncle) Mr Sahgal had tried to sexually abuse her in the middle of the night when she was at his house but Lata stood her ground. She threatened him with shouting and waking up her mother and that stopped him in his tracks. But regarding that incident Lata “could not speak to anyone about what had happened. Mrs Sahgal doted on her husband; could she be even aware of what he was like?” (592) Even Lata’s mother Mrs Rupa Mehra “would hardly have believed Lata” (592) if she had told her about the attempted violence. Later that night Lata found out that Mr Sahgal has been raping his own daughter Kiran although, Vikram Seth does not show that in an overt manner. Lata figures it out gradually after observing the weird behaviour of Kiran and Mr Sahgal. Lata feels revulsion towards Mr Sahgal but she cannot do anything about it as she is unable to tell her family about his misdeeds. It is due to society’s indifference or blind belief in the character of the rapist that many rape cases are not reported. According to the writer Sir Matthew Hale, rape “is an accusation easily to be made and hard to be proved, and harder to be defended by the party accused” (“History of the Pleas of the Crown”, 126). It is through rape that the rapist gets a sense of power and control over the victim. In *A Suitable Boy*, Mr Sahgal makes it clear that he uses physical abuse to stake a claim to his daughter’s life. Rape is not just a violation of the body but the destruction of a

self. One finds the victim Kiran as a nervous wreck who can hardly maintain a conversation with Lata. Existing evidence with regard to rape victims indicates that the consequences of rape are indeed multifaceted. Psychologists Burgess and Holmstrom describe the "rape trauma syndrome" (1982) typical of rape victims as a cluster of behavioural, somatic, and psychological reactions which are an acute stress reaction to a life-threatening situation. These symptoms are prominent in the character of Kiran. Seth's denial of 'space' to these episodes in his mammoth novels itself shows how much shrouded these incidents are within society. This reveals Seth as a writer who refuses to focus on such heinous crime as he might be wary of getting into the politicization of the issue. He dismisses it as an everyday occurrence. He shrugs away from the brutality of physical violence. Rape is rampant throughout the globe. It is not limited to a particular city, country or continent. There must be some form of global laws to fight it and help the victims.

People do not want to recognize that there is violence happening within the so called safe and secure confines of their own homes. Indian society is closeted regarding the issue of rape be it on females or males. In fact jails are one of the breeding grounds for issues like rape and spread of sexually transmitted diseases like HIV but the jail authorities turn a blind eye to it. In one of their interviews, gay activist and authors R. Raja Rao and Dibyajyoti Sarma, found that homosexual sex was rampant in jails. Even the jail authorities turn a blind eye to such activities when someone is caught in the act. In the book *Whistling in the Dark* the authors also mention instances where the convicts rape the under-trials. "Convicts virtually treat under-trials as their slaves, commanding them to perform menial chores, threatening them with dire consequences if they refuse" (183). Convicts openly have sex with each other in jails and rape is a common scenario. Although awareness is being generated about rape, it is the prerogative of every individual that they stop further instances by either protesting when coming in contact with such instances as well as creating awareness among

people around them. Hence, it can be seen how rape can be used as an instrument of power to subjugate women, persons with queer tendencies as well as males. In the contemporary era books like *Whistling in the Dark* creates global awareness about the problems of queer community. Violence in any form should be abhorred in society. Even a change in the preference for partners or refusal of sex can lead to violence and abusive tendencies. Like in Seth's *The Golden Gate* when the homosexual lover Ed refuses physical intimacy with Phil and the verbal abuses start, it ends up in violence.

Ed, with a right hook swift and vicious,

Knocks Phil down. Dazed, Phil makes a slow

Lunge for Ed, who is adventitious

Timing, swerves straight into the blow.

Phil grabs him by the throat, half throttling

Him with the fury he's bottling.

