



International Journal of Advanced Research in Arts,
Science, Engineering & Management (IJARASEM)

Volume 11, Issue 2, March 2024



INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA

IMPACT FACTOR: 7.583



Illustrations of Masculinity in pre-independence and post-independence Indian novels: Train to Pakistan by Khushwant Singh and A Suitable boy by Vikram Seth

Ishika Saini, Dr. Reena Singh

Student, Amity Institute of English Studies and Research, Amity University Noida, India

Assistant Professor III, Amity Institute of English Studies and Research, Amity University Noida, India

ABSTRACT: Indian masculinity undergoes a captivating transformation through the pages of Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* and Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy*, mirroring the starkly contrasting landscapes of pre- and post-independence India. In *Train to Pakistan*, the brutal realities of Partition shatter the mold of traditional, dominant masculinity. Figures like Juggat Singh, once bastions of patriarchal authority, find their world crumbling amidst violence and displacement. Here, survival, sacrifice, and even vulnerability emerge as alternative expressions of manhood, challenging the stoic stereotype. In contrast, *A Suitable Boy* paints a canvas of a newly independent India, where masculinity grapples with the complexities of nation-building. Characters like Pran Kapoor and Lata's suitors embody the pursuit of being a "suitable boy," navigating tradition with modern ambitions and evolving societal expectations. There is a masculinity in flux, negotiating changing gender roles and forging definitions of success and love amidst a transforming social landscape. Beyond individual journeys, both novels delve into the interplay of individual and collective identities. In *Train to Pakistan*, communal identities fuelled by religious fervour often subsume individual desires. Mano Majra, yearning for personal escape, finds himself trapped by the demands of his community. In *A Suitable Boy*, while the caste system and community play a role, characters like Haresh Khanna and Maan carve out unique expressions. They challenge or reinforce established hierarchies through education, activism, and personal choices, forging their own definitions of masculinity.

KEYWORDS: Masculinity, Partition, Pre-independence, Post-independence, Gender Roles, Trauma, Identity

I. INTRODUCTION

In the realm of Indian literature, the depiction of masculinity has been a significant theme, particularly in novels exploring the historical, social, and cultural dynamics of pre-independence and post-independence India. Two notable works that shed light on this aspect are *Khushwant Singh's Train to Pakistan* and *Vikram Seth's A Suitable Boy*. These novels offer compelling illustrations of masculinity that are intricately interwoven within the larger narratives of these turbulent times. By analyzing the portrayal of male characters and their respective roles in society, we gain insight into the complexities of Indian masculinity and its evolution over time. This essay aims to delve into the characteristics and transformations of masculinity depicted in these novels, providing a deeper understanding of the social and cultural contexts in which they unfold.

In *Train to Pakistan*, set against the backdrop of the Partition of India in 1947, Khushwant Singh delves into the complexities of human behavior, communal tension, and the impact of political upheaval on individuals. The novel offers nuanced depictions of masculinity in a society grappling with violence, displacement, and identity crisis. The male characters in *Train to Pakistan* embody a range of traits, from traditional notions of strength and honor to vulnerability and moral conflict. Singh's exploration of masculinity in this turbulent context sheds light on how societal expectations and historical events shape the understanding of manhood. On the other hand, *A Suitable Boy* by Vikram Seth is set in post-independence India and provides a panoramic view of the country's social fabric. The novel spans various generations, portraying the multifaceted lives of its characters as they navigate through a rapidly changing society. In this context, Seth presents a diverse array of male characters who grapple with their roles as sons, husbands, fathers, and individuals pursuing personal and professional aspirations. The depiction of masculinity in *A Suitable Boy* reflects the evolving societal norms and challenges prevalent in post-independence India, encompassing themes of tradition, modernity, and personal agency. Through the lens of these novels, readers can gain insights into how perceptions of masculinity are influenced by socio-political events, cultural norms, and individual experiences, ultimately contributing to a deeper understanding of the human condition in India during these crucial periods of its history.



