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# The Suitable Boy and the long shadow of the British on the Indian subcontinent

Prof Anjali Raman

Department of English, Shivaji College. Delhi University, New Delhi, India

[anjalipanki@gmail.com](mailto:anjalipanki@gmail.com)

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## Abstract

*The paper explores the Suitable Boy's( written in1993) relevance to the current day politics of the country. It puts forward a case that the country's march to nationalistic belligerence is not without drawbacks. Writing in 1993 , Seth did not have the hindsight which we have in 2025 , Seth writes about post-Independence India of the 50's with the insight of the 90's, but we see further and see that the path which India would take post 2014, till 2014 India was a secular nation but post 2014 , with the establishment of the non-Congress government at the center, India has spiraled on a downward path of over religiosity. In the 50's India both the prominent communities are still fighting, but these are restricted to the margins of the population. In contemporary India, religion has become a tool to consolidate power, keep the masses in subservience to the oligarchs who in turn spend big money on elections, either to bribe the electorate or to buy up the legislators once the elections are over. It is alleged that the Election Commission is hand in glove with the ruling party in rigging elections, making fake voters IDs, getting voters from other states who vote to tilt the scale in favor of the ruling party. In the 90s when Vikram Seth was writing such corruption was not widespread, In the novel, the complaints of the ruling elite against the Congress party are puerile at best, at worst show a deep resistance to lower caste emancipation, and a phobia against the Gandhi- Nehru family for implementing land reforms and giving equality to all castes under the constitution which again was a legacy of the British. The novel deals in themes of elections, land reforms, caste and religious politics at a time when oligarchy was not prevalent and money power of the rich could not influence the elections as it does today.*

## INTRODUCTION

The governance of the present era is a contrast to the Nehruvian 50s and the pre-independence era, which was a more innocent era. No doubt, communal flare ups were plenty still an

atmosphere of hope pervades the 50's under the leadership of the first PM. The contrast to the bitterness of current day political life cannot be more evident. Those times have been derided as colonial, yet they seem better than the corruption

and poverty of the contemporary era. We have overlooked the contribution of British to the introduction and maintenance of institutions such as the administrative services, the judiciary, the Election Commission, the central universities and the railways. In the novel we explore a time when all these institutions are running impartially as the British influence still exuded through them

*The Suitable Boy* is replete with instances of politics all around. The new nation is run by the Grand old party of A.O. Hume. Seth explores the ambivalent attitude of the protagonists to the Congress. Most of the action revolves around the Congress party which is the cement that keeps the country together. Mixed attitudes of the people are quite prevalent to the Congress as seen in the novel. Now that the British have gone a lot of government positions are up for grabs, the ICS has now become the IAS, IPS, IFS. The administration plays an important role in stopping riots in Mishri mandi. (Seth, 2023a)

The ethos of the book is secular although riots are a dime a dozen in the book. They take place at the drop of a hat. Mishri mandi is the site for the first riot. The Raja of Marh is the patron of the Shiva temple, which becomes the bone of contention amongst the two communities. Seth paints the Raja as an alcoholic who is too fond of women like Saeeda Begum, the Muslim courtesan. The old aristocracy like the Nawab of Baitar and the Raja of Marh are powerless against the laws of the post-Independence govt which has forced them to give up their lands in the Zamindaari Bill. The Raja of Marh and Nawab join hands to save their ancestral lands from the Nehruvian socialism of Mahesh Kapoor who has drafted a bill which will see the transfer of land from the landed zamindars like the Nawab and the Raja to the landless peasantry represented by Kechheru. These two sworn religious enemies' team up their resources to engage the best lawyer's services to defeat the bill in the Supreme Court. Here, they lose the case but we get a glimpse into the workings of the judiciary. The role of precedents is particularly illuminating. "the rule of precedent has been adopted from English jurisprudence into the Indian constitution." (drishtijudiciary.com, 2023) G.N Bannerjee (the Lawyer for the Raja and the Nawab) argues through British and American

precedents (Hodge vs Queen and Schechter Poultry Corp v United States) that taking over lands by the state was unconstitutional as it was an overreach of the executive powers of the government. The junior lawyers are impressed by the barristers, the arguments back and forth "was indeed the clang of sword on shield" As is mentioned in page 783 of the second volume of the novel.