Now Ed's on top, his jaw contused,

And Phil's left eye and cheek are bruised. (182)

Thus, it is seen how love can turn violent and destroy a relationship. Domestic violence is usually discussed in the context of heterosexual relationships. But such violence is also an issue in the LGBTQ community and this fact is taken up only in recent years. Research indicates that domestic violence among same-sex couples occurs at similar rates as domestic violence among straight couples. Unfortunately, domestic violence victims in same-sex relationships are not receiving the help they need. This is due to the lack of legal recognition of same-sex relationships, law enforcement's failure to identify and properly handle domestic

violence cases involving people of the same sex, and the shortage of resources available to victims of same-sex partner domestic abuse. Considerable education is needed to increase consciousness of myths and cultural beliefs about violence, including the definition of violence. Lawmakers and social service providers should reconfigure the traditional model of domestic violence prevention and treatment to include individuals involved in same-sex relationships. Vikram Seth gives instances of violence through his characters located in different cultures. Nowadays insidious crimes get reported easily due to the reach of the media. This shows that the problem of violence is a global issue and serious steps are needed to tackle it. There is a wave of gender awareness created among the global masses and this can be seen as a by-product of globalization.

Queer theorists such as Judith Butler, SueEllen Case, Teresa de Lauretis, and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick have undertaken critical/theoretical explorations that consciously avoid situating heterosexuality as the unquestioned norm in human sexual practices. In their work, heterosexuality comes to acquire a certain exoticism as an object of estrangement. Heterosexuality is not seen as natural and universal but to a large extent as both learned behaviour and a network of forces embedded in the very fabric of culture. As such there is a constant need in the heterosexuals to assert their dominance and they do not shy away from discriminating against people whom they perceive as the other. An example of this attitude is the failure to appreciate and understand the queer movement in a country like India. LGBT people in many societies are subjected to discrimination, abuse, torture, and sometimes state-sponsored execution. The amorphous group of individuals with same-sex desires and non-conforming gender behaviours is thus in many cases under-confident, silent, and completely closeted about the reality of their queer desires.

Vikram Seth is one of the foremost supporters of the LGBT movement that is currently brewing in India. In 2006, he became a leader of the campaign against India's

Section 377, a law against homosexuality. In many of Seth's works one encounters the problems of the queer community. In Seth's novel *The Golden Gate*, it can be seen how the characters have to face discriminatory behaviour due to their sexual preferences. When Phil, a divorcee with a son, tells his friend John that he is in love with another guy Ed, John's reaction can be seen below:

John stammers, shakes his head; then, shivering,

Emits a small bleat of disgust

At this malformed and sickening lust,

And turns away; while Phil, quivering,

Feels his fist clench and disengage

In insult and astonished rage. (197)

This is the common problem that the queer community faces when they proclaim their sexual preferences in public domains. The discriminatory behaviour of John who is a heterosexual is evident. Referring to a public opinion survey undertaken in America, critic Gregory M. Herek states in his article "Gender Gaps in Public Opinion about Lesbians and Gay Men" that:

...heterosexual women were more supportive than men of employment protection and adoption rights for gay people, more willing to extend employee benefits to same sex couples, and less likely to hold stereotypical beliefs about gay people. Heterosexual men's negative reactions to gay men were at the root of these gender differences. Of all respondent-by-target combinations, heterosexual men were the least supportive of recognition of same-sex relationships and adoption rights for gay men, most likely to believe

that gay men are mentally ill and molest children, and most negative in their affective reactions to gay men. (40)

In *The Golden Gate* it is seen that John who is a heterosexual is shocked and disgusted when he finds that his friend Phil is a homosexual. On the other hand John's girlfriend Liz is sympathetic with Phil's homosexuality although Phil is in a relationship with her brother Ed. Later one finds that Liz ends up marrying Phil and his queer tendencies are not even considered by her. But it is actually society's attitude that forces Phil and Ed apart. Ed Dorati, Liz's twenty-year-old brother is unable to reconcile his personal or political beliefs with a practical functionality in society. Ed is a devout Catholic, with homosexual tendencies. However his inability to see another side of his religious beliefs or to reconcile his two faiths drives him outside every fulfilling relationship, and leaves him utterly alone at the end. Ed constantly places himself as the 'other', the 'outsider' in every relationship he is involved in, by choice or by birth. Ed although consciously enters into a relationship with Phil, he is unable to come to terms with their queer leanings. He constantly struggles with the feeling of shame about possessing what society insists are abnormal sexual desires. This feeling of guilt mingled with shame is poignantly captured by Seth through the character of Ed. Ed's religious beliefs are what primarily serve to draw him apart from most people, including his lover Phil.

