



# Marriage and Society: A Comparative Analysis of Matrimonial Themes in 'A Suitable Boy' by Vikram Seth and 'Pride and Prejudice' by Jane Austen

RUCHIBEN R. CHAUDHARI

## Abstract:

*This comparative analysis delves into the intricate portrayal of marriage as a central theme in two distinct yet thematically resonant novels: Vikram Seth's "A Suitable Boy" and Jane Austen's "Pride and Prejudice." The juxtaposition of these works offers a captivating exploration of the societal norms, familial expectations, and individual desires that shape the institution of marriage. Set against the backdrop of post-independence India in "A Suitable Boy" and early 19th-century England in "Pride and Prejudice," this study examines how the authors depict the complexities of courtship, choice, and the cultural nuances that influence matrimonial decisions.*

*Through the lenses of Lata Mehra and Elizabeth Bennet, the heroines of these novels, we delve into the challenges and dilemmas faced by young women navigating the delicate balance between societal conformity and personal agency. Vikram Seth and Jane Austen provide unique perspectives on the roles of family, class, and society in the pursuit of suitable matches, as well as the evolving expectations of women within the contexts of their respective eras.*

*This comparative analysis not only offers insights into the evolving dynamics of marriage and society but also underscores the timeless relevance of these novels, inviting readers to reflect on how societal norms and personal aspirations continue to intersect in the complex tapestry of matrimony.*

---

**Keywords:** Marriage & society, A Suitable Boy, Pride and Prejudice, Matrimonial theme

---

## 1. "A Suitable Boy" by Vikram Seth:

"A Suitable Boy" by Vikram Seth is a sprawling and richly detailed novel set in post-independence India. At its heart, the novel revolves around the quest for a suitable match for the protagonist, Lata Mehra, who is a young woman navigating the complexities of love, family, and societal expectations. The novel unfolds against the backdrop of a newly independent India, reflecting the vast diversity of its people, cultures, and traditions.

One of the central themes of the novel is the institution of arranged marriage, which is deeply ingrained in Indian society. Lata's mother, Mrs. Rupa Mehra, is determined to find a suitable boy for her daughter, and this search becomes the driving force of the narrative. Through Lata's interactions with a diverse array of suitors, the novel explores the tension between tradition and modernity in India. Lata, a university student with her own aspirations and opinions, finds herself torn between her duty to her family and her desire for personal agency in matters of the heart.

Seth's portrayal of the social fabric of post-independence India is intricate and multifaceted. He introduces readers to a vast array of characters, each representing a different facet of Indian society. The novel explores themes of religion, politics, caste, and class, reflecting the complex mosaic of identities and ideologies that define the country. Through the characters and their interactions, Seth paints a vivid picture of a nation in transition, grappling with the challenges of nation-building and individual freedom.

Lata's journey is not just one of personal discovery but also a reflection of the changing roles and expectations of women in India. Her insistence on choosing her own path, even if it means defying tradition, mirrors the broader societal shifts taking place in post-independence India. "A Suitable Boy" captures the tensions and contradictions of a society in flux, where the old and the new collide and coexist.

## 2. "Pride and Prejudice" by Jane Austen

"Pride and Prejudice" by Jane Austen, written in the early 19th century, is a classic of English literature. The novel is set in rural England and focuses on the Bennet family, particularly the headstrong and intelligent Elizabeth Bennet. While the novel is set in a very different time and place compared to "A Suitable Boy," it shares common themes related to marriage and societal expectations.

In "Pride and Prejudice," marriage is also a central theme. The novel explores the societal norms and pressures surrounding marriage in Regency-era England, where securing a suitable match was a primary concern for young women. The protagonist, Elizabeth Bennet, is known for her wit, intelligence, and independent spirit. However, she is not immune to the expectations of her society, which places a premium on marriage for women as a means of securing financial stability and social status. The novel introduces readers to Mr. Fitzwilliam Darcy, a wealthy and enigmatic gentleman who initially appears proud and aloof. Elizabeth's initial prejudice against Darcy is a central plot point, but as the story unfolds, their complex relationship undergoes a transformation. Austen's keen social commentary and sharp characterizations provide insight into the rigid class structure and societal conventions of her time. "Pride and Prejudice" is celebrated for its exploration of themes such as love, pride, prejudice, and the role of women in society. The novel challenges the notion of marrying for convenience and status, advocating instead for love and compatibility. Through Elizabeth's journey of self-discovery and her refusal to settle for a marriage devoid of affection, the novel champions the idea that women should have agency in their own lives and love should be a fundamental consideration in marriage.