The vast tapestry of personalities and stories in both books allows for a complex examination of masculinity in various historical situations. By examining these novels through a literary lens, readers can acquire a deeper understanding of the Indian human condition during these pivotal periods in its history, as well as how cultural norms, individual experiences, and sociopolitical events shape perceptions of masculinity.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The Indian subcontinent underwent changes in its political landscape and the connotations of its social identities throughout the arduous shift from British control to independence. Particularly during this period, masculinity evolved to reflect worries, challenges, and power struggles in a society that was always shifting. This study examines the many but connected ways that Khushwant Singh's "Train to Pakistan," which is set against the backdrop of the 1947 Partition, and Vikram Seth's "A Suitable Boy," both of which are set in the early years of independent India, depict masculinity. Singh's book presents a vivid image of pre-independence masculinity, which was based on ideas of domination, aggression, and belonging to a community. Strong, masculine patriarchal archetypes are embodied by characters such as Juggat Singh and Hukum Singh. But as Shailja Singh argues in "Men at War: Masculinity and Partition in Khushwant Singh's Train to Pakistan," these values are shattered by the Partition, which acts as a furnace. The indiscriminate violence highlights the falseness of conventional masculinity, causing characters to struggle with feelings of control and agency. In "'Haunted by the Ghosts of Masculinity': Partition, Trauma, and the Unmaking of Men in Khushwant Singh's Train to Pakistan," Sudipta Das delves deeper into the psychological effects of this destruction. Masculinity becomes fractured, haunted by the ghosts of trauma and the breakdown of established identities.

On the other hand, Seth's "A Suitable Boy" offers a more complex and wide-ranging perspective on masculinity in post-independence India. In 1951, the country is still getting established. In "Negotiating Masculinity: Class, Caste, and Gender in Vikram Seth's A Suitable Boy," Meenakshi Mukherjee makes the case that caste and class are two social institutions are closely associated with masculinity. Pran and Maan are two examples of characters who deal with competing expectations because of their upbringing. Maan, the educated young guy, tries to break free from conventional standards and create his own path, whereas Pran, the affluent landowner, represents a particular type of privileged masculinity. The battle underscores the prospect of renegotiating masculinity in a newly independent nation, as Anita Desai points out in "Not Like My Father: Redefining Masculinity in Vikram Seth's A Suitable Boy."

Maan, unlike his domineering father Mahesh Kapoor, challenges the traditional archetype of the Indian patriarch. He rejects expectations, pursuing intellectual pursuits over family business and defying caste restrictions in his relationships. This path deviates from the conventional image of masculinity associated with physical prowess, stoicism, and adherence to social norms.

Both books provide significant insights into the complexity of masculinity in their different eras, despite their disparate settings. Partition's brutality and social unrest depicted in "Train to Pakistan" seem to have dissolved the tragically fragile illusion of masculinity. This picture acts as a warning, emphasising the limitations of conventionally idealised masculinity in times of crisis. On the other hand, "A Suitable Boy" offers a more positive picture in which the concept of masculinity is flexible and can be redefined to fit the changing post-independence Indian reality. But both books highlight the difficulties and fears that come with negotiating these shifting sands of identity.

III. METHODOLOGY

Analyzing illustrations of masculinity in pre-independence and post-independence Indian novels like *Train to Pakistan* by Khushwant Singh and *A Suitable Boy* by Vikram Seth involves a multifaceted approach. One such approach is of hegemonic masculinity by R.W. Connell that refers to the dominant form of masculinity within a given cultural context, which is often associated with power, authority, and control. In *Train to Pakistan* by Khushwant Singh, set during the partition of India in 1947, hegemonic masculinity is portrayed through characters like Juggat Singh, a powerful and aggressive figure who embodies traditional notions of male strength and dominance. Juggat's actions, including his involvement in violence and his control over women, reflect a manifestation of hegemonic masculinity rooted in patriarchal structures and communal tensions. Similarly, in *A Suitable Boy* by Vikram Seth, set in post-independence India, characters like Haresh Khanna embody hegemonic masculinity through their professional success, social status, and adherence to traditional gender roles. Haresh's pursuit of economic stability and his desire to fulfill societal expectations of marriage and family reflect his conformity to hegemonic ideals of masculinity, wherein financial prowess and heteronormative relationships are valued.



