'Swimming In A Sea of Language': Linguistic Aspects of Vikram Seth's 'A Suitable Boy'

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This essay appeared in *Vikram Seth's "A Suitable Boy": An Anthology of Recent Criticism*, ed. Murari Prasad, New Delhi: Pencraft International, 2005, 62-88. It is a revised and updated version of an article first published in The Atlantic Literary Review (Delhi), Vol. 3, No. 3, July-September 2002, 69-95, and also on-line at:
<http://www.doononline.net/pages/info_features/features_spotlights/spotlights/seth/sethpaper.pdf>. A slightly different version appeared in *Indias Abroad: the Diaspora Writes Back*, ed. Rajendra Chetty and Pier Paolo Piciucco, Johannesburg (South Africa): STE Publishers 2004, 170-186.

NOTE: The present on-line version has been further revised from that published in 2005, in the light of the comments of Prashant K, Sinha in his review of the Pencraft volume in the *Yemen Times*, 18-20 December 2006

I

'India, with an intelligentsia that grows by leaps and bounds, expands in all directions': so spoke V.S. Naipaul in 2001[1]. A similarly upbeat view of contemporary India was expressed in 1999 by one of the English-speaking world's most prestigious historians, Eric Hobsbawm: 'India has an extremely promising future because it has an asset …: a degree of true originality in the fields of technology and intellectual research … economically and culturally, I think that India has a brilliant future'.[2] In a context where, as Western press reports on outsourcing and software development underline daily, India is manifesting the potential to become an ever-more important power in the twenty-first century, the by now well-documented 'boom' in English-language fiction by Indian writers appears as a phenomenon meriting close attention; and such a contention should most certainly apply to the much-accoladed Vikram Seth and to his best-known work, the novel *A Suitable Boy*.

Seth, born in 1952, in Calcutta (now Kolkata) but to a Hindi- rather than Bengali-speaking family, has achieved worldwide fame primarily as the author of this epic narrative, which has obtained a success, both critical and commercial, commensurate to its exceptional length. He is also a rather notably polymorphous writer, as much a globalised world citizen as he is a chronicler of India. Having lived not only in his native India but also in China, the UK and the US, Seth has devoted his literary energies thus far to evoking the realities of all of those countries[3]. He is also something of a polymath and polyglot, having obtained his first degree at Oxford in the course known as PPE (politics, philosophy and economics) and begun, though never finished, doctoral research at Stanford on the demographics of China: the languages he commands include Hindi, English and Mandarin Chinese (from 1980-1982 he studied Chinese language and literature at Nanjing, where, it is said, he 'demonstrated his intellectual brilliance by mastering the language so quickly he was writing poetry in Mandarin within a year'[4]). His goal as a writer has been described as 'to do something different each time': in his own words, '"You won't be bored; it's a way of spending a life"'[5].

Among Seth's publications to date, *From Heaven Lake* (1983) is a chronicle of travels in China and Tibet; *Three Chinese Poets* (1992) offers highly readable English translations of classic poems of the T'ang period; *The Golden Gate*, a novel in verse (1986), probes the world of young, upwardly mobile Californian professionals; *An Equal Music* (1999) is a novelistic exploration of Western classical music tracing the fortunes of a London-based string quartet; and *A Suitable Boy* (1993) presents a panoramic view of Indian society in the years immediately

following Independence. This mammoth novel narrates, in the third person, the intertwining lives and relationships, over a period of some eighteen months, of a cross-section of individuals and families in, around or connected with Brahmpur, an imaginary north Indian city. The guiding thread is supplied by a quite traditional theme, namely a young woman's search for a husband: Lata, a student of English literature and intending teacher, considers the claims of three rival suitors before making her choice in the final pages. Along the way, Seth's narrative not only explores the Indian society of the post-Raj period in its multiple political, religious, cultural and communal ramifications, but also raises a wide and stimulating range of issues relating to various aspects of language and communication: it is on these latter that the present paper will primarily concentrate.

II

Weighing in at 1349 pages in the original edition (the UK paperback version runs to all of 1474 pages), *A Suitable Boy* has been called 'the longest single-volume novel ever published in English'[6], and, whether or not that claim is literally true, there is no doubt about its epic pretensions. Critics have often compared it to the masterworks of the European nineteenth-century novel ('European' here including British) - and, notably, to the great Russian novels. Two of the earliest critical commentaries, both published in the *Washington Post* in 1993, set the tone, with their titles 'A Dickens for the Subcontinent' and 'A Tolstoy - On His First Try'[7]. M. Rajagopalachary and B. Krishna Chandra Keerthi, in 'Social realism in Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy*', their significantly titled study of 2000, read the novel as a social comedy in the British nineteenth-century tradition, evoking Jane Austen[8]. Overviewing the state of contemporary Indian fiction, Rajeshwar Mittapalli and Pier Paolo Piciucco stated in 2001 that 'this massive novel surely deserves comparison with the huge masterpieces of the 19th century Russian novelists in terms of bulk and multiplicity of characters'[9]. Another Italian scholar, Silvia Albertazzi, wrote in 2000: 'Vikram Seth, da alcuni critici definito, con qualche esagerazione, il nuovo Tolstoi, per l'ampiezza di respiro della narrazione … offre un panorama di situazioni e personaggi, spesso interconnessi, che forniscono un quadro quanto più possibile completo dell'India all'indomani dell'Indipendenza. É il trionfo della nazione come "communità immaginata"' ('Vikram Seth has been called by some critics, a little exaggeratedly, the new Tolstoy, thanks to the range and scope of his narrative … a panorama of situations and characters, frequently interconnected, which provide the fullest possible picture of India in the wake of Independence - the triumph of the nation as "imagined community"')[10]. Such readings effectively place Seth, writing near the end of the twentieth century about the society of his native India in the middle of that century, squarely in the tradition of that nineteenth-century European realist writing in which, in the words of perhaps its most eminent critic, Georg Lukács, 'great realism and popular humanism are merged into an organic unity'. The great realist novelists, wrote Lukács, 'penetrate deeply into the great universal problems of their time and inexorably depict the true essence of reality as they see it'[11]; and such claims may convincingly be made for Vikram Seth's vast, all-encompassing fictional model of a great nation at a crucial moment in its historical development.

Seth's embrace of the classical realist form has, inevitably, been seen in some quarters as a throwback to the past. Certainly, for better or worse, his fictional practice stands in stark contrast to the magic-realist vein of Indo-Anglian fiction pioneered by Salman Rushdie and subsequently refined by the likes of Vikram Chandra and Amitav Ghosh. The entry on *A Suitable Boy* in *The Reader's Companion to the Twentieth-Century Novel*, a volume published in 1995, presents Seth's novel as 'wilfully anachronistic': 'in scope and execution, it is reminiscent of Victorian realism; it locates its protagonists' private concerns within a public panorama; … its

great achievement is to revivify a dying form'[12]. While the avant-garde defenders of postmodernism at all costs might demur, it is interesting that, despite the charge of anachronism, this work of reference actually concludes that Seth has successfully given new life to what might, before his book, have been written off as a 'dying form' (though one might also cite *Oscar and Lucinda*, the long historical novel of Australia which won Peter Carey his first of two Booker Prizes in 1988, as a similar, if somewhat less lengthy, instance of such revivification).

