

# Impact of Music on Life on the basis of Vikram Seth's Novel 'An Equal Music'

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## ABSTRACT

*Vikram Seth, one of the most influential male novelists of the post-independence era, justifies the impact of music on human life. Music is basically responsible for maintaining the relationship between two characters. It is through his male and female characters that he highlights the impact of music. In this article, I have tried to explore all the characteristics of Vikram Seth as a modern Indian novelist, who beautifully records the mutual fascination, understanding and connects people and keeps them together which helps a certain extent in the formation and continuance of human relationship.*

**Keywords:** Music, Novel, Human life, Vikram Seth, Life

## INTRODUCTION

So far scholars and critics have known Vikram Seth, the most significant novelist of the modern era. This article has been presented in the context of the impact of music on human life. Music is one of the recurrent motifs of Vikram Seth's novel. His vision is togetherness. According to him, it could be achieved not only through marriage and family but also through institutions of music like string, trio, quartet *etc.* It is also said that music is the most difficult subject for a novelist. However, for a creative and innovative artist like Vikram Seth, it becomes the favourite medium for artistic expression. It is an autobiographical element which could be traced to his childhood days. As we have seen in the first chapter that Seth has inborn inclination towards music. Seth's mother, Leila Seth, observes in her autobiography in this connection: "Vikram loved music, and could identify the 78r.p.m records even before he learnt to read properly"<sup>1</sup>. Vikram Seth himself in his Author's Note of *An Equal Music* says: "Music is to me is dearer even than speech. When I realised I would be writing about it. I was gripped with anxiety, and slowly did I reconcile to the thought of it"<sup>2</sup>. It is also crystal clear that music is an integral part of Seth's personality and figures constantly in all his novels. In Seth, music appears to have two functions: firstly, it functions as a connecting element between one man and another. Secondly, it functions as a consolation in the moments of crisis in life.

## RETEROSPECTIVE THEME

Vikram Seth's '*An Equal Music*' was published in 1999. It is shot through with elements of European classical legacy. It is based on the Greek myth of Orpheus and Euridice that has haunted music lovers through the ages. Orpheus descends to the underworld to bring back Euridice who had died of Snakebite, and Sings so beautifully that Hades is persuaded to grant him his wish. This story articulating the anguish of loss made the more poignant for the unrealized recovery, it forms the underpinning frame and motif of the novel. In '*An Equal Music*' the story revolves around Michael, a professional violinist, and his love, Julia, a pianist. This novel was appreciated for the accuracy of Vikram Seth's description of music. In this novel we find that it is music which brings Michael and Julia together and they learn music under the guidance of the same teacher named Carl Kall. While learning music, they fall

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in love and the relationship continues for quite sometime. After the quarrel with Julia, Michael leaves her. But he meets Virginie, a French girl, who also learns music under his guidance. Thus the relation is formed here and lasts for sometime. Michael meets Julia after ten years in his string quartet. Music creates fascination for each other. Julia acknowledges the power of love and says, "Making music and making love, it is a bit too easy an equation."<sup>3</sup> It also creates mutual understanding and attraction between the individuals. In spite of Julia's deafness due to auto-immune ear disease, she plays piano and wants to share her experience. She admits to Michael that she had been so hungry to speak of music and to it with someone who understands me." Similarly, in 'The Golden Gate' we also find that at the house-warming function of John, Phil and Ed meet and fall in love in an atmosphere of music. Due to music, John and Liz also come closer and attend the concert. In 'The Suitable Boy' we also find that Maan is fascinated towards Saeeda Bai, a ghazal singer, because of music. Saeeda Bai sings a few holy songs and ghazals at Prem Niwas on the occasion of Holi. Maan hums the same tune next day and feels 'he was falling irresistibly in love with her." Thus, music unites the individual.