It is through the powerful, unwritten codes inscribed in the daily functioning of institutions such as the family, religious institutions, and popular culture, that social intolerance towards queer tendencies is produced. Social intolerance can have severe psychological effects, as individuals perceive themselves as perverted, dirty, and unclean, forcing some like Ed to attempt to change themselves, or driving away their lovers from their life. It is clear that this unremitting social intolerance impacts both other people's perceptions of queer people and queer people's self-perceptions. Due to the processes of globalization

there is a rise in social activism and all through the world people are fighting to secure equal rights for the queer community.

Discrimination can occur at the hands of queer community too. Sometimes women and men are oppressed not just by the heterosexuals but people with queer tendencies who themselves are oppressed. Like in the case of homosexual man who use woman as a means of leaving offspring's without bothering to regard or fulfil the needs of the woman. Instance of such behaviour is seen abundantly in the interviews conducted by Rao and Sharma for their book *Whistling in the Dark*. To quote the attitude of a highly educated gay men:

As a member of Indian society, I can't think of living alone. Therefore, I have to get married. I think after marriage too, my homosexual activities will continue, as I have many friends who are married and continue to be gay. I think I will join their gang. (115)

This attitude of a gay person shows the discriminatory behaviour towards women. Women are seen as objects through which the former hide their sexual preferences and gain acceptance and respectability in society. In *The Golden Gate* too it can be seen that Phil in spite of his homosexual leanings marry Liz in the end of the novel. But Seth is silent on the topic of whether Phil will continue to be loyal towards Liz or seek out other homosexual relationships outside his marriage.

For quite some time the problems of the queer community have been highlighted in India after Section 377 was challenged. Critic Paola Bachcheta in her article "When the (Hindu) Nation Exiles its Queers" uses the term "xenophobic queerphobia", which implies a particular form of queer phobia that is justified by constructing the queer individual outside the nation (144). By this logic, she is claiming that Indian nationalists see queer as "non-Indian". By placing queerness as a foreign object, Bachcheta argues, Hindu nationalists

dissociate themselves from the queer figures, which, according to them embody the anti-nationalist, sexually promiscuous, materialistic and Western attitudes. As such, the queer community is forced to lead a closeted life. Any hint of queerness in a society like India can lead to a societal ostracism of an individual. Hence, most individuals hide their homosexual preferences and seek shelter in institutions like marriage. In Seth's *A Suitable Boy* too one finds that homosexuality is merely hinted in the relationship between Maan Kapoor and Firoz Khan. But Seth remains silent on the extent of their homosexual relationship and both the male characters are seen perusing girls. The mere fact the Seth has not come out openly about these two homosexual characters in his novel shows how cloistered this issue is in the Indian society. In *The Golden Gate*, Seth very openly gives space to a gay relationship as it is based in America which has legally accepted such relationships. But since the setting of *A Suitable Boy* is India, the gay relationship between the characters is merely hinted and no space is provided for their relationship in the novel. But the question remains unanswered whether Maan and Firoz's relationship was a passing phase or if it will continue even after they are eventually settled in heterosexual relationships. As such it can be seen that the women with whom these gay characters have relationships face discrimination as they are deceived about the actual feelings of their partner's and left in the dark regarding their partner's loyalty towards them. These are global issues which are a cause of concern as it shows the narrow mindedness of the society.

In Seth's works there are traces of gender divide in the form of the acquisition and dissemination of certain forms of knowledge. In the world of Western Classical Music presented by Seth one finds some discrimination based on the gender of the artist. The dominant implication in the narrative of *An Equal Music* is that women cannot be as good as the men in the sphere of the Western Classical Music as they cannot have their own individual identity. Other than Julia, there is Helen who is also a musician but her identity is