The presence /absence of the British looms large over the novel. Kishen Chand Seth the CMO of Brahmpur lives in huge colonial bungalow, he has very decided ideas on flowers, he has decided those roses, canna, bougainvillea, petunias are bureaucratic flowers, and he has banned them at the Prince of Wales Medical college. The names of the institutions are still British, but were subsequently changed by Indian governments, the latest name change being the Lady Willingdon swimming pool in Delhi Gymkhana club. Kishen Chand Seth does not help the poor or weak in any way, in fact he does whack a poor beggar with his cane, he also gives his car very reluctantly in stampede emergency He is the very typical of the Indian upper class which do nothing to satisfy the hunger pangs of the poor near them but were quick to blame Nehru's Socialism which looked out for the upliftment of the masses. Kishen Chand Seth believes in ruling his daughter and grandchildren with an iron hand and is the reason the stricter Mehras are spared the fate of the more liberal Kapoors. Mahesh Kapoor like many politicians of his time is well versed in Urdu and English, he is unable to read Hindi and his secular outlook influences his children much to the chagrin of his pious wife. His son, Maan Kapoor falls for the wiles of the Muslim nautch girl Saeeda Bai, stabs his best friend Feroz, the Nawab's son, in mistaken rage and his father bears the punishment by losing the Muslim votes and suffering an electoral loss. This flirtation too is reminiscent of the British fascination for nautch girls. (Neville Pran, 2009) The nautch girls sang and danced in courts of the nawabs were patronized by the British and the rajahs, they were invited to add flavor to gatherings and often were patrons of the musical arts. Maan Kapoor falls for Saeeda Bai in one such Holi gathering, enthralled by her Urdu couplets and her musical voice. Saeeda Bai runs a proper establishment with her troupe of singers

and her daughter, Tasneen. Tasneen is her dark secret, the outside world thinks that Tasneen is her sister, when in reality she is her daughter, a product of rape, fathered by the respectable Nawab of Baiter. This dark secret comes back to haunt Maan, Feroz (the Nawab's son) and Saeeda Bai when Maan attacks his close friend Feroz because he suspects them of having a clandestine affair behind his back. Feroz is informed by Saeeda that the object of his affections, Tasneen is a sister to him as they share the same father, the Nawab. The Nawab who in his pastime studies Macaulay but is only superficially influenced by the secular British and reverts to his community and turns his back on the secular Congress candidate and conspires to make him lose the elections to Waris. The novel sees a reconciliation of sorts when the Muslim nawabzaada (princelings) and the Hindu Maan and his father once again renew their ties with each other, but much water has flown under the bridge as Maan's mother dies of heartbreak at the thought of her favorite son's dalliance with a Muslim courtesan and him subsequently stabbing Feroz in fit of misplaced jealousy. Saeeda Bai plays fast and loose with Maan's emotions. She rejects him when he turns up at an important religious gathering of Shia Muslims, we can see her religious prejudices coming to the fore, as she organizes a musical wailing for Moharam but Hindus such as her lover Maan are not welcome, neither are the Sunni Muslims. The punctilious courtesan is not so fussy when it comes to her lovers, Maan and the Raja, both of whom are Hindus. Seth's secular credentials come to the fore when he makes Mahesh Kapoor, a secular politician more likeable than L. N Aggarwal who represents the anti-Muslim sentiments inside the Congress which J.L. Nehru's popularity kept at bay. Later these elements broke away from the Congress and formed the Jan Sangh, which was the precursor to the current day BJP. L.N Aggarwal is shown vindictively trying to take over Nawab's Baiter house through the Custodian of evacuee property. A post formed in post-partition India, the Custodian had the right to take over a property when its owners had migrated to Pakistan. Baiter house is saved by the Chief Minister S.S Sharma, a Brahmin with close ties to the Nawab.