## 3. "A Suitable Boy" by Vikram Seth and "Pride and Prejudice" by Jane Austen: A Comparative Analysis

"A Suitable Boy" by Vikram Seth and "Pride and Prejudice" by Jane Austen are two literary classics that, despite their different settings and cultural contexts, share common themes and concerns related to marriage, societal expectations, and the roles of women. Here, we undertake a comparative analysis of these two novels, highlighting their similarities and differences.

### 3.1 Marriage as a Central Theme

Both novels revolve around the theme of marriage and its significance in the lives of the main characters. In "A Suitable Boy," the protagonist, Lata Mehra, is caught between her desire for personal agency in choosing her life partner and the societal expectation of an arranged marriage. In "Pride and Prejudice," Elizabeth Bennet navigates the complex world of 19th-century England, where marriage is essential for securing a woman's future and social standing.

### 3.2 Societal Expectations and Pressures

In both novels, societal expectations and pressures play a significant role in shaping the characters' decisions and actions. In "A Suitable Boy," Lata's mother, Mrs. Rupa Mehra, is determined to find her daughter a suitable match, reflecting the societal norm of arranged marriages in post-independence India. Similarly, in "Pride and Prejudice," the Bennet family faces social and financial pressures to secure advantageous marriages for their daughters. The novels explore the tension between individual desires and societal conformity.

### 3.3 Protagonists as Independent Thinkers

Lata Mehra and Elizabeth Bennet are portrayed as independent thinkers who question the traditional roles and expectations placed on women in their respective societies. Lata's pursuit of education and her determination to choose her own partner challenge the conventional norms of her time. Elizabeth's

sharp wit and refusal to marry for convenience demonstrate her independence of mind. Both characters embody a spirit of resilience and a desire for meaningful partnerships based on mutual respect and affection.

### **3.4 Romantic Relationships and Conflict**

Both novels feature complex romantic relationships and conflicts. In "A Suitable Boy," Lata's interactions with various suitors, each representing different aspects of Indian society, create a web of romantic intrigue. In "Pride and Prejudice," the relationship between Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy is marked by initial misunderstandings and prejudices that gradually evolve into mutual respect and love. Both novels explore the idea that love should be a fundamental consideration in marriage, challenging the notion of marrying solely for financial or social gain.

### **3.5 Societal Contexts**

While both novels share thematic similarities, they are set in vastly different societal contexts. "A Suitable Boy" is set in post-independence India, reflecting the diverse cultural, religious, and political landscape of the country. The novel delves into the complexities of Indian society as it grapples with the aftermath of colonial rule. In contrast, "Pride and Prejudice" is situated in early 19th-century England, where issues of class, reputation, and social hierarchy are central. Austen's work provides a window into the manners and customs of the English Regency era.

## **4. Conclusion**

In conclusion, "A Suitable Boy" by Vikram Seth and "Pride and Prejudice" by Jane Austen, while separated by geographical and temporal contexts, converge in their exploration of universal themes related to marriage, societal expectations, and the agency of their female protagonists. Both novels offer timeless narratives that delve deep into the human condition, presenting characters who strive for love, independence, and meaningful connections within the confines of their respective societies.

Through Lata Mehra and Elizabeth Bennet, readers witness the evolution of strong-willed, independent thinkers who challenge the norms and expectations placed upon women in their times. These heroines exemplify resilience and a commitment to forging meaningful partnerships based on mutual respect and affection, rather than succumbing to the pressures of arranged marriages or marriages of convenience. Furthermore, both novels emphasize the enduring importance of love as a fundamental consideration in the institution of marriage. They question the wisdom of marrying solely for financial or social gain and highlight the significance of personal compatibility and affection in forming lasting unions.

While "A Suitable Boy" immerses us in the diverse, post-independence India, with its intricate web of cultural, religious, and political complexities, "Pride and Prejudice" provides a window into the manners and customs of early 19th-century England, where issues of class, reputation, and societal hierarchy are central. These distinct settings offer valuable insights into the diverse societies in which these stories unfold. In essence, these two novels serve as timeless reminders that the pursuit of love, independence, and meaningful connections transcends geographical and historical boundaries. Whether in the bustling cities of post-independence India or the rural landscapes of Regency-era England, the themes explored in "A Suitable Boy" and "Pride and Prejudice" continue to resonate with readers worldwide. They stand as enduring classics that invite us to reflect on the enduring struggles and aspirations of individuals in their quest for love and autonomy amidst the constraints and expectations of their respective societies.

## **References**

1. Austen, J. (1813). *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen, Thomas Egerton, Whitehall, London
2. Retrieved from: [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Pride\\_and\\_Prejudice\\_\(1813\)](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Pride_and_Prejudice_(1813))
3. Retrieved from: <https://www.librarything.com/work/7378/summary>
4. Seth, V. (1993). *A Suitable Boy* by Vikram Seth