that of being the sister of the musician Piers as Julia is seen as the lover of Michael. Here again, where Julia is seen as the desirable woman who is a passionate pianist, Helen, who is a viola player, is seen as a deliberately a-sexualized buddy whose womanhood rarely impacts upon other members of the quartet. Helen's identity as a musician takes a back seat and her creativity and performance in concerts is always viewed in relationship to the male musician. As an accompanying artist, she plays a second fiddle to the male artist. Thus her role is to enhance the notes and accompany the main artist who takes precedence in the musical performance. Seth deals more in exploring the complex relation of Helen with her brother and musical rival. It seems as if Seth needs to justify the presence of female characters leaning on the shoulders of male characters. Even Virginie who is Michael's student is seen more as a sexualised person rather than a budding musician. *An Equal Music* masks what the critic Gayatri Spivak names as "the male suppression of the competitive female [which is] a poignant story" ("The Burden of English", 147). Though Spivak's remark is made in the context of an article that deconstructs the reading and teaching practice in a postcolonial classroom and is particularly concerned with some works by Rabindranath Tagore, this statement of her's on how male writers negate and erase their women characters has a striking resonance when applied to *An Equal Music*.

Seth's novel can be seen as an instance where women are debilitated and one can find a lot of gender discrimination in his literary activities. The value of women in the novel is linked to their ability to retard or advance the clandestine project of male dominance. This is going against the brave new shining world of globalization. *An Equal Music* shows an unequivocal furtherance of the patriarchal project which is implicated in linguistic systems that deny women any agency whatsoever. Here, Seth uses Julia to bring out the different shades in Michael's life. Julia acts as the mirror against which the readers watch the progress

of Michael's life. Michael has also used woman like Virginie predominantly for his sexual gratification.

In *The Golden Gate*, although the character Liz has a choice of suitors, she is sexually experienced, economically independent, and sure of herself but, in the end she makes the abrupt choice of marrying not for love, but for security. The novel downgrades passionate love for the idea of traditional marriage. Seth might want to argue for a more open interpretation of marriages, but the story appears to underwrite the female protagonist's choice. There is thus what appears to be, at least for women, serious and considered rejection of romantic love as a basis for marriage. There is a gendered inconsistency here as culturally, emotionally and economically women and men are not treated equally. Seth's view, in *The Golden Gate*, seems that women should choose reliable fathers for their children. Although *The Golden Gate* is all about American characters and American identity, critic Isset Hussain in an outstanding paper (quoted in Sastry, 1991) dealing with Seth's *The Golden Gate* states that, "An Indian sensibility and outlook is shown in several ways, one of which is in the attitude to marriage, seen as a relationship requiring for its success sensible accommodation between two people for the founding of a family" (157). Liz's choice of husband finds an echo in the choice of husband by the heroine Lata in *A Suitable Boy*. The characters Liz and Janet in *The Golden Gate*, despite their ethnic names, are made of identical mould. The reason one cannot tell them apart is that Seth never thinks of them as anything but representative Yuppies. One women character can easily be replaced with the other. Both love cats and fall in love with the same man. Seth might show that they belong to different cultures (Janet is a third generation Japanese immigrant and Liz an Italian immigrant) but they show no personal hangover of displacement or a sense of loss of cultural roots. Such cultural transformations are increasing and flourishing due to exposure in this globalized world.

One finds the women characters in Seth's narrative to be quite flat. Seth in his novel is more focused on what ails his protagonist and seems not to attach much importance to the female characters. When it comes to his dealing with female characters much seems to be wanting. The female characters seem to fall back on tradition and the men in their life as in the case of Julia in *An Equal Music* and Lata in *A Suitable Boy*. The female characters seem to show a disregard for tradition initially, but as the novel progresses they seem to fall back on to their traditional roles as homemakers. In *An Equal Music*, Julia too in the end chooses to leave her tumultuous affair with Michael and goes back to the stability of her home. The critic, Mala Pandurang, commenting on Julia's selection of husband says, "Her choice to opt for her dependable (though unmusical) 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*" (*Vikram Seth: Multiple Locations, Multiple Affiliations*, 157). Julia's choice of stability as compared to passion reflects in the life of Lata in *A Suitable Boy*. Lata, like Julia, chose the stable and reliable Harish rather than Kabir whom she truly loved. Lata felt that with Kabir she was being whirled around in a whirlpool. Similarly Liz, in *The Golden Gate* chose a sensible Phil over romantic John because she realised that in life a steady relationship has more chances of survival than a passionate relationship of love. Hence, discrimination can be identified in some of Seth's female characters. The female characters in most of his novels are identical. Although they might initially rebel and assert their independence, by the end of the novel they revert to the traditional ideas of finding security in a marriage of convenience. Seth is a bisexual and throughout his life he has shown non-conformity towards the traditional social norms. Yet in his literary works he creates characters that finally succumb to the overpowering forces of patriarchy thereby subduing their forces of activism.