The debt to the nineteenth-century realists is clear enough, and is admitted within the text itself. Amit Chatterji, the Bengali poet and suitor who is in many ways an alter ego for the author, at one point declares: '"I still bear the scars of *Middlemarch*"'[13]. The reference to George Eliot's epic novel of 1872 stands up to closer scrutiny, for the Middlemarch of the title is, like Seth's Brahmpur, a fictitious provincial city offered to the reader as typifying an actual society. Another of Lata's suitors, Haresh, reads the novels of Thomas Hardy, and in his drawing-room 'the volumes of Hardy on the small bookshelf were arranged alphabetically'[14]: Hardy too gave fictional names to the towns and villages of his novels, and the reference further grounds Seth's narrative in the nineteenth-century English tradition.

Following the practice of George Eliot, Hardy and, indeed, Tolstoy (who made Napoleon a character in his celebrated novel *War and Peace*), in *A Suitable Boy* Vikram Seth offers a hybrid blend of the fictional-but-typical with actual historical characters and events. The main characters are invented, but the fictional politician Mahesh Kapoor, and his equally fictional Chief Minister S.S. Sharma, read a letter from the eminently real Jawaharlal Nehru - which indeed, as Seth informs the reader in his prefatory notes, reproduces, word for word, parts of a letter actually sent by Nehru, on 9 August 1951, to the Chief Ministers of the Indian states' Congress politicians[15]. Later in the novel, Nehru himself actually makes a cameo appearance, and the narrator states in deadpan fashion: 'The few hours that Jawaharlal Nehru spent in the district had an enormous effect on all the electoral campaigns there'[16]. Brahmpur city, and Purva Pradesh, the state of which it is the capital, do not exist - a point which may, incidentally, have escaped some of Seth's Western readers who may not be familiar with Indian geography. Nonetheless, we are not talking about 'invisible cities' in the fantastic sense popularised by the Italian writer Italo Calvino in his novel of that name. Vikram Seth's invented state and city are not located in some vague subcontinental nowhere-land: Purva Pradesh is clearly in north India and inside the Hindi belt ('the official language of the state … was Hindi'[17]), Brahmpur is on the Ganges, and the characters journey to Delhi and Calcutta. The imaginary state and city are also supplied with a convincing history and demography comparable to those of other, real, Indian locations (under the British, we are told, Brahmpur was spelt 'Brumpore'[18] and Purva Pradesh was known as the 'Protected Provinces'[19]; the state still has, post-Partition, a substantial Muslim and Urdu-speaking community). The mix of fact and fiction is thus a complex one; indeed, Brahmpur appears as a hybrid of various North Indian cities, based no doubt in the first place on Patna, where Seth spent part of his childhood, but with certain characteristics that also point, respectively, to Varanasi (the festival on the Ganges); to Agra (the leather industry); and, anticipating the Babri Masjid controversy of the 1990s, to another city of epic associations, Ayodhya - in this case anachronistically, since, Seth says, the book was actually in its final stages of production when that issue flared up ('I was harking back to the 1950s, and then things had died down for about 20 years. I had no idea that what I was writing about - the attacks of temples and mosques - actually would take place two months before the book - while the book was actually being typeset')[20]. The end product has been received in at least some sectors of the Indian critical establishment as meriting the accolade of authenticity: Khushwant Singh, himself the author of the celebrated novel of Partition *Train to Pakistan* (1956), has been quoted as

declaring: 'I lived through that period and I couldn't find a flaw … it really is an authentic picture of Nehru's India.'[21]

III

One nineteenth-century model for Seth's fictional explorations who does not seem to have been mentioned by critics is, nonetheless, potentially the most significant of all, and that is Walter Scott. The great Scottish novelist set the standard for the nineteenth-century historical novel, locating imagined characters inside real historical events alongside such actual figures as Richard Coeur de Lion, Saladin or the outlaw Rob Roy, and tracing how individuals' destinies are shaped by greater forces within their society. The comparison between Seth and Scott as novelist is particularly illuminating in relation to the aspect of language. In *A Suitable Boy*, a novel written in English, the reader is asked to imagine the different characters as speaking or otherwise employing a number of different languages. A number of Walter Scott's key novels similarly give prominence to a complex multilingual reality, albeit, again, one expressed through the dominant medium of English.

In *Waverley* (1814) and *Rob Roy* (1818), two of his most important novels of Scottish history, Scott brings to life a trilingual society. Both of these novels are set in the eighteenth century, not excessively far back from the time when Scott was writing. They deal with a Scotland under English rule but itself divided into two - into the modern, developed Lowlands and the archaic Highlands where clan traditions still prevail. Correspondingly, the various characters in these fictions would naturalistically have spoken in at least one of three languages, namely: standard English; lowland Scots, a language related to but distinct from English and understandable by English native speakers at the cost of a linguistic and cultural effort; and Gaelic, the language of the Highlands, which belongs to the Celtic rather than the Germanic Indo-European family and is totally incomprehensible to both English and Scots speakers unless (something very rarely the case) they have consciously and systematically learned it. In these two works by Scott, written in the vehicular medium of English, lowland Scottish characters are nonetheless made to speak in Scots, the author's presumption being that the reader from England or elsewhere will manage to make out the Scots passages. The Highland characters, by contrast, cannot be allowed to speak directly in Gaelic, but, even so, Scott effectively 'marks' their speech as different from that of both their English and lowland counterparts by having them talk in a deliberately formalised, grammatically correct but visibly stiff and rhetorical register of standard English that makes it clear that they have learnt English as second-language speakers.

In *The Talisman* (1825), a novel set back much further in time and tracing the imagined fortunes of the twelfth-century European crusaders in Palestine, Scott employs a rather different strategy to deal with the multilingualism of his characters. Here, the English, Scottish and French crusaders, among them the English monarch Richard Coeur de Lion, are assumed to speak in the medieval forms of either English or French (French was still the English court language at the time); their 'oriental' counterparts, not least among them the heroic figure of Saladin, are signified as expressing themselves in one or another of 'the Eastern languages'[22], presumably Arabic or Persian; while the language of communication between the two groups, as religious and military adversaries or as diplomats and negotiators, is represented as being the so-called 'lingua franca', a mixture of European and Oriental speech forms - in the words of Scott's third-person narrator, 'the lingua franca, or compound of Eastern and European dialects'[23]. Here, by contrast with the Scottish novels, Scott is obliged to transpose his characters' dialogue, whatever the imputed language, into one language only, namely a somewhat medievalised English. Nonetheless, and even more so with the hindsight of subsequent history, the alert reader will

note with interest the circumstance that Walter Scott, himself an English-speaking citizen of a non-English nation ruled from London, narrates his characters, in this novel of the Orient, as speaking a tongue denominated 'lingua franca', through the medium of that other lingua franca called the English language. The complexities of multilingualism which Scott ably negotiates in his historical fiction return, in the context of another time and place, in the narrative of Vikram Seth.