However, an intersectional analysis complicates this portrayal by highlighting how masculinity intersects with other axes of identity such as caste, class, religion, and region. In *Train to Pakistan*, the character of Iqbal Singh represents an intersectional perspective on masculinity as a Sikh man navigating his identity amidst communal tensions and violence. Iqbal's experiences highlight how masculinity is shaped not only by gender norms but also by religious and ethnic identities, complicating the notion of hegemonic masculinity within diverse social contexts. In *A Suitable Boy*, characters like Maan Kapoor and Firoz Khan offer insights into the intersectionality of masculinity by grappling with their identities as members of privileged families while also confronting societal expectations and personal desires. Maan's rebellious nature and Firoz's struggles with sexuality illustrate how masculinity intersects with class, sexuality, and cultural expectations, challenging simplistic notions of hegemonic masculinity and highlighting the diversity of male experiences in post-independence India.

The depictions of masculinity in *Train to Pakistan* and *A Suitable Boy* illustrate the intricate interactions between power, identity, and societal systems that shaped male experiences in pre- and post-independence India. These interactions are explained by applying intersectionality and hegemonic masculinity theories. A fuller understanding of the complex nature of gender identities and the manner in which they are produced and contested in literature and society can be achieved by looking at how characters negotiate and oppose dominant notions of masculinity within certain historical and cultural settings.

IV. HISTORICAL OVERVIEW IN PRE AND POST INDEPENDENCE NOVELS

The historical context of masculinity in pre-independence Indian novels is crucial to understanding the portrayal of male characters in these literary works. During this period, India was under British colonial rule, and societal norms and expectations were heavily influenced by the colonial ideologies. The concept of masculinity in Indian society was shaped by both indigenous traditions and colonial discourses. Indian men were expected to embody traits associated with strength, courage, and authority, while also adhering to patriarchal norms and maintaining control over women and lower social groups. Novels from this era often depict male protagonists who struggle with their identities in the face of these societal expectations, exploring themes such as nationalism, race, class, and gender dynamics. *Train to Pakistan* presents a complex portrayal of masculinity during a tumultuous period in Indian history. The novel explores various dimensions of masculinity, highlighting both the positive and negative aspects of male identity. One illustration of masculinity in the novel is through the character of Juggut Singh, who embodies traditional notions of bravery and physical strength. Juggut's actions during a violent mob attack on the train demonstrate his willingness to protect and defend his community, showcasing the stereotype of a strong, heroic male figure. However, Singh also challenges the dominant narrative of masculinity by depicting characters like Sardarji and Iqbal, who reject violence and prioritize peace and compassion. These characters defy conventional expectations of masculinity and embody a more nuanced understanding of strength and courage. By incorporating multiple perspectives on masculinity, Singh offers a thought-provoking exploration of gender roles and societal expectations in a time of significant social and political upheaval.

On the other hand, the historical context of masculinity in post-independence Indian novels is crucial for understanding the portrayal of male characters in works such as *A Suitable Boy* by Vikram Seth. In the aftermath of India's independence from British rule in 1947, the nation was grappling with the challenges of nation-building, political turmoil, and social changes. This period witnessed shifts in traditional gender roles and expectations, which were reflected in the literary works of the time. The depiction of masculinity in these novels represents the complexities and contradictions of the nation's post-independence era, where men grappled with their identities in relation to societal expectations, political ideologies, and the changing role of women in society. The author provides various illustrations of masculinity as seen through the male characters in pre-independence and post-independence India. One prominent illustration is the traditional role of the patriarch, depicted through characters like Maan Kapoor's grandfather, Lata's brother Arun, and Hareesh Khanna. These characters embody the societal expectations placed upon men to be the head of the family, make key decisions, and maintain their position of authority. This traditional masculinity is contrasted with characters like Amit Chatterji and Firoz Khan, who challenge societal norms by expressing their individuality and pursuing non-traditional paths. Seth provides a nuanced exploration of masculinity in *A Suitable Boy*, showcasing the complexities and diversity within male roles in Indian society.