Ishq, the sarangi player in *the Suitable Boy* is respected and given an allowance by Saeeda bai. He is insulted by Ustaad Majeed Khan for being part of the entourage of Saeeda bai, a nautch girl. He reluctantly leaves her employment when arthritis twists his fingers beyond redemption and he can play no longer. But finds a new career as a singer with the very man who had earlier insulted him.

The influence of the British is also seen over the judiciary. The remnants of the British judiciary are present in the 50s, in fact the now Indian judiciary is still a formidable and reliable institution in the 50s. The judiciary has been on a downhill since the last 30 years, and rampant casteism has resulted in predominantly upper caste judges punishing lower caste undertrials and minorities, in the *Suitable Boy* which depicts the 50's India, the corrupt practices of the lower district courts is not to be seen. The advocates like G N Banerjee rein in the judges with their confidence and oratory. Government interference in the judiciary is minimal. (Seth, 2023b) Even rich and influential spoilt brats feel the force of the judiciary, we see how Mann Kapoor must spend considerable time in jail even though he is the son of an influential Congress politician. This forms a contrast to judges today who give bail easily for hit and run cases, homicides and murders but give no bail for so called seditious speech when it's against the government. The similarity with the mother country is striking even though ideologies are different in both countries, here in India right wing prevails and in Britain left wing fascism and people are being jailed over hurtful words, when they take the government to task over deteriorating law and order, boat immigration, machete gangs and murder of innocent white Christian children.

In the novel, favorite right-wing ideas such as the disbanding of Congress party are discussed ad nauseum, ideas which are impracticable, the ideas of the sainted Mahatma who didn't chase power but believed more in spirituality. A contradiction in terms because why should the freedom fighters seek independence if not to govern oneself. Mahatma Gandhi is much maligned by the ultra-Hindu party because his ideas of reconciliation with the Muslims are derided. Simplistic notions of blaming the partition on him are bandied about in daily

political discourse. The current problems within Israel persist because the Palestinian people did not accept the partition of 1948, such may have been the fate of India had leaders such as Gandhi, Nehru, Jinnah not accepted the partition. Though things did not work out so well for the Hindus of Sindh who are a persecuted minority where young girls are regularly kidnapped and converted. But such is the fate of all minorities in Islamic countries be they Copts of Egypt, or Yezidis of Iraq or the genocide of Alawites and Christians of Syria and many others. These realities of radical Islam scare nations who have opted for secularism till now.

Justice Chatterjee of the Calcutta high court embodies the mixed feelings of the intelligentsia to the return of the British back to Britain. Although he personally benefits from the British leaving, he is elevated to the position of a judge, he misses the learned and upright British judges and tries to follow their footsteps. His antipathy to Subhas Chandra Bose is discussed openly. He doesn't have the typical Bengali reverence to Subhas Chandra Bose the others exhibit. He disapproves of the leader's close ties with Hitler and the Germans, his cozying up to the Japanese was not appreciated by the Burmese where the Japs perpetrated many atrocities so Justice Chatterjee is relieved at the early demise of Bose and his hard-core nationalist sentiments. His family echo his pro -British sentiments and tolerant sexual values which are taboo amongst the traditional Mehras, with Meenakshi Chatterjee going a step further by having a clandestine affair with Billy Irani.(Seth, 2023a)

Churchill who through his racist comments became the favorite punching bag of Indians is not far from wrong when he decries that Indians will revert to casteism once the British leave and the rulers will tax the very air that Indians breathe. Such premonitions are not far from wrong considering the path on which new India is going. Especially concerning is the lack of freedom of expression against the stranglehold of the powerful. The prevailing fear is that the constitution, which safe guards us will be amended to suit the ruling class. The British started drafting the Indian constitution from 1935 for they could foresee the clash of the castes was prevalent and an impending reality which couldn't be ignored, let it be said that the

British introduced democratic principles to India. Seth depicts a very lively parliamentary tradition in the debates of the legislative assembly of Purvi Pradesh, with the spirited Begum Abida Khan frequently clashing with the Home minister L.N Aggarwal over the loss of Muslim lives in the riots and over Hindi imposition and marginalizing of Urdu post-independence. The language debate continues to this day with the southern states rightfully resisting the 3-language formula which would force Hindi down their throats to the detriment of other scientific subjects