IV

The status of English in India has been perceived as problematic since well before Independence, and may be expected to remain so despite the indisputable utility of that language in the Internet age. English was not the first external language to be employed for vehicular purposes within the subcontinent: a similar role was played by Persian under the Mughals. The genesis of the contemporary arguments over English may be traced back to the Raj era, but it should also be recalled that the interaction between English and Indian languages ran (and runs) parallel with other and multiple forms of interaction among the Indian languages themselves. The contemporary Bengali writer and critic Amit Chaudhuri, in his seminal anthology of 2001 *The Picador Book of Modern Indian Literature* - an anthology that may be considered ground-breaking since it takes in both English-medium material and translations from various Indian languages - includes a number of texts of substantial cultural significance which bear witness to the complexity of subcontinental language matters.

The very first writer to be featured in Chaudhuri's anthology, the mid-nineteenth century author Bengali Michael Madhusudan Dutt (1824-1873), appears, in an essay of 1854 entitled 'The Anglo-Saxon and the Hindu' as making the remarkably anglophile statement: 'I love the language of the Anglo-Saxon … My imagination visions forth before me the language of the Anglo-Saxon in all its radiant beauty; and I feel silenced and abashed' (Dutt's essay was, logically enough, written in English)[24]. Chaudhuri contrasts this position with that of Dutt's fellow Bengali Bakhimchandra Chatterjee (1838-1894), who, in 'A Popular Literature for Bengal', a paper read to the Bengal Social Science Association on 28 February 1870 and, again, written in English, declared: 'a single great idea, communicated to the people of Bengal in their own language, circulated among them in the language that alone touches their hearts, vivifying and permeating the conceptions of all ranks, will work out grander results than all that our English speeches and preachings will ever be able to achieve'[25].

Chaudhuri's anthology also points up the complexities of the relations between Indian languages with specific reference to the case of Bengali versus Oriya. One author whom Chaudhuri excerpts at length is Fakir Mohan Senapati (Orissa, 1843-1918), whom he describes as 'the first major writer of Oriya fiction'[26]. He includes a number of passages from 'Story of My Life' (1927), in which Senapati narrates his efforts to promote the Oriya language at a time when, in the words of his first English translators as quoted by Chaudhuri, 'some influential Bengalis ... claimed that Oriya was not a language but a dialect of Bengali, and hence demanded that Oriya should be replaced by Bengali in Orissan schools'[27]. Senapati writes, of the years after 1865: 'Although Bengali became the medium of instruction in southern Midapore, Oriya continued to be spoken at home. It is hard to give up one's mother tongue (…) While teaching at Mission School I was doing all I could for the development of Oriya literature. I wrote a history of the Rajputs … I wrote a book on Oriya grammar, and another on arithmetic, both of which became school textbooks … We founded an association for the development of Oriya literature (…) It was decided … that all the old Oriya manuscripts should be printed'[28]. Once a printing-press had been acquired, he states that 'the machine could print in Oriya and English beautifully'[29]. The

interaction between Bengali, Oriya and English thus appears as a three-way process which cannot be reduced to a simple binary opposition of coloniser and colonised.

Another text included by Chaudhuri, 'Is There An Indian Way of Thinking?', published in 1989 in English by the Mysore-born poet and essayist A.K. Ramanujan (1929-1993), suggests, somewhat provocatively, an analogy between English and Sanskrit: 'When English is borrowed into (or imposed on) Indian contexts, it fits into the Sanskrit slot; it acquires many of the characteristics of Sanskrit, the older native father tongue, its pan-Indian elite character - as a medium of laws, science and administration, and its formulaic patterns; it becomes part of Indian multiple diglossia'[30]. Ramanujan's notion of 'multiple diglossia' is arresting, but Amit Chaudhuri himself, in his editorial comments elsewhere in the anthology, throws more oil on the fire by arguing that English is not necessarily an elite language at all in India, since many of its speakers are actually quite ordinary folk: 'the so-called "English-speaking elite" in India is a mythic construct; … it is composed both of the powerful and the happy, and also of the thousands who catch their crowded local trains in the morning, listen to rock music, read novels, and struggle to stay in their jobs, those who have no backing or capital except the English language and the doubtful possibilities possessing it seems to offer'[31]. Chaudhuri's general position on Indian multilingualism and its literary expression is summed up in the following remarks: 'Modern Indian writing is no single, definable tradition, but multiple, occasionally competing traditions embedded within traditions … It is more important to acknowledge these contesting traditions within traditions than the imagined battle between the margin, or the once-colonised, and the colonial centre'[32].

Further evidence of the complexity of the relations between Indian languages appears in the pages of Amitav Ghosh's novel of 1986, *The Circle of Reason*. Ghosh, himself a Bengali speaker by origin, recounts (in very idiomatic English) the difficulties of a policeman from Delhi posted to Kerala, who finds the Malayalam language all but unlearnable: '"You chaps in your home states are lucky. You don't know what it's like for us […] I've got myself a teacher and I've tried to learn the bloody lingo, but it's impossible."' Later in the novel, a twist in the plot turns on a Hindi-speaking woman doctor's request for help with a Bengali text (in fact, Tagore's drama *Chitrangada*) from a native speaker of that language: '"I have a Hindi translation of the original done by my father, but there are a couple of places where I can't read his handwriting. He copied the original down with the translation, but the trouble is I can't read Bengali […]. So, if you could just help a little […]?"'[33]. Ghosh's novel is written in English, but the particular communication problems which these passages point up have, in themselves, nothing to do with that language.

Salman Rushdie has on more than one occasion argued that English should be treated not as an alien imposition but as one other, by now naturalised, Indian language. In an essay of 1983 entitled '"Commonwealth literature" does not exist' Rushdie wrote: 'The children of independent India seem not to think of English as being irredeemably tainted by its colonial provenance. They use it as an Indian language, as one of the tools they have to hand ... In South India ... the resentment of Hindi is far greater than of English ... English is an essential language in India, not only because of its technical vocabularies and the international communication which it makes possible, but also simply to permit two Indians to talk together in a tongue which neither party hates.' He added that that English can be and is being appropriated, by Indians, as by others in the postcolonial world, in dynamic ways that amount to recreating it for their own, autonomous purposes which have nothing to do with either British or US interests: 'those peoples who were once colonised by the language are now rapidly remaking it ... assisted by the English language's enormous flexibility and size, they are carving out large territories for

themselves within its frontiers'[34]. More recently, in his introduction to *The Vintage Book of Indian Writing 1947-1997,* the anthology co-edited by him and Elizabeth West (which precedes Amit Chaudhuri's and is confined to texts originally written in English), Rushdie has reaffirmed his position in the following terms: 'English has become an Indian language. Its colonial origins mean that, like Urdu and unlike all other Indian languages, it has no regional base … English has acquired, in the South, an air of *lingua franca* cultural neutrality. The new Silicon Valley-style boom in computer technology that is transforming the economies of Bangalore and Madras has made English, in those cities, an even more important language than before'[35].