From the above discussion it is seen that both women as well as queer people face a lot of violence as well as discrimination all over the world despite the claims of modernity the globalization process is believed to have attained. Even Vikram Seth as a writer, does not give much emphasis on these issues and this can be seen as an indication of the general attitude of indifference of society towards this section of people. But these conditions are not restricted to a particular state, community or culture. These issues have global repercussions. Women as well as queer people face violence in their private as well as public spaces throughout the world. The news is full of instances of such violence worldwide. Although some countries like America have legalised homosexual relationship yet this has not stopped the discriminations against them. The queer community in many countries like India is still fighting for their legal rights and recognition in the community but it is a long battle for them. Even if homosexuality is legalised, it will take a while for mass acceptance. As such it can be said that the issue of the acceptance of the queer community is a global concern and it is important to create awareness about it. As regards violence to perpetuated against women and queer people, education about legal rights of an individual should be provided at a global scale. Many Indian English writers including Seth have shown instances of violence against women and people possessing queer tendencies. But violence is an important tool for patriarchy and hence it is difficult to get rid of it. The need of the hour is creation of support groups wherein such cases of violence can be handled. It is important that writers like Seth, give a more realistic picture of women as well as the queer people. Like Seth's openness to bisexuality in personal life, his characters acceptance of their sexual preference would signify the advent of a truly globalized culture. The traditional mould needs to be broken and it is time for a new globalized world where people are treated equally irrespective of their gender and preference.

The succeeding chapter will give a final conclusion to the thesis. In the chapter “Conclusion”, I shall consolidate all my findings and in the same chapter, the scope for further research is identified and spelt out.

Chapter 8

CONCLUSION

Vikram Seth, in his fictional and non-fictional works, has brought several cultural aspects of globalization into focus. In this ever changing world it is important for the readers who are products of the globalization era to fully understand the processes of globalization that are at work. Vikram Seth is one of the writers whose works can help the readers with the ideas of globalization. A study of his work shows that he has been a critical thinker when dealing with the various aspects of globalization. He has not only highlighted the advantages of globalization but also shown his readers its weak points. He has also been able to show the hybridity that occurs as a result of the processes of globalization. Due to globalization the world around us is constantly changing and Seth shows his readers particular aspects of it. Where on the one hand the theories define the meanings and impacts of cultural globalization, Vikram Seth shows the consequences of globalization through a portrayal of his life as well as the life that his characters lead in a globalized world.

Vikram Seth has been trotting the globe for years now. He was privileged to travel the world and has made the world his home, and his works are written in that vein. In the study titled “Implications of travel in the non-fictional writings of Vikram Seth” it was seen how Seth in his travelogue *From Heaven Lake* and memoir *Two Lives* gives the readers a feel of the different aspects of globalization. The questions about authenticity of the text does not hold true in case of Seth’s writings as he is not claiming to document a place but gives his individual perceptions. Seth does not exoticize the culture of the other, and in fact, represents it in an emphatic manner. Different authors have different perspectives and Seth writes from the perspective of a cosmopolitan writer. Seth’s family has been travelling for quite some

years; so born into such a family he is more open to other cultures. He believes in a multicultural existence where every culture is treated equally and different cultures stay together in harmony. Seth in his work *From Heaven Lake* portrays one of the many cultural aspects of China and Tibet. Seth showing the characteristics of a global writer appreciates the vast cultural differences and remains non-judgmental about them. Seth objectively describes the culture he comes across and it is only when he is expressing his own views that he becomes subjective. Since Seth is a product of globalization, it is easier for him to accept the culture of the 'other'. He is aware of the progress made in the world and has an open mind to accept the change. Seth transcends the physical and mental borders and, as a global citizen, regards people of other cultures as his own. This is quite a change from the perspectives of the earlier Western writers who travelled with Orientalist tendencies and represented the natives as barbaric and uncouth. Seth shows the way to be a truly global traveller. His travels through hitch-hiking lead him to get a taste of the undiluted social experience of the Chinese and Tibetan culture. His non-judgmental ways are something to be applauded. It is no small feat to describe the dismemberment of a dead body without being prejudiced about such cultures like the way Seth does.