In the 90s when Seth is writing parliamentary democracy was at its full bloom. The mood of the nation was still optimistic, secular principles were still enshrined in the hearts of the leaders. The steady deterioration of which started at the time of Narasimha Rao and strengthened the communal forces and reached a peak with the demolition of the Babri Masjid. Two major riots take place in the novel which are very realistically captured. Unlike the current regime, which does not compile data on major events, we have late Mughal and British records which attest that Mishri Mandi was a site for communal riots.

The zamindari abolition bill and the socialism inherent in it is discussed at length in *the Suitable Boy*. Kechheru, the lower caste peasant has a tough life, irrigating and cultivating land which does not belong to him, and Rasheed, the communist is prevented from signing over his land to him by the diktats of the joint family. The other Islamists of his village often bully him for missing Namaz, we see how in this set up religion flourishes where each believer thinks it's his bounden duty to mind the other's business, make him keep the Roza fast and say prayers five times. The individual choice is rejected in such a scenario. Rasheed also finds himself sidelined for supporting the lower caste peasant. Kechheru's fate and thousands like himself fate hangs in balance as Nehru and Mahesh Kapoor try to give them a more equitable life though the land reform bills of the time.

The struggles that Nehru underwent to keep the communal harmony in the country and keep the Congress united remind one of the struggles which the Congress undergoes to this day .(Nehru, 1986) Current day opposition leaders are stigmatized and the whole media

propaganda painted the most prominent one in a poor light. The bias shown against the Congress during Nirbhaya and Anna movement years show the double speak in the middle-class Indian mind which has benefited the most with becoming the ruling dispensation to which most benefits accrued be it the PSU jobs which Nehru created or university jobs or the IAS which are a legacy of the British the rapid trajectory of growth which Narasihma Rao's open liberalization led. Current day policies threaten to overturn institutions on its head. The space for a liberal arts university is being overrun by hardliners which thought control the populace as Orwell would say strangulating free thinking. (Orwell George, 1949) Lack of academic freedom and withdrawal of funding of the institutes of higher education will lead to the disbanding of universities, But the very same middle class does not vote for Congress just as the Muslim populace of Baitar did not vote for Mahesh Kapoor even though they would be direct beneficiaries if the zamindari act was enacted. Nehru is reviled by the Indian right wing to the extent that it has become a joke. Contrasting the India of the 50s to the India of today one is painfully aware of the general fall in electoral morality, so long as the Congress was in power, we could have called ourselves as the largest democracy in the world.

Institutions such as the judiciary under advocates such as Banerjee and honest Advocate Generals may inspire confidence but it's the judges such as Justice Chatterjee and a few old Britishers who remained on India till a few years after the British left, who are the pillars of the judiciary in the novel. They passed judgment based on their conscience and morality. As the influence of the British wanes the Indian judiciary like the IAS, IPS, IFS sinks into deeper morass of corruption. It becomes a shadow of what it was in the days of the British, when it was known for its political neutrality. As taxes increase, especially on food commodities and essentials which was avoided as long as socialist principles of Nehru remained, but with the rise of the opposite ideology which supports cronyism have Winston Churchill's words come true? (The Churchill Project, 2015) He claimed that India will sink into oppression of one class by the other, where the rulers will tax the very air which people