It is interesting that Rushdie should here use the term 'lingua franca', whose origins we have already discussed in connection with Walter Scott. Attention may also be directed to his comparison with Urdu, the language he grew up speaking: Rushdie adds the claim that 'Urdu, the camp-argot of the country's earlier Muslim conquerors, became a naturalised subcontinental language long ago'[36], implying a parallel status for English - as an Indian language seen as both naturalised and non-territorial. A similar analogy, this time and more daringly with Sanskrit, is made by Vikram Seth in the pages of *A Suitable Boy*. When the poet Amit Chatterji reads from his work to the Brahmpur Literary Society, a woman in the audience asks him: '"Why is it that you do not write in Bengali, your mother tongue?"'. The text continues: 'His answer was that his Bengali was not good enough for him to be able to express himself in the manner he could in English', and Amit adds: '"Even Sanskrit came to India from outside"'[37]. The reasoning here is presumably that the Indo-Aryan languages themselves can be seen, if one goes back far enough, as tongues imposed 'from outside' over the older Dravidian substratum. The position expressed is, it is true, the character's rather than the narrator's or author's, but Pier Paolo Piciucco has convincingly argued that Amit may be read, here as at other moments, as a stand-in for Vikram Seth[38]. It appears that both Rushdie's and Seth's texts promote an objectivist, non-communalist model of language use which refuses to make an automatic or emotional distinction between English on the one hand and all longer-established Indian languages on the other.

Nonetheless, the notion of English as an 'Indian language' remains problematic: even apart from political and cultural considerations of an arguably subjective nature, it is objectively the case that, while English is certainly the language of India's most prestigious newspapers and its IT sector, it is spoken and understood by only a relatively small minority of a huge population. Doubts are frequently expressed about the 'Indianness' of English even by those writers who choose to express themselves in English. Vikram Chandra has, in his public declarations, followed Ramanujan in labelling subcontinental English as a 'father tongue' along the lines of Sanskrit, and echoed Rushdie in viewing it as a lingua franca or as one 'Indian language' among others[39]. Nonetheless, *Red Earth and Pouring Rain*, Chandra's novel of 1995, contains a poignant reflection which is worth quoting in full: 'How in English can one say roses, doomed love, chaste passion, my father my mother, their love which never spoke, pride, honour, what a man can live for and what a woman should die for, how in English can one say the cows' slow distant tinkle at sunset, the green weight of the trees after monsoon, dust of winnowing and women's songs, elegant shadow of a minar creeping across white marble, the patient goodness of people met at wayside, the enfolding trust of aunts and uncles and cousins, winter bonfires and fresh chapattis, in English all this, the true shape and contour of a nation's heart, all this is left unsaid and unspeakable and invisible'[40]. A note of caution is also sounded, in a more analytic vein, by Amit Chaudhuri in his comments to his anthology, where he writes: 'The way English is used in India, by a small but substantial group, not all of its members by any means well-to-do or privileged … the fact that English is now an Indian language - while that may be true - requires all kinds of qualifications and a re-examination of that claim; for English is not an Indian language in the way it is an American language; nor is it an Indian language in the way

that Bengali or Urdu, for instance, are'[41]. Chaudhuri thus implicitly distances himself from the naturalisation argument to be found in the pages of the Urdu-native Rushdie and the Hindi-native Seth. Indeed, specifically on Seth Chaudhuri offers the following words of somewhat ambivalent praise: 'it's as if he's not just a writer, but a microcosm of the cultural ethos - the ethos of the post-Independence, urban, English-speaking middle class - to which he belongs'[42].

V

It should be clear from all the above that if *A Suitable Boy* embodies a totalising model of mid-twentieth-century Indian society through the medium of English, that language choice on the author's part, if historically justified and justifiable, is neither innocent nor unproblematic. At the same time, however, it should be equally clear that, if we are talking about the role and position of any of the other Indian languages that are present at one remove in the pages of Seth's novel, none of them can lay claim to absolute cultural innocence either.

Multilingualism in *A Suitable Boy* appears as one aspect of the diversity of India, and the novel's very range and scope implies a commitment on the author's part to the full preservation of that diversity - of India as a multicultural, multi-religious, multilinguistic society. An interview with Seth has made it clear that he 'sees *A Suitable Boy* as a plea for religious tolerance, among other things. He says, "It is an insult to Hinduism that these people have hijacked what it means to be Hindu. It's tolerance, understanding - not just trying to bash your neighbour over the head because he is Muslim. These things need to be said"'[43]. Hindu-Muslim tension is a recurring theme across the novel, whether in the fraught political alliance between Mahesh Kapoor and the Nawab Sahib, the friendship between their respective sons Maan and Firoz and its difficulties, the communal riots that disfigure Brahmpur, or Lata's doomed passion for the Muslim student Kabir.

It is in this context of a strained plurality that Seth's representation of the book's various imputed languages should be read. *A Suitable Boy* may be described, at least approximately, as a novel that takes in a quadrilingual reality: the characters are represented as speaking, understanding, reading and writing varying combinations of four main languages, namely Hindi, Bengali, Urdu and English. At least three others feature in the background: Sanskrit and Arabic, as respective cultural reference points for the Hindu and Muslim communities; and German, which, as the native tongue of Kakoli Chatterji's diplomat fiancé Hans, serves to recall the linguistic and cultural diversity of the Western world outside[44]. The essential interaction is, however, between the four main languages, of which two are indisputably Indian and written in autochthonous script, one is non-territorial and written in the alien Arabic script, and the fourth bears the stigma of the just-departed coloniser. Schematically, in the pages of *A Suitable Boy* Hindi appears as the would-be dominant national institutional tongue, Urdu as the cultural marker of India's post-Partition Muslim community, Bengali as the bearer of aestheticism and the arts and of a specifically Indian modernity, and English as the lingua franca which both binds and loosens the character's self-expression, while also supplying the book's matricial language for both author and reader. A more detailed consideration of some of the complexities of this four-language situation may now be in order.

