



MUSICAL JOURNEY IN THE NOVEL OF NAMITA DEVIDAYAL THE MUSIC ROOM & VIKARAM SETH AN EQUAL MUSIC

K. Veni* & Dr. R. Rajavelu**

* Research Scholar (Ph.D), Assistant Professor of English, Arulmigu Palani Andavar
College of Arts and Culture, Palani, Tamilnadu

** Tagore Arts and Science College, Pondicherry

Cite This Article: K. Veni & Dr. R. Rajavelu, “Musical Journey in the Novel of Namita Devidayal the Music Room & Vikaram Seth an Equal Music”, International Journal of Scientific Research and Modern Education, Volume 7, Issue 1, Page Number 61-65, 2022.

Copy Right: © IJSRME, 2022 (All Rights Reserved). This is an Open Access Article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Abstract:

Namita Devidayal's *The Music Room* makes her musical journey with her master Dhondutai who is connoisseur in the field of music. In this novel she reveals her own experience about music as well as the relationship between guru and shishya. Despite her intensely personalized relationship with music, Devidayal writes on music theory with scholarly acuteness, combined critical awareness of the grammar with sophisticated taste. She learnt Gharana from her music master. *The Music Room* portrays the life and history of her guru Dhondutai. She was the last living disciple of the legendary Alladiya Khan, and the famous singer Kesarbai Kerkar. “An Equal music” by Vikram Seth is a classic in every sense of the word. It is a novel of passionate individuals who are dedicated to music. It is a beautiful blending of human passionate love with musical atmosphere, fully changed with the fire of emotion. Both of the writer explicit an importance of the music through their novel.

Key Words: Connoisseur, Gharana

Namita Devidayal is an Indian English writer who has written three award-winning novels such as *The Sixth String of Vilayat Khan*, *The Music Room*, and *Aftertaste*. She has been in the journalist field and associated with *The Times of India* for many years. She also held the post of co-director with *Times Litfest* in Mumbai. Apart from this, she is a trained Indian classical singer who graduated from Princeton located in the United States of America. *The Music Room* is a prominent book written by Namita Devidayal that is based on the background of teaching, history, music, and learning. The story revolves around a 10-year girl who visits a Bombay neighbourhood that was filled with girls and prostitutes. Initially, the young girl is inhibitive to enter the room but enters it and found that there was a reputed music teacher who was teaching to the girls.

On the other hand, the novel *Aftertaste* written by Namita was based on a business family that was obsessed with money and materialistic things. The family values are based on the matriarch in which all the members of the family are treated like puppet strings. Her contribution to Indian English writing enriches the Indian literature background and develops a strong base of Indian English Writing.

The novel, *Sixth String of Vilayat Khan* by Namita Devidayal highlights the story of great musician Vilayat Khan and his love for music. The novel begins with the description of the early years of Vilayat Khan when he used to accompany his father in the musical concerts from six years of age. It was believed by the great artists of the olden days that the children must learn the art of music even before they learn to speak or develop any motor skills of reading or writing. This is how music was inducted into the bloodstream of young artists that influenced them in everything they do later. The training in music from childhood allowed the beginners to choose music as their first language and establishes a direct connection with the universe by reminiscing the music of birds, rivers, and silence. As a creative write, Namita Devidayal dreams often about the childhood to recollect and write the same in her fictionalizing events. Sometimes these yearnings become sources for readers to learn more about the other writings. The chosen writer for study portrays the lives of her characters adding her personal experiences.

They can achieve a subtle and judicious blend of the autobiographical and the fictive. For a creative artist personal life offers rich potential for expression Namita Devidayal is a rare writer who has used some of her experiences in fiction and in doing so, achieved artistic equilibrium. For instance the story of *The Music Room* begins with Devidayal visiting her teacher Dhondutai for the first time as an impetuous teenager, uninterested in music and blissfully ignorant of the possibilities of her sonorous bass voice. Before long, more than the real music itself, she is captivated by *The Music Room*, with its shrine to miniature gods and goddesses, and by the people who live there- Dhondutai and her ancient mother, Ayi. Further, the journey to Kennedy Bridge from the protected, upper-middle class life of her family brings her close to a host of strange characters – pimps, women of ill-repute beggars. They were people from another world altogether.

The Music Room depicts these different social spheres, each of them informed by its intense emotional history, as something immeasurably rich and alive. In the dingy little Kennedy Bridge apartment, young Devidayal is expose to values and beliefs, which, with her privilege and liberal upbringing, she finds difficult to accept. She is fascinated by her teacher's selfless devotion to art even in the face of poverty and social

disapproval, although she can never aspire to this kind of artistic self forgetfulness herself. The Music Room thus becomes a self-distancing as well as self-revealing space. Increasingly, as with most musicians who decide not to make a living out of music, Devidayal started living music in other, intangible ways. Growing up through the years with weekly music lessons-sometimes even being forced to attend classes by her mother – she felt the ragas growing into her soul until there naturally came a time when she could never outgrow that music.

Despite her promising voice – she is lovingly called “little Kesarbai” by connoisseurs – she chose to go up to Princeton and, later on, to become a journalist. Yet, coming back to the “timeless” music room, after spending two years in the US, left her feeling utterly reassured, “like going back to your childhood room many years later, and finding your teddy bear perched exactly where you left it, with its left eye still hanging loose”. As she grew older, this same room afforded her some time out from daily life, a respite from being a wife, a mother or a reporter. Despite her intensely personalized relationship with music, Devidayal writes on music theory with scholarly acuteness, combining critical awareness of the grammar with a sophisticated taste. Alongside anecdotes, she quietly includes sections on the history of Indian classical music, and its sociological evolution. A theoretical discussion of