breathe. Much like today where the salaried class and the poor are being taxed but the corporate responsibility and taxation has lessened to the extent that they are hardly providing any jobs to the unemployed either. Winston Churchill in his weaker moments says , "Power will go to the hands of rascals, rogues, freebooters.....they will have sweet tongues and silly hearts. They will fight amongst themselves for power and India will be lost in political squabbles. A day would come when even water and air would be taxed in India." ( Churchill Winston n d )He was able to predict that independence would be accompanied with a blood bath, the events of the time bore out his words, partly because of the hurry in which the plans were drawn and the two countries partitioned. He had close relations with Nehru as well, "I have worked very hard with Nehru. I told him he should be the light of Asia, to all those millions how they can shine out, instead of accepting the darkness of Communism" (The Churchill Project, 2015). And again in 1955 he says, " Nehru is a great light, and a greater light than Gautam Buddha" (Aneja Rajendra, 2021) Perhaps he was impressed by Nehru's attempts to maintain social harmony amongst the Hindus and Muslims. *The Suitable Boy* gives us an insight into the efforts Nehru put in to maintain peace and harmony amongst these two communities. Nehru finds ill-treatment of minorities in Pakistan no excuse to make them second class citizens in India. Nehru spoke against communal enmity in every speech. The letters Vikram Seth uses in his *Suitable Boy* were the actual ones Nehru wrote to the Chief ministers (Seth, 2023c).The theme of communal harmony has lost its resonance amongst the voters of India today, as they vote only for hardline parties, and some of the electoral victories have been rigged to suit the ruling party which has lost its sheen. Lower castes are voting according to caste dynamics but these votes are a mere blip in the electoral machinery where these votes get suppressed as newer and newer methods are employed to rig elections, such as duplicate voter IDs . It is even alleged that cadre from Gujrat will be made to vote in Bengal as they have fake addresses in Bengal. Secondly a single building may be used as the address of a thousand fake voters. Voting turnout is hidden and it mysteriously increases the next day with

the addition of millions of fake votes. The contrast with the Congress era is even more stark as India descends into one party rule. Indians have surrendered to totalitarian government easily. Democracy was imposed from outside by the British. As they say, what is bred in the bones will not wear out in the flesh, so the fundamental character of Indians was casteist and hierarchical. And with the disappearance of the British things again go back to how they were for centuries. So long as Congress was in power things were fine. Congress which was started by an Englishman and steeped in democratic values was a strong force, democracy continued in India but with the weakening of the Congress through negative propaganda, democracy too is breathing its last in India. The last secular and formidable institution the armed forces too is less secular than it was. The ruling dispensation has abandoned Nehruvian socialism for oligarchy, where income inequality is the worst in the world and according to a recent study by Blume on start-ups says that only about 10 percent of Indians have spending capabilities. (Pai et al., 2025) And over a billion people have no spending power. The numbers speak for themselves. (Jha Anuja, 2025) They are a step away from poverty, and with narcissistic leaders at the helm of affairs in India has resulted in only the sham of democracy being enacted to keep up a facade for the western world.

As the Indian system becomes fraught with corruption, the one thing on which the common man had faith has lost its sanctity, that is the electoral process itself, where daily chicanery is coming to light such as deletion /addition of lakhs of fake voters to the voter list, which begs the question, are we really capable of running a country fairly? Election Commission has suggested linking voter cards to Aadhaars to eliminate the problem of fake voters. It remains to be seen how successful this will turn out.

The pro and anti-British attitude is explored through Arun Mehra, his in-laws, Varun and Lata on the other hand are anti-British So the 2 younger ones get along better, Varun was punished once by his English headmaster for desecrating the Bible, and Arun reminds him time and again of his dastardly act. Justice Chatterjee doesn't like the over nationalist Subhash Chandra Bose, Justice Chatterjee who

never wanted to be a judge in the first place accepted the role when he was told to be arbiter of right and wrong.

Zareer Masani has argued persuasively that it is blatantly wrong of the Bengali leftist historians along with their continental counterparts to blame Churchill for the famine. Churchill was also anti-independence because he considered the Congress to be a representative to Hindu Brahminism, this view of the Congress may surprise some as in current day Indian politics it's the BJP which has positioned itself as the pro-Brahmin party

Churchill felt that independence to India would result in fracturing the unity that the British had precariously built amongst the various castes, the north south, east and west and amongst the Hindus and Muslims. Churchills critical views of Islam are well known, also known are his criticism of Hinduism and some of its superstitious practices and caste rules.