The political dimension may be taken first. In a north Indian state where Hindi has been adopted as the main official language and certain politicians are pressing for it to become the sole official language, the status of both Urdu and English suddenly becomes problematic - even if in reality by no means all presumed natural Hindi speakers are in fact very comfortable with that

language. The Minister Mahesh Kapoor's dilemmas over language, as recorded fairly early in the novel, are worth quoting in full:

> Mahesh Kapoor himself found it very difficult to read the Purva Pradesh legislative debates of the last few years … The real difficulty was that Mahesh Kapoor was not very familiar with the Hindi - or Devanagari - script. He had been brought up at a time when boys were taught to read the Urdu - or Arabic - script. In the 1930s the *Proceedings of the Protected Provinces Legislative Assembly* were printed speech by speech in English, Urdu and Hindi - depending on the language that the speaker wrote or spoke. His own speeches were printed in Urdu … The English speeches he could read without difficulty. But he tended to skip the Hindi ones, as they made him struggle. Now, after Independence, the *Proceedings* were printed entirely in the official language of the state, which was Hindi; Urdu speeches too were printed in the Hindi script; and English could only be spoken - and that too extremely rarely - with the express permission of the Speaker of the House. That was why Mahesh Kapoor often asked his wife to read out the debates to him. She had been taught - like many women of the time - to read and write under the influence of the Hindu revivalist organisation, the Arya Samaj, and the script that she had been taught was, naturally enough, the script of the ancient Sanskrit texts - and the modern Hindi language.[45]'

We are nonetheless told that 'the Minister did not want the world at large to know that he could not read Hindi'[46]; while conversely, it emerges that his wife does not know English[47]. At a later point, one of his political acquaintances, the Subdivisional Officer Sandeep Lahiri, finds himself obliged to speak in public in a small town in Hindi, although he 'hated making speeches in his flawed Hindi': 'he made a little speech thanking the people for their generosity …; he masculinized a great many Hindi nouns in the process.[48]' The practical complexities of changing the official language are, Seth implies, not to be underestimated.

When the time comes to debate the pro-Hindi Language Bill in the Purva Pradesh Legislative Assembly, a variety of ideologico-linguistic positions are expressed, ranging through the culturalist to the anti-colonial to the apparently pragmatic. Begum Abida Khan, a notably feisty defender of the Muslim community, cries discrimination, declaring that '"the sudden enforcement of Hindi in the Devanagari script has closed the doors of government service on the Muslims"', and asks: '"If a foreign language like English can be tolerated ..., why can Urdu not be tolerated?"', concluding that Urdu '"can be treated like any other regional language. But it must not be dispossessed"'. She also accuses the promoters of Hindi of chauvinistically trying to impose an artificial, purist form of their language and thus create an unbridgeable comprehension gulf between the traditionally mutually intelligible Hindi and Urdu tongues: '"Read the Hindi versions of our bills and acts … You will not understand one word in three. It is all becoming stupidly and stiltedly Sanskritized. Obscure words are being dug out of religious texts and being reburied in our modern language. It is a plot of the religious fundamentalists who hate … Arabic or Persian words that the common people of Brahmpur have used for hundreds of years"'. A Socialist Member wishes to see English squeezed out rather than Urdu, though still wishing Hindi to have the edge: '"I am dissatisfied with the progress of Hindi. All the work in offices is carried on in English still, despite the many resolutions and regulations. It is English that we should be working to displace, not each other's languages."' The Minister for Home Affairs pushes the superficially utilitarian line that '"the fact of the matter is that duplication of all government work in two languages, two scripts, is utterly impracticable and unworkable"', but it is hard not to see this argument as a pretext for Hindi chauvinism[49].

Despite the increasingly embattled position of Urdu in Purva Pradesh, the novel's plot is such as to foreground that language, as a cultural badge of the Muslim community which is, through the ghazals composed by the great Urdu poets and sung by the courtesan Saeeda Bai, capable of exerting an aesthetic and emotional attraction on Hindi speakers[50]. Maan Kapoor's infatuation with Saeeda Bai impels him to learn Urdu so that he can express himself to his beloved in her own tongue: 'At the end of the ghazal Saeeda Bai turned to Maan and said: "You must write a dedication in your book." "What, in English?", asked Maan … "I'll learn Urdu!"'[51] Consequently, the history student Rasheed, who is already teaching Arabic to Tasneem, the young relative who lives with Saeeda Bai, is drafted in as Maan's Urdu instructor, and later, when Rasheed invites him to stay in his village, we find the minister's son dutifully struggling with the unfamiliar Arabic script: 'While Maan was engaged in his Urdu lesson a crowd of small children gathered around him … They were particularly fascinated by an adult who was having a hard time with the alphabet. They began to imitate Maan under their breath: "Alif-be-pe-te … laam-meem-noon", they chanted'[52]. The spectacle of the Minister struggling with Hindi while his son, for totally different motives, tries to learn Urdu may appear as somewhat comic, but the contrast points up something of the complexity of the north Indian language issue.

Bengali, by contrast, appears less as a political adversary to Hindi than as a rival of both Hindi and English, with connotations of creativity, sophistication, and modernity in an authentically Indian guise. It is above all associated with the Chatterji family and their circle of acquaintances in Calcutta. Lata's mother, who hails from the Hindi belt but uses English by preference, is visibly suspicious of Mr Justice Chatterji's brood of gifted children, seen variously as frivolously modern, unwordlily literary or impractically spiritual - or, all in all, as downright eccentric. She expresses some of her discontent with the Bengali atmosphere in a letter from Calcutta: "'Amit says Lata should learn Bengali, as it is the only truly civilised language in India. He himself as you know writes his books in English, so why does he say that only Bengali is civilised and Hindi is not?"'[53]. This is, at all events, a world where English and Bengali merge bewilderingly, as in Lata's experience at a Chatterji party: 'Lata felt as if she was swimming in a sea of language … Sometimes a half-comprehensible English wave would arise, sometimes an incomprehensible Bengali one.[54]' She appears quite aware of the regionalist bent of Bengali particularism, as in the historically prophetic little incident when, annoyed with Haresh calling Kanpur by its Raj-era name of Cawnpore, she declares: "'And if you wish I'll call Calcutta Kolkata'"[55]. More generally, the strong artistic and cultural connotations of the Bengali language are heavily underscored across the novel in the repeated allusions to the great Rabindranath Tagore (also known as Gurudeb or Robi Babu), in his various identities as poet, musician, educationist and national hero. The musical Kakoli sings Tagore's songs; Amit enters his brother Dipankar's bedroom to find him 'sitting on a prayer-mat at the harmonium, untunefully singing a song by Rabindranath Tagore'[56]; a lady guest tells Amit: ""I have some good ideas for books. When I was in Shantiniketan, the influence of Gurudeb on me was very deep … you know, our own Rabindranath … I have an aunt who writes Bengali poetry. She was a true disciple of Robi Babu"'[57]; and even the Hindi-speaking Veena Tandon is made to recall an episode with a Bengali woman friend, in language which is all but a pastiche of a Tagore poem: 'And Veena thought of her Bengali friend (she of the yellow water-lilies) who, when the monsoon rains first struck after the terrible months of heat, would walk out of the house dressed as she was, humming a Tagore song in welcome, and let the rain streak down her face and hair'[58].

Despite the strong connotations attached across the novel to the major north Indian languages, English retains a significant value. It is the in-house language of Lata's family, the Mehras, and, for all their Bengali identification, one of the languages of the Chatterji family. It is also the language in which Lata, herself a student of English literature, communicates with Haresh, who

has followed vocational studies in Britain. Haresh writes to Lata: 'I have met few English girls who could speak English quite as well as you do'[59], and when it is said near the end of the novel that Lata intends, post-marriage, to work as a teacher we may presume that it is English she will be teaching.