In "An Equal Music", Music has been presented as an addiction. Michael can't bear the thought of his violin lying unplayed, unloved and unspeaking. Similarly, Julia too has passion for music. She expresses : "Music is the heart of my life". In a self-reflexive sleight of hand Seth allows us to read his own inspiring image of the tall lonely figure at the park, in the perceptions of his narrator at the very beginning of the novel : *"Yesterday as I walked back across the park I paused at a fork in the footpath. I had the sense that someone had paused behind me. I walked on. The sound of footsteps followed along the gravel. They were unhurried; they appeared to keep pace with me. Then they suddenly made up their mind, speeded up, and overtook me. They belonged to a man in a thick black overcoat, quite tall-about my height-a young man from his gait and attitude, though I did not see his face."*

## PROSPECTIVE AND DISCUSSION

As these major Ups emphasize moral conduct as essential virtues required for spiritual progression, how can it be said that the Ups are devoid of any ethical value? From the foregoing discussion it would be clear that the Ups have given much thought to the ethical conduct of the human beings and they are not devoid of any ethical content. We may say that moral conduct is like the very first step of a ladder which leads to the highest goal. While summing up, it would be appropriate to quote Dr. Radhakrishnan, "All the ethical theories are based on metaphysics in a philosophical conception of relation between human conduct and Ultimate Reality."<sup>28</sup> The theme of the novel is encapsulated in a piece of music by Beethoven opus which the composer himself arranged in string quintet. Michael frantically searches for this music piece and acquires it, only to lose it again. Early in the second part of the novel, the lost record of the Beethoven opus is miraculously returned to him. At the end of the same part, Julia just as miraculously makes a voluntary appearance backstage after a concert by the Maggiore at Wigmore Hall. Their performance has been a success and Seth's representation of their playing is exceptionally brilliant. At the end of part three of the novel Michael learns to this immense shock, from Luke's inadvertent words, that Julia has become deaf. The knowledge is followed up with Julia's long missive explaining facts about the auto-immune disease that has affected her hearing on reading Julia's words in the letter about the hearing loss- "I did not think at first I could live through it. Music is the heart of my life. For me, of all people, to be betrayed by my ears was unbearable." Michael makes an attempt to understand her situation. But the anxiety of losing his beloved violin besets him. He attempts to get a loan from the bank and goes to auctions with piers who is in need of a violin himself. But no solution presents itself. The loss of Julia and the impending loss of the violin vitiates his being. Thus the novel ends with Julia's solo performance of Bach's 'Art of fugue'<sup>4</sup> In the

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audience, Michael thinks, "It is a beauty beyond imagining-clear, lovely, inexorable, phrase acrossphrase..... it is an equal music" (p.380). After the concert, he reflects, 'Music, such music, is a sufficient gift. Why ask for happiness; Why hope not to grieve? It is enough, it is to be blessed enough, to live from day-to-day and to hear such music not too much, or the soul could not sustain it- from time to time.'<sup>5</sup> (Vikram seth : An equal music. p. 381) It has been seen in the novel "An Equal Music" that the passion for music helps Seth's men and women to a certain extent to overcome their grief. After the quarrel with Julia, Michael leaves her Life settles into a bearable aloneness. The return of that record has changed things. Thus, to Michael, music is the most prized thing. But in his grief and loneliness, he finds consolation in music. In this way 'more than father, mother, friend or lover, music has been constant companion in Michael's life. Evidently, he admits its utmost importance in his life. Similarly, in 'A suitable Boy', Lata turns to music for consolation whenever she is sad and depressed So we can say that music has soothing effect over the perturbed psyche of Seth's characters and they take resort to music to lessen the pain of the bitter assaults of loneliness of contemporary life. The novelist seems to say that in our contemporary life, the problems like disappointment, frustration, bitterness, alienation, isolation, separation etc. are bound to be these but the grief can be coped with the melodious music. Vikram Seth has quoted someone as saying, "Writing about music is like dancing about architecture."<sup>6</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Really, 'An Equal Music' is an unforgettable novel of love, lost and nearly regained, its events unfolding in the dramatic setting of contemporary London, Vienna, and Venice Brilliantly interweaving themes of loss, longing and the power of music, Vikram Seth has created a deeply moving story about the strands of passion that runs through all our lives.

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