An intellectual discussion on Winston Churchill finds itself in the section on the Chatterjees, Winston Churchill, a scapegoat of the Bengal intellectuals who love to point fingers on him for the Bengal famine, when it was the grain merchants, shop keepers and other Marwaris who were to blame for hoarding the grain. Some have squarely stated that the Hindu Marwari merchants' supporters of the Congress party also sought to embarrass the ruling Muslim league Bengal government which they detested and hence felt justified in hoarding grain. (Masani Zareer, 2021b) The famine took place when the Japanese had invaded Burma and had warships on the Bay of Bengal, going to the extent of bombing Calcutta. Now it was impossible to escape the axis powers and divert European grain to Calcutta, Churchill even asked Roosevelt to divert some American ships to Calcutta. Seizing of grain ships in the Bay of Bengal also contributed to grain shortage as did cyclone, flooding. As did the policy for reserving rations for the army, which caused some shortages to the civilians. (Masani Zareer, 2021a)

Partly at fault was Subhas Chandra Bose's flirtation with the Japanese and with his support of Japan and mobilizing his army under the Japanese flag against Indian and British troops. (Masani Zareer, 2021b)

Some of these happenings are mentioned in passing in *the Suitable Boy*, when Seth mentions Churchill tangentially. Although in view of the present-day Islamization of Britain some of the British currently do believe that it would have been better to have surrendered to the Germans and be speaking German than to have been destroyed by low birth rate and Islamization of their country by the left's alliance with the Islamist ideology, which has led to the boat invasion and the grooming gang scandal for which contemporary Britain is best known. The thought police have struck in the mother country as people are jailed over memes. The King of Britain has shown no inclination to be the "defender of the faith." as is his title. Ramdan Prayers are being held in Windsor Castle and the monarchy is totally ignoring Lent. For some patriotic British the monarchy has outlived its relevance in the 21<sup>st</sup> century with these actions and has proved itself out of touch with the popular sentiment. Christianity the religion which held Europe and Britain together is losing ground to more aggressive religions. The revival of Christianity should be the aim of the monarchy and the Anglican church. But churches are getting converted to mosques at a rapid pace. In the grip of the globalists, governments are allowing the Islamic invasion of fighting age males from across the seas. As misplaced political correctness feelings of the majority are being ignored to accommodate the minorities. The Islamic invasion of Britain and Europe and the declining population of the indigenous Europeans is a cause for worry for those looking for guidance to these countries as beacons of humanity. Although Lata chooses Haresh over Amit Chatterjee one can sense in her wish to spite her brother, who is in favor of Amit. Arun Mehra is portrayed as a snob is the most likely to succeed as he embodies western values, and has an entrepreneurial spirit. He is at home in the Western culture of Calcutta. Lata is traditional and chaste, her flirtation with Kabir is never serious for her because of his religion. Maan's entanglement with Saedaa Bai and his imprisonment and the death of his mother through disappointment also serve as a cautionary tale for Lata to stay away from mixed marriages. Although she gets good grades in her English undergraduate course and acts in an

English play, Amit is too westernized for her. As a heroine her feelings fall short on empathy unlike her Masauji's daughter who is deeply moved at the sight of a young British girl's grave whose life was cut short in her prime. Lata is surprised that her cousin shows so much feeling at the grave of a young British girl who was shot down by a cannon ball when she was 19. Lata comes across as almost cold here and this prefigures her rejection of Amit Chatterjee, though they make a perfect match in terms of shared interests such as poetry, perhaps the westernized Chatterjees are too much for her middle-class morality. (Seth, 2023c) Though she studies English Literature, she is unable to appreciate the nuances of the British rule and her simplistic anti-British attitude is revealed when she reads Tennyson's patriotic poem, *The Relief of Lucknow*.

The closest to the British way of life are the Chaterjees, with their flair for poetry and limericks, their clubbing, their flair in piano playing, Seth informs us that Calcutta was full of old pianos the British left which they were unable to cart overseas. In addition, the judiciary were full of British judges who knew the ins and outs of the laws they had brought from England. One such judge is Trevor Harris, a mentor of Chaterjee . Harris selects Chaterjee as the most capable replacement. Regretfully for Justice Chaterjee, he misses the old judges and decries their departure from the land. In the Nehruvian 50's the courts were not corrupt, and the ends of Justice was often served. A mention must be made of the state of the British judiciary today. They have decided to make a law that minorities will be given lighter sentences than the indigenous Brits. A two-tier system is being practiced by the British judiciary and soon it will be made a law. An unconstitutional move which should be challenged. Looking at leftist judges siding with the perpetrators of grooming gangs one can clearly see the problems of British judiciary is even worse than the corruption practiced here, in India. Ironically the Labour government actively encouraging replacement of its indigenous population with Islamic immigrants from all over.