It can be deduced (correctly) from *A Suitable Boy*'s fictional world that English is not about to disappear from India, and that, despite the political pressure in favour of Hindi and the strong cultural pull of both Urdu and Bengali, English will continue to be employed for the foreseeable future as a useful lingua franca for communication between different groups. On another level, that of the text itself, it is also undeniable that English is the language in which Vikram Seth has chosen to tell his story. Given the quadrilingual nature of the realities described, Seth finds himself in a more difficult position than did Walter Scott in his Scottish novels: where Scott was able to represent directly to the reader two out of three imputed languages (English and Scots but not Gaelic), Seth can, for practical reasons, do this with only one of four, namely English. In his narratorial voice he nonetheless reminds the reader from time to time of the real complexities of the Indian language mosaic. Thus, sometimes the narrator takes care to state what languages the characters are speaking at a given moment, as in the following little interchange: '"I hope things are well with you, Meenakshi", said Mrs Chatterji, reverting for a moment to Bengali. "Wonderfully well, Mago"' replied Meenakshi in English[60]'. At other moments, Seth's narrator stresses certain nuances of Indian languages which affect the plot but could risk going unperceived, as in a key moment of amorous dialogue between Maan and Saeeda Bai: '"What would you like to hear?", she asked Maan gently. She had used a more intimate "you" than she had ever used so far - "tum" instead of "aap". Maan looked at her, smiling.[61]'

It is further worth drawing attention to the remarkable command which Vikram Seth displays of the English language in its multiple registers. This is true of both *A Suitable Boy* and his other writings, and is disputed by none. The late R.K. Narayan declared, in an interview of 1999 with *India Today*: 'Vikram Seth shows absolute mastery of the English language'[62]: this remark actually concerned *The Golden Gate*, but is equally applicable to *A Suitable Boy*. Indeed, if one compares the characteristic features of the English employed by Seth in his three principal works to date, his versatility becomes evident: if *The Golden Gate* is written in perfect American English, *An Equal Music* is a similarly flawless example of British English, and *A Suitable Boy*, logically enough, of Indian English. The presence of appropriately employed Americanisms and Britishisms in the texture of the two other books could be demonstrated easily enough by appropriate quotation. The specifically Indian nature of the form of standard English employed in *A Suitable Boy* here merits further comment, via a number of salient examples: '"at least restrain yourself till the Zamindari Bill has passed"'[63]; '"there are many madrasas and religious establishments all over the state where Urdu may be taught"'[64]; 'Veena hummed to herself the first few lines of a bhajan, one of her mother's favourites'[65]; 'the sending of cards to third cousins thrice removed on their birthdays'[66]. If the lexical 'Indianness' of the first three examples is evident, in items like 'Zamindari', 'madrasas' and 'bhajan', the fourth is a more subtle case, as 'thrice' for 'three times' has dropped out of standard British use and become an archaism, but has been retained in Indian English. The purely linguistic aspect of contemporary Indian writing in English is a fascinating subject in itself, and any future doctoral theses on the subject will no doubt take due account of Vikram Seth's excellent practice in this respect. At the same time, it is clear from *A Suitable Boy* that in a multicultural nation like India, with all its densities and intricacies as chronicled in Seth's pages, the only intelligent language solution is, necessarily, multilingualism.

VI

Literature is also a means of communication in its own right in the text of Seth's novel. I refer not merely to the frequent literary allusions within the narrator's or the characters' discourse, but also to the way in which the reading, teaching and study of literature, and the performance of drama, play an active role in the plot (Seth is of course helped here by his decision to set his entire narrative in a recent past that precedes the advent of television). Lata is, as we have seen, what the British call 'reading' English literature at Brahmpur University, where her brother-in-law Pran is a lecturer and, later, Reader in the same department. This is the 1950s, and the usefulness and value of literary studies as a civilising influence are still taken for granted in humanities faculties worldwide: Pran's ideological arguments with his superiors are not about the need to defend literature against the utilitarian incursions of vocationalism or ELT, but over his proposal for 'the inclusion of James Joyce on the syllabus for the paper on Modern British Literature'[67]. Lata first meets Kabir in a bookshop, where she is leafing a volume of Tennyson while he is browsing the pages of the *Penguin Book of Contemporary Verse* (a real-life anthology); and later, both participate in a student performance of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* which even Lata's traditionalist mother ends up enjoying. Indeed, all three of Lata's suitors have links with literature: Amit is a poet and has an unfinished novel on the table, while even the more down-to-earth Haresh, as we have seen, is a reader of Thomas Hardy. Nor is the Indian literary tradition neglected: besides the myriad references to Tagore, the text also contains an episode that revolves around the details of the Ramlila, a theatrical production of the *Ramayana* story at a Hindu festival in Brahmpur[68]. The literary references in Seth's text are in effect metaliterary, underscoring the function of the text itself as an example of literature perceived as a necessary and vital mode of communication.

The communication theme, essential to this novel, also embraces the domain of music, and indeed, here as elsewhere in Seth's work, music appears as a mode of human interaction running parallel to language, if not a language in its own right The dominant note is sounded from inside the North Indian or Hindustani musical tradition; the Western tradition is also present, in the impromptu performances of Schubert *Lieder* served up within the ever-artistic Chatterji family by Kakoli and her fiancé Hans, in a textual gesture that points forward to the world of Seth's later novel *An Equal Music*. The musical theme nonetheless clusters mostly around the high-class courtesan Saeeda Bai, who becomes the object of the perilous desires of Maan Kapoor. Maan first sets eyes on Saeeda when she is drafted into the Kapoor house to sing ghazals at the Holi ceremony, and in the later episodes where he becomes an avid frequenter of her dwelling-place much of the atmosphere is supplied by the musicians - sarangi and tabla players - with whom she surrounds herself. Music communicates, certainly, a certain sensual or exotic atmosphere, but beyond that it becomes a carrier of an entire cultural tradition - a tradition which in this novel is transmitted predominantly by Muslims.

Communication, be it through language, literature or music, is a concern that lies at the heart of Seth's novel; and in this connection the Saaeda Bai thread takes on major importance. The friendship between Maan and Firoz, one Hindu, the other Muslim, crosses religious and cultural lines and, despite the problematic status of both as wastrel sons within their own families, may be perceived by the reader as an interesting case of secularist and multicultural attitudes. Maan becomes one of Saeeda Bai's lovers, while Firoz acquires an interest in Tasneem, the carefully closeted young relative who Saeeda tells the world is her sister. When the Pul Mela festival, in a year when it unfortunately coincides with the Shia mourning ceremony of Moharram, erupts into Hindu-Muslim riots, it is Maan who saves Firoz's life from anti-Muslim marauders. However, their common interest in Saaeda Bai's household brings about near-disaster in the

