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**A SUITABLE BOY : SOCIO-RELIGIOUS AND POLITICAL
PERSPECTIVE**



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ABSTRACT

A Suitable Boy is a novel by Vikram Seth, published in 1993, the English language book is one of the longest novels published in a single volume. *A Suitable Boy* is set in a newly post-independence, post-partition India. The *Suitable Boy* is the central theme of the novel by that name. The idea comes from the Indian tradition of arranging marriages for eligible young girls with several points that comprise the ideal match. First, the boy must be of the same religion as the girl. This becomes the main hindrance between Lata, a Hindu, and Kabir, a Muslim. The only way they could have married was to elope and marry without their parents permission. Another consideration is the caste or social standing of the boy and his family.

The theme of *The Suitable Boy* also brings up the conflict between an arranged marriage and a marriage escaped on romantic love. Lata raises the question at the wedding of her sister to Pran Kapoor and concludes that it is good for Savita but possibly not good for her. Mrs. Rupa takes the matter seriously and solicits help from relatives and close friends to keep an eye out for *The Suitable Boy* for Lata. To keep peace, Lata appears to go along with whatever her mother is doing, but she secretly questions whether she will follow her heart and marry Kabir with or without her mother's blessing. Interestingly, Lata eventually selects Haresh Khanna to be her husband, even though she does not love him. She comes to her conclusion, to the horror of her friend Malati, by recognizing religion would eventually create serious problems for her and Kabir and by the feeling that the love of literature would not be enough to sustain a marriage between her and Amit. Lata's reasoning includes the ideas that, eventually she will come to love Haresh, he

will be able to support her comfortably, and she will enjoy stability in her married life. In antithesis to *The Suitable Boy* theme is Malati, Lata's friend, who is a free spirit and given to have relationships with whatever boy turns her fancy. In that regard, the theme of *The Suitable Boy* stands as a hallmark of traditional Indian customs and culture.

The novel follows the story of four families over a period of 18 months, and centres on Mrs. Rupa Mehra's efforts to arrange the marriage of her younger daughter, Lata, to a "suitable boy". Lata is a 19-year-old university student who refuses to be influenced by her domineering mother or opinionated brother, Arun. Her story revolves around the choice she is forced to make between her suitors Kabir, Haresh, and Amit. The novel alternately offers satirical and earnest examinations of national political issues in the period leading up to the first post-Independence national election of 1952 including Hindu-Muslim strife, the status of lower caste peoples such as the jatav, land reforms and the eclipse of the feudal princes and landlords, academic affairs, abolition of the Zamindari system, family relations and a range of further issues of importance to the characters.

KEY WORDS

Intolerance, partition, intrigues, land reforms, abolition