The night life of Calcutta is another remnant of the old British way of life, Arun Mehra, Lata's westernized brother , a dynamic businessman

knows that it's the foreign investment which the country needs, so he hosts foreigners regularly, he wines and dines them with his beautiful and accomplished wife Meenakshi and her even more musical sister Kuku, who ultimately gets engaged to the German, Hans. Their parties are the life and soul of Calcutta. In the north, polo playing, and hunting or shikaar are the past time of the Rajahs and the zamindar class like Feroz and Maan Kapoor. The SDO of Rudhia hates to hunt the wolves and only hunts reluctantly when he forced to by his seniors. The SDO is untainted, completely honest, a product of the old British public schools which were built for British ORs (Other Rankers) but later became elite schools where wealthy Indians sent their children post-independence. These schools produced an honest lot of administrative officers. Convents and missionary schools did their bit to inculcate values of social service and honesty. Hunting, polo playing, tennis and swimming, these were the past-times of much maligned British. Fox hunting, a cruel game is still practiced by the royalty in England though it has lost its appeal in contemporary Britain. Unlike the other women in the novel who are afraid of monkeys, Lata loves to feed the rhesus monkeys which she does very fairly trying to feed the undernourished mothers and babies rather than the huge alpha males. The rhesus monkey is found in the forests of India but now is less prevalent. The book ends with Lata feeding the monkeys and the train moving on.

The ubiquitous presence of monkeys reminds one of the threats to miles of forest in Jammu & Kashmir, Uttarakhand, and in the Andamans, in Chhattisgarh to accommodate commercial interests of corporates point to a very different direction which the current day regime has taken. In contrast to the more enlightened Congress party which sought to protect these forests and the wildlife in it, through various conservation acts. Though the egalitarian policies of the Congress would see this upper class lose much of its power only to be replaced by a belligerent middle class which too is being pushed back to poverty by the very people they voted for. This downgrade has occurred since the Congress started losing elections and a more casteist, divisive and ruthless politics has come into play,

where wealth was redistributed to benefit the corporate sector.

Another aspect which is a reminder of the success of Macaulay's education is the flourishing English department in Brahmipur university and at Stephens'. The department organizes poetry competitions, and a fair amount of talent is seen, internal politics delays Pran Kapoor's promotion but he gets it eventually. Pran Kapoor suffers from asthma sometimes is unable to take class when he has a severe attack. Merit plays part in securing appointments at the Brahmipur university and highly acclaimed scholars such as Kabir Durrani's father and Dr Ramaswamy are mentioned as being fellows of the Royal Society for Science. The Brahmipur university is free from the kind of corruption seen in India 75 yrs after independence, university is in a sad state of decline with money exchanging hands for university positions, dilution of syllabus to make the English Department one focusing only on Indian texts in translation to the exclusion of the canonical writers like Shakespeare or Dickens. To be fair, academia in the west too trod the unfamiliar path where overspecialization led to questions on the nature of language itself. The modern theories unfortunately led to a divorce from reality which in turn has led to the left's love affair with Islamists which has made the west a ticking time bomb of Islamist gang wars, stabbing, rapes etc. In India, the infiltration was of a different kind, a revival of Brahminism, an imposition of Hindi and Sanskrit has come to the fore. An attempt is being made to marginalize English and remove its official status, all credit to south Indian states like Tamil Nadu which are fighting Hindi imposition. The English Department is a misnomer because the teaching of English Literature taken a backseat with focus being on literature in translation, or anything but the cannons, even this diversion is acceptable to the older lot of policy makers but what is not acceptable is the bypassing and marginalization of the cannons and an overhaul of the education system. The older system was a rigorous one with BA, MA, M.Phil., is now being disbanded and replaced by light and non-rigorous courses teaching the art of happiness, yoga, communication and culture with a marked emphasis on extolling and singing blind praises

to archaic Indian know-how. An emphasis on acceptance and not on critical examination is being encouraged in the academia. Research too is encouraged on archaic and controversial books like the Manusmriti, or the Indian epics, wonderful texts though they be, they do not come within the purview of a so-called English course, and now the end product of the research is to sing encomiums and not critically examine these ancient Indian texts.