Seth is sympathetic to the different cultural practices and he does not judge them upon the practices of his own culture. Although he describes the negative impact of the Cultural Revolution that occurred in China, he is not condemning it and he lets the native speak out about their problems. Travel even if undertaken for the sake of education and gathering experience can change the perspectives of a person as seen in the case of Seth and his great uncle. Both of them are exemplary examples of the ideal global citizen. They both have treated the culture of the 'other' as equal to their own culture. Although, for Seth travel has acted at times as a mode of escape it has led him to a fulfilling life. Seth shows the positive side of globalization where the readers can learn the idea of a multicultural existence. He

looks at different culture with the same kind of wonder and puts them on the same plane. Seth is creating a path for people to understand how one should behave when travelling in an alien culture. He has created a benchmark of sort through his travelogue and memoir for other future travellers in the art of experiencing a new culture.

In the next chapter of the thesis titled “The portrayal of nation in Vikram Seth’s works” the study went on to see how Seth handled the concept of nation from the perspective of cultural globalization. As a product of globalization, and a world traveller, Seth easily distances himself from the immediate community that he is dealing in his work, and gives an unbiased view. In his fictional work *A Suitable Boy*, Seth gives a microcosmic view of the Indian nation through his imagined city of Brahmpur. To give a historical continuity and a sense of permanence traditions are highlighted and sometimes even "invented" like in the case of India as seen through Seth’s novel and this generates a collective Indian cultural identity. The creation of a nation through an amalgamation of different cultures is the perfect example of the hybridity of a culture. Hence, Seth gives an idea of the processes of globalization that are at work through his representation of the hybrid Indian culture. There is a hybridity even in the use of languages by a nation as seen in the case of India where although attempts were made to make Hindi the official language, it failed as it is not possible for a nation to insist on a single language in today’s globalized world. Vikram Seth is critical of the negative passion shown by the religious groups in India and regards them as a form of extremism, and narrow-mindedness, and shows a sense of disgust towards these religious groups. In the cultural context it can be seen hampering the growth of a multicultural society. Seth in the novel *The Golden Gate* discusses the making and impact of dropping of nuclear bomb. He is critical of America’s policy of nuclear armament. Even the general public does not support it and Seth shows the protests against such inhuman attitude of the makers of bomb and policy. The impact of globalization can be seen in the scenario

where citizens of a nation come out to protest the atrocities against other nations. Seth also shows the dangers of focusing too narrowly or too myopically on the idea of national identity as it may lead to anarchy as in the case of the Holocaust. The acts of Nazi Germany left a black mark in the global community. It hampered world peace and left generations of sufferers. Through his fictional characters and his memoir, Seth depicts his take on the national politics and policies, and their impact on the lives of common man. This helps the readers grapple with the emerging ideas in the theories of globalization. Seth through his works shows that in a global world all countries are inter-related and the policies implemented in one country have repercussion on the other countries too. Vikram Seth through the life of his great uncle Shanti shows the making of a global citizen where Shanti transcends the geographical boundaries and creates multiple identities for himself. Reading the works of Vikram Seth helps one to come to terms with the cultural theories promulgated on globalization.

The next chapter “Exploring cuisine and food culture in Vikram Seth’s works” shows Vikram Seth’s handling of the culture of food in the globalization era. Seth gives a glimpse of the Indian food culture through the depiction of a wedding in his fictional work *A Suitable Boy*. Every food culture has its own distinct ways of gathering, preparing and eating. The same food item takes up different names based on the culture they are consumed. If a person fails to recognise the signs of a particular food culture it can lead to embarrassment. It is through the creation of cultures like food that a community comes together and hence they try to stick to it rigidly. But the impact of globalization has penetrated this and hybrid food cultures have evolved. The ability of food cultures to transcend boundaries forms an important aspect of globalization. When two people find similarities in their food choices, they form a bond not restricted by borders. Every culture has different acts of eating. Describing the traditions of the Javanese culture theorist Clifford Geertz in his essay “The