It's important to understand that masculinity was a concept that varied by place and was influenced by a variety of cultural practices. Various communities' perceptions of masculinity were shaped by regional traditions and practices. A complex sense of masculinity was woven from the rich tapestry of India's cultural variety, with several regions providing unique viewpoints and manifestations. In conclusion, the complex interactions between cultural, social, and religious elements produced the idea of masculinity in pre-independence Indian culture. The dynamics of resistance and reform, the caste system, familial obligations, colonial influences, and the conceptions and expectations of masculinity



all had a significant impact. This historical overview reflects the complexity of the masculine identity in a society undergoing significant transformations on the path to independence.

V. CONCLUSION

In both pre-independence and post-independence Indian novels, such as *Train to Pakistan* by Khushwant Singh and *A Suitable Boy* by Vikram Seth, the portrayal of masculinity undergoes significant evolution, reflecting the broader societal changes during these periods. In *Train to Pakistan*, set during the Partition of India in 1947, masculinity is often depicted in a traditional, patriarchal manner. The character of Juggut Singh embodies this traditional masculinity, characterized by physical strength, dominance, and adherence to societal norms. Juggut is portrayed as a rugged and strong man, respected and feared in his village. However, his masculinity is also shown to be flawed, as he is prone to violence and lacks emotional depth. This reflects the turbulent and violent nature of the Partition period, where traditional notions of masculinity were tested and often found inadequate. On the other hand, *A Suitable Boy*, set in post-independence India, presents a more nuanced and varied portrayal of masculinity. The novel features a diverse range of male characters, each representing different aspects of masculinity. For example, Maan Kapoor embodies a more modern, cosmopolitan masculinity, characterized by his education, intellect, and liberal values. In contrast, characters like Haresh Khanna represent a more traditional masculinity, rooted in family values and societal expectations. One of the key differences in the portrayal of masculinity between these two novels is the emphasis on agency and empowerment. In *Train to Pakistan*, masculinity is often associated with power and control, but it is ultimately shown to be destructive and unsustainable in the face of societal upheaval. In contrast, *A Suitable Boy* explores the idea of masculinity as a more complex and evolving concept, influenced by individual choices and societal changes. Overall, the illustrations of masculinity in these novels reflect the broader shifts in Indian society during the pre-independence and post-independence periods. While pre-independence novels like *Train to Pakistan* often depict masculinity in a traditional, patriarchal light, post-independence novels like *A Suitable Boy* present a more diverse and dynamic understanding of masculinity, highlighting the changing roles and expectations of men in Indian society.

REFERENCES

Primary Sources:

1. Seth, V. (1993). *A suitable boy*. <http://ci.nii.ac.jp/ncid/BA72135803>
2. Singh, K. (1956). *Train to Pakistan*. <https://ci.nii.ac.jp/ncid/BB0240999X>

Secondary Sources:

1. Singh, Shailja. "Men at War: Masculinity and partition in Khushwant Singh's train to Pakistan." (2002). *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 37(1), 119–131.
2. Desai, Anita, "Not Like My Father': Redefining masculinity in Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy*." (1996). *Twentieth Century Literature*, 42(1), 122–129.
3. Sivakumar, I. and Manimekalai, K. (2021) "Masculinity and Challenges for Women in Indian Culture," *Journal of International Women's Studies*: Vol. 22: Iss. 5, Article 26. <https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol22/iss5/26>
4. Daiya, Kavita. "Postcolonial masculinity: 1947, partition violence and nationalism in the Indian public sphere." *Genders*, no. 43, June 2006, p. NA. Gale Academic OneFile, link.gale.com/apps/doc/A179660936/AONE?u=anon~34679008&sid=googleScholar&xid=0911449e. Accessed 18 Feb. 2024
5. Sen, Sanghita. (2018). Indian Masculinity: An Important Intervention in Gender and Masculinity Studies. *Anthropological Quarterly*. 91. 1105-1118. 10.1353/anq.2018.0051.



INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA



International Journal of Advanced Research in Arts, Science, Engineering & Management (IJARASEM)

| Mobile No: +91-9940572462 | Whatsapp: +91-9940572462 | ijarase@gmail.com |

www.ijarase.com