The attack on minority Christian colleges such as Stephen's continues, the next step is to fill them up with teachers from the opposite cadre, which would make a mockery of their unique Christian culture. *The Suitable Boy* harkens back to the days when the old Stephanians are having a reunion where they enjoy themselves thoroughly, in the backdrop of contemporary politics over the Delhi University having a tussle with every Christian institution preventing them from exercising their autonomy about the input of students or teachers. University is vetting the new lot of appointments thoroughly only to retain those who subscribe to certain communal ideology. Some may even blame the Congress, as the party is the favorite punching bag of the intellectuals, saying that the party is partly responsible for this mess as they created a large middle class by giving undeserved pay hikes in the pay commissions to a class of people who did nothing to better the downtrodden. The new middle class only filled their coffers. This is the same middle class which has proved itself devoid of values and indifferent to merit in the academia. This class promptly gave bribes under the table to those who could be signatory to jobs, sinecures and pensions. The multiple increments for Ph.D., M.Phil., made teaching a much-coveted job, which was not so earlier, Pran Kapoor in the 1950s cannot afford snazzy vehicles in his tenure unlike the professors of today. The fault is not with the top leadership of the Congress party which has borne the brunt of xenophobic attacks because one of them has an Italian connection, but in the character of the people who have a grab it all attitude and do not believe in sharing the pie.

The religious versus secular tug of war is prevalent in the *Suitable Boy*, where Mahesh Kapoor is secular, but his wife and other relatives are not, Pran Kapoor certainly follows in his

footsteps, his is a secular vision like his brother Maan and their father, Mahesh. The English department of Brahmipur university is described in great details, Pran Kapoor is sick of the head of departments obsession with T.S. Eliot and calls it the sacred cow of Indian intellectuals. But at least the department functions independently oblivious to outside interference, unlike nowadays where it is the reactionary forces which are selecting the syllabus. In *the Suitable Boy*, the internal committee decides whether Ulysses will be taught or *Dubliners*. *Twelfth night* is staged in which Lata is Olivia and Kabir acts as Malvolio, though nephew Bhaskar prefers the enactment of Ramayan.

Lastly the train which takes Lata from Brahmipur to Calcutta and back is another marvel of the British empire. The whole nation was connected from the east to south west frontier province, from the north to the south through the railway grid, which ran on time, and provided a tolerably comfortable journey to its passengers. More than 75 years after independence the railways have deteriorated because of the government's inability to employ manpower in a short-sighted attempt to cut costs at the expense of human life. In the 2020s, stampedes and fatal accidents are a regular occurrence on the Indian railways reminding the old timers of how much more efficiently the British ran the railways.

### CONCLUSION

The Nawab of Baitar reads Macaulay but the secular writings touch him only superficially as he allows a Muslim candidate, Waris to defeat the secular Congress one, Mahesh Kapoor. The book depicts the charged communal atmosphere reminding us these are the preoccupations of contemporary politics. A few years post-independence, the assembly elections at Darbaria are held in a free and fair manner as the British influence was still predominant. Those benign times are a stark reminder to the corrupt practices of today and the contrast jars and saddens. Transparent and just elections are a thing of the past in India as lacs of voters are added suddenly by the Election Commission. In an unbiased recreation of the 50's India we see the universities, judiciary, the administrative services, the Election commission working impartially. And in the realities of present-day

India, we see the degradation of these institutions. Their capture is complete, so in the light of these current day realities the British Raj casts a long, dark shadow on the deplorable situation in India today.

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