climactic episode in which Maan stabs Firoz in the courtesan's house, over what the Longman *Reader's Companion* describes as a 'bizarre and bloody misunderstanding'[69]. This designation is correct enough, but it may be interesting to go into further detail. The misunderstanding arises when Maan hears Saaeda Bai declare of Firoz: '"It is not my *sister* he is in love with"' and jumps to the conclusion that she means he is in love with Saaeda herself and has been using Tasneem as an excuse to get near her: 'the woman he loved', he now falsely supposes, 'had betrayed him with his friend'[70]. The truth, as already revealed to the reader, is that Tasneem is in reality not Saeeda Bai's sister but her *daughter*, but Maan does not know this. His feelings of friendship and gratitude towards Firoz collapse into antagonism on the horns of a factual error: and even though Firoz survives and the two finally make it up, irreparable damage is done to the relations between their families and to Maan's father's political career. Maan fails to verify the facts and to check and re-check what he hears: the consequences of an apparently minor breakdown of understanding are shown to be disastrous, and the episode thus reinforces through contrast Seth's crucial theme of the need to connect across barriers. Furthermore, this misunderstanding, central to the plot, hinges on the more general problematic of Hindu-Muslim interaction, an eminently Indian theme which remains a major preoccupation of contemporary writers, and here one might wish to compare Seth's treatment of the issue with other significant fictional explorations such as those of Anita Desai (*Clear Light of Day*, 1980) or Manju Kapur (*A Married Woman*, 2002).[71]

Shifting to more general considerations, I would suggest that it would not be correct to impugn the 'Indianness' of *A Suitable Boy*. It has been said that 'Seth has resisted being classified as an Indian writer', but *The Golden Gate* still, for all its alien, transatlantic setting, received, as we have seen, the highest praise from as Indian a writer as R.K. Narayan. Indeed Narayan, in the interview cited earlier, called that book an 'extraordinary work' and 'no small achievement', commenting on its unfashionable use of traditional poetic forms: 'I have never come across any other modern writer who has ventured almost recklessly to narrate a story in verse'[72]. If the influence of nineteenth-century European fiction is evident in *A Suitable Boy*, the text itself also points to the heritage of the ancient Indian epics. We have already noted the Ramlila episode; at another moment, Pran Kapoor's devout mother is seen to pray before 'a calendar from "Paramhans and Co., Chemists and Druggists", of Rama, Sita, Lakshman and Hanuman with the sage Valmiki seated on the ground before them writing their story on a scroll'[73]. Amit receives a letter from his brother Dipankar, who is involved in traditional Hindu spirituality, suggesting structural similarities of a clearly autochthonous nature between the river Ganges and Amit's own unfinished novel (once again, Amit here appears as an alter ego for Seth himself): '"I remember, Amit Da, you once told me that the Ganga was a model for your novel, with its tributaries and distributaries and so on"'[74]. If the Ganga is a possible model for Seth's own ramifying tale of Brahmpur, another model from Anglo-Indian fiction might be sought in that other celebrated fictional city, Narayan's Malgudi: George Eliot and Hardy have no monopoly on such devices. Further, on a more practical level, it appears that Vikram Seth insisted that his novel should have its world premiere in the country whose history it recounts: 'He wanted the book published first in India, and insisted on it being typeset there, under his own supervision'[75]. It should also not be forgotten that Seth's novel now exists on the Indian market not only in the original English but also in translation in a number of Indian languages, including Hindi, Bengali and Marathi[76].

VII

The fact that Seth followed *A Suitable Boy* with *An Equal Music*, a novel which contains no Indian characters and, indeed, no textual reference to India at all, has been seen by some as an abandonment of roots. On the other hand, non-Indianness is also a feature of Seth's earlier work. The travel narrative of *From Heaven Lake*, if it certainly has the Indian in China as one of its themes, reaches India only at the very end; while one critic has said of *The Golden Gate* that it 'does not have a single Indian character in it'[77]. That is not actually quite true, as the author himself appears in it twice, in a digression about an editor's party where he is addressed as 'dear Mr Seth'[78], and, again as a party guest, at an event thrown by two of his characters, this time under the thinly disguised anagrammatic appellation of Kim Tarvesh ('Poor Kim Tarvesh - we must recall/He's an economist after all')[79]. Nonetheless, these signature cameos do seem to be that book's only concession to its author's origins: we are in 1986, and the Indian presence in Silicon Valley remains some way off in the future. *An Equal Music* does, certainly, mark an enormous break with *A Suitable Boy*. The music theme nonetheless provides a certain continuity: we have already seen how in *A Suitable Boy* language and music appear as parallel modes of communication, and in Seth's follow-up novel this analogy is more deeply and poignantly developed. The author has spoken in interviews of his great interest in music, both Indian and Western: 'I've always loved music … I was trained in Indian classical singing and I learned the tabla and a bit of Indian flute. But I turned to Western music somewhat late.'[80]; although when asked if he had ever thought of becoming an actual practitioner of Western classical music, his reply was: 'No, I don't think I had the very early training one needs for that. I just love music'[81]. If we recall the whole Saeeda Bai thread in *A Suitable Boy*, with its multiple evocations of North Indian classical music, one way of reading *An Equal Music* might then be to see this novel as Vikram Seth following up his exploration of his own national musical tradition with a parallel voyage into the music of a completely different culture.

In that narrative, the highly gifted concert pianist Julia Hansen is going deaf, gradually, tragically and incurably: by the end of the novel, the deterioration has reached the point where she is only willing or able to perform solo, and no longer with any kind of ensemble. Caught in a process of simultaneous and advancing alienation from the worlds of both speech and music, she tries to cover up her deafness by skilled lip-reading and by performing her beloved musical compositions from memory. Seth's text at certain points stresses this link between music and language through narratorial comments (the first-person narrator, Michael, is in love with Julia and by no means always narratorially reliable, but at points like this he may be considered to stand in for Seth). At one moment when Julia is playing Mozart, Michael comments to himself: 'There is something tender and indefinably strange and searching about her playing, as if she is attending to something beyond my hearing. I cannot put my finger on it; it undoes me'[82]. It is as if music can become some kind of ultimate mode of communication, a language beyond language. On the very last page, Michael, finally resigned to losing Julia as he watches her perform for the last time, reflects: 'She plays without the music, her eyes sometimes on her hands, sometimes closed. What she hears, what she imagines, I do not know. There is no forced gravitas in her playing. It is a beauty beyond imagining - clear, lovely, inexorable, phrase across phrase, phrase echoing phrase, the incomplete, the unending "Art of Fugue". It is an equal music[83].'

This perception of an unheard 'equal music' can, paradoxically, bring the reader back to the Indian tradition and the 'unstruck music' of Kabir, the fifteenth-century weaver-poet whose work expresses an ecstatic synthesis of Hindu and Muslim traditions. In one of his poems, Kabir sings: 'There falls the rhythmic beat of life and death; Rapture wells forth, and all space is radiant with light. There the Unstruck Music is sounded; it is the music of the love of the three worlds. There millions of lamps of sun and of moon are burning; There the drum beats, and the

lover swings in play.'[84] Kabir was much admired by Rabindranath Tagore, and it is in Tagore's translation of Kabir, from the Hindi dialect modes in which he wrote into English, that I have quoted those lines. The name Kabir will, of course, also remind the reader of the character of that name in *A Suitable Boy*, Lata's first, ill-fortuned suitor.