Impact of the Concept of Culture on the Concept of Man” states that: “It is not just to eat; it is to prefer certain foods cooked in certain ways and to follow a rigid table etiquette in consuming them” (14). Different cultures form their traditions around acts of eating and it is a way for them to make a sense of life, time and space. But when cultures overcome their individual rituals and accept other cultures, they are truly multicultural and the impact of globalization becomes prominent. Food has the power to destabilize the binary opposites like that of man and women. Through food a bond is created amongst these two genders. It is globally seen that the mental and physical health of a person is reflected in his food habits. Seth is conversant with the processes of globalization and through his personal experiences as well as through his fictional characters he shows its impact on the food culture. In the global age food can become a source of international threat as every country is dependent on food and there is a constant sharing of it. During the Holocaust food became an instrument to break the moral of the prisoners and the same tactic can be repeated in a larger scale. This can be dangerous and Seth through his works makes us reflect on this aspect. He relativizes culture to have a better understanding of the world that one lives in. As a world citizen, Seth can talk about food culture without being biased.

The chapter “Representation of the middle class in the works of Vikram Seth” deals with Vikram Seth’s dealing of the middle class characters in his fictional works. For Seth globalization has made the world borderless. Through his works he reflects on it. The middle class occupies an important position in the globalized world. For this class education is very vital as the sociologist, A. Giddens in *The Class Structure of Advanced Societies* argues that the middle class is defined by education, in as much as its market power is based principally upon educational qualifications. Vikram Seth shows this aspect through the life and aspirations of his middle class characters. Education forms a component of the global middle-class’s cultural and social lifestyles. Education becomes a means for this class to elevate their

social standing as well as have a steady source of income. The women too benefit from this as the middle class is becoming aware of the importance of educating girls all over the world. Education can act as a safety net for the girls to fall back on in case of any untoward incident to their husbands or fathers and an educated woman is an asset for the family.

Where on the one hand, through Seth an idea of the importance of education can be seen, on the other he provides a critique of how education makes the middle class hypocritical. He criticizes the blind adherence to the British lifestyle through his characters. Education in the middle classes has to be geared to liberate them from the worship of Western culture. Education has the power to unshackle a person from ignorance but in *A Suitable Boy* one finds superficiality in the life of the characters. Vikram Seth envisages a kind of global education where one is exposed to different cultures to choose the best practices, systems and beliefs like treating women as equal. This view of Seth on the middle class comes from his exposure to different cultures as a result of globalization. The attitude of consumerism that Seth shows in his works is borrowed from the West. An exposure to the English society does not mean that one looks at a person who cannot ape the English lifestyle as inferior. Seth critiques the middle class and puts them under the limelight so that their ways could be mended. It is sometimes necessary to work against the Western education in order to avoid the bias and implement the best practices. For Seth globalization is not Westernization. All cultures can have good and bad aspects in them and it is up to an educated person to understand what is good, and these will make him/her an ideal global citizen. Seth looks at education as a liberator of mind-sets. Through a criticism of the middle class Seth tries to make one aware of what one should avoid in order to have a true hybrid existence. The middle class plays an influential role in the policy making process and its implementation, as this class forms a major portion of the bureaucracy. Thus, it has got global consequences. The nuclear family structure seen in India is the after effects of the

globalization process and this concept has come from the West. The change in the cultures is seen through the characters in *A Suitable Boy* who, might be influenced by the Western ideals but, falls back on the Indian middle class values when it comes to making life changing decisions. There is a hybridity that is seen through his characters. Seth gives his readers something to think about and improve, through his portrayal of the middle classes in his works.

In the next chapter “The Queer and the Ladies: Gender Studies with Vikram Seth”, a study has been conducted on Vikram Seth’s handling of the system of differentiation and domination that every society has regarding gender roles. Seth through his works shows the violence that the gendered characters face as they are deemed weak irrespective of whether they are male or female. Violence as a tool for domination is used throughout the world. Seth gives examples of violence through his characters. Violence is seen in the queer community too in the form of the physical fight between the homosexual lovers in *The Golden Gate*. Even amongst individuals belonging to the same gender there are instances of violent behaviour. Another manifestation of violence is in the form of rape and it is something that is closeted as shown by Seth. He shows violence in different cultures to reiterate the fact that it is a global problem. There is also the problem of discrimination that the LGBT community faces as seen through the characters in *The Golden Gate*. Discrimination is not limited towards the queer community. Sometimes homosexuals are perpetrators of injustice where a man takes a wife to hide his gay tendencies from the society. Even in the world of music discrimination prevails where female artists are overshadowed by their male counterparts. Seth’s creative work highlights the fact that the male suppresses the competitive female, when he gives identity to his female characters in relation to male characters. In today’s world such attitudes are a setback to the positive influences of the globalization process. It is the need of the hour to change the tendencies of violence and discrimination against genders and bring in equality. A

person needs to be given freedom to live with whoever they want irrespective of the gender, and partners should be sympathetic to each other's needs.

This doctoral thesis has looked into Vikram Seth's handling of different cultural and social aspects of the globalization process in his fictional and non-fictional works. To do so different perspectives like travel, nation, food, middle class and gender have been taken into consideration to give a holistic view of globalization. In a globalized world, boundaries collapse. People need as many modes of representation as are available to come to terms with it. In addition to a good theory on globalization, fiction as well as non-fiction is needed to negotiate with the new realities that are emerging. Seth can be seen as a serious thinker grappling with the issue of globalization. His works show that he is well aware of the different perspectives of globalization. He shows the positive as well as the negative impacts of it. There is also the creation of hybrid cultures that can be seen through his fictional as well as non-fictional works. Although the process of globalization has come into focus recently, its impact can be traced back to a long history of human travels across the globe.

8.1 Scope for Future Research

The concept of globalization can be understood better if researchers look at both the theoretical framework and creative writing. Simultaneously, there can be further study in the lines of the current thesis, analysing the works of more creative writers. Study can be undertaken on the works of Amitav Ghosh, Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy, Jhumpa Lahiri or even Anita Nair whose works show the impact of globalization. This will give readers a broader understanding of the processes of globalization that are at work and newer patterns that are emerging.

Further, Seth's other works like his poetry and upcoming novel *A Suitable Girl* can be read through the critical lens of the researcher to get deeper insights in his handling of

some additional aspects of globalization. Seth works can also be reviewed from the economic and political aspects of globalization. This may bring out newer aspects into the globalization process.

The concept of the use of language can be further explored. Research can be done as to why Seth chose to write in the English language and the changes that he has made to the idiom of the language. Also it can be seen how Seth is changing the use of language for future writers. Is he making the language more formal or is he making it casual? His contribution to the Indian English style of writing will be interesting to study for future researchers.

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Ms. Jayashree Hazarika, completed her Masters in English Literature with a First Class degree from Gauhati University, Guwahati, Assam. Her field of specialization in her Masters was Indian English Literature. She had been appointed as a Junior Research Fellow at Birla Institute of Technology and Science, Pilani- Hyderabad campus from 2012-2015 under the supervision of Dr. Maya Vinai. She has published eight publications in well-renowned national and international journals and presented papers at various national and international conferences.

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Dr. Maya Vinai works as an Assistant Professor in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences in Bits-Pilani (Hyderabad Campus). She has completed her Masters in English Literature from University of Mumbai and her M.Phil and Ph.D are from English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad. She has taught courses like *Contemporary Indian English Fiction*, *Popular Culture and Literature of South Asia*, *Comparative Indian Literature* and *Technical Report Writing* in Bits-Pilani (Hyderabad Campus). Her research areas include Indian English fiction, Gulf Diaspora, Matrilineal Communities and its representation in literature and cinema, documentation of indigenous art forms in literature and cinema. She has one book titled *Caste and Gender in the works of Anita Nair* and ten publications in various national and international journals and one chapter in an edited volume. She has completed one Research Initiation Grant project titled *Challenging the representation of women in the matrilineal communities of Kerala through selected fiction* funded By Bits-Pilani (Hyderabad Campus). Currently she is a co-investigator of the UGC-funded project (Principal Investigator: Prof. M.G Prasuna) around the area of Parsi theater.