This surprising link to the Indian tradition, half-concealed on the very last page of *An Equal Music*, suggests that that book's 'un-Indianness' may in fact be no more than a detour for Vikram Seth. Indeed, he has said on one occasion: 'There's still so much to write about India. I don't think I would want to do a straight sequel to *A Suitable Boy*. But perhaps a story about Lata when she is a grandmother.'[85] The future may yet see Vikram Seth continuing in the mode of chronicler of modern India, across multiple registers of language and in full awareness of his country's multilingual, multicultural and multi-religious traditions, which he launched with such magisterial panache in *A Suitable Boy*.

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[1] Naipaul, *Beyond Belief*, 265.
[2] Hobsbawm, *The New Century*, 56-57.
[3] Further new ground will be broken by Seth's next book (forthcoming when this article went to press), *Two Lives*, which will be set in Berlin in the 1930s.
[4] Gavron (see Internet reference).
[5] Knorr (see Internet reference).
[6] Seth, "Bold Type' interview (interviewer's comments). Seth's original manuscript was even longer. He has explained: "I revised it, cut out about a quarter of it, and stitched the other parts together" (Seth, interview in Roberts et al., ed., *Writers on Writing*, 23).
[7] Seth, "Bold Type interview" (interviewer's comments).
[8] Rajagopalachary and Keerthi, "Social realism in Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy*", 102.
[9] Editors' 'Preface' to Mittapalli and Piciucco (eds.), *Studies in Indian Writing in English, Volume 2*, vii.
[10] Albertazzi, *Lo sguardo dell'altro*, 116-117.
[11] Lukács, *Studies in European Realism*, 13.
[12] Parker (ed.), *The Reader's Companion to the Twentieth-Century Novel*: entry '*A Suitable Boy*', 672-673.
[13] Seth, *A Suitable Boy*, 18.2, 1371.
[14] ibid., 9.10, 621.
[15] ibid., 14.8, 1061-1062.
[16] ibid., 17.35, 1355.
[17] ibid., 6.14, 353.
[18] ibid., 15.20, 1178.
[19] ibid.
[20] Seth, quoted in Knorr, loc. cit. For Ayodhya, compare Manju Kapur's novel of 2002, *A Married Woman* (see note 71 below).

[21] quoted in Gavron, loc. cit.
[22] Scott, *The Talisman* [1825], 33.
[23] ibid., 52.
[24] Dutt, 'The Anglo-Saxon and the Hindu', 6.
[25] Chatterjee, 'A Popular Literature for Bengal' 14.
[26] Chaudhuri, *The Picador Book of Modern Indian Literature*, 319.
[27] Senapati's English translators of 1927, quoted in Chaudhuri, 309.
[28] Senapati, 'Story of My Life', 313, 324, 325.
[29] ibid., 327.
[30] Ramanujan, 'Is There An Indian Way of Thinking?', 437.
[31] Chaudhuri, 606.
[32] ibid., xxxiii.
[33] Ghosh, *The Circle of Reason*, 162-163, 394.
[34] Rushdie, '"Commonwealth literature" does not exist', 65-66.
[35] Rushdie, 'Preface' to Rushdie and West (eds.), *The Vintage Book of Indian Writing 1947-1997*, xiii [Rushdie was writing before Madras was renamed Chennai].
[36] ibid., xii-xiii.
[37] *A Suitable Boy*, 18.2, 1369.
[38] 'Amit is the privileged mouthpiece for Seth's ideas' - Piciucco, 163.
[39] See Chandra, in *Scrivere = Incontrare*, 83, 125.
[40] Chandra, *Red Earth and Pouring Rain*, 344.
[41] Chaudhuri, xxii.
[42] ibid., 508.
[43] Seth, 'Bold Type' interview, loc. cit.
[44] We may also note here the German setting of Seth's forthcoming *Two Lives* (see note 3 above).
[45] *A Suitable Boy,* 6.14, 353-354.
[46] ibid.
[47] see ibid., 13.5, 927.
[48] ibid., 14.4, 1048-1049.
[49] ibid., 14.26, 1104-1106.
[50] For the aesthetic attraction of Urdu for Hindi speakers, compare Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day* (1980): see note 71 below.
[51] *A Suitable Boy*., 6.4, 328-329.
[52] ibid., 8.5, 555.
[53] ibid., 6.6, 334.
[54] ibid., 7.11, 432.
[55] ibid., 16.22, 1251.
[56] ibid., 7.7, 417.
[57] ibid., 7.8, 422
[58] ibid., 13.6, 935.
[59] ibid., 13.21, 978.
[60] ibid., 7.10, 427
[61] ibid., 6.4, 328-329.
[62] Narayan, interview with *India Today* (see Internet reference).
[63] *A Suitable Boy,* 5.9, 281.
[64] ibid., 14.26, 1106.
[65] ibid., 13.6, 933.
[66] ibid., 13.12, 952.
[67] ibid., 1.16, 54.
[68] see ibid., 15.4, 1129.
[69] *The Reader's Companion to the Twentieth-Century Novel*, 672-673.
[70] *A Suitable Boy*, 17.12, 1298.
[71] Both these novels may be compared with *A Suitable Boy* for their exploration of intimate relations across the Hindu-Muslim divide. In *Clear Light of Day*, the brother Raja, a Hindu but a great admirer of Urdu poetry, 'goes over' to the Muslim side in the wake of partition, marrying the daughter of a Muslim neighbour from Delhi and moving with her to Hyderabad. *A Married Woman* features the marital relationship of Aijaz, a Muslim intellectual and left-wing militant, and Pipee, a woman of Hindu origin, which is tragically terminated by Aijaz's death following Hindu-Muslim violence in the wake of Ayodhya. Dora Sales Salvador, in her note to her Spanish translation of the novel, reads this transreligious aspect of Kapur's narrative as 'una alegoría sobre la comunicación

y el entendimiento más allá de las diferencias' ('an allegory on communication and understanding beyond differences' - Sales Salvador, 'Nota de la Traductora', 336): the potential analogies with Seth's novel are patent.
[72] Narayan, loc. cit.
[73] *A Suitable Boy*, 14.12, 1069.
[74] ibid., 11.12, 779.
[75] Gavron, loc. cit.
[76] For further information on some of these translations, see:
<http://www.indiaclub.com/shop/ and http://www.unipune.ernet.in/dept/journalism/Sadhu.html>.
[77] Gavron, loc. cit.
[78] Seth, *The Golden Gate*, 5.1, 100.
[79] ibid., 111.10, 239.
[80] Seth, quoted in Knorr, loc. cit.
[81] Seth, 'Bold Type' interview, loc. cit.
[82] Seth, *An Equal Music*, 3.15, 169.
[83] ibid., 8.35, 484.
[84] Kabir, *One Hundred Poems of Kabir*, trans. Tagore, II.61, 32.
[85] Seth, quoted in Gavron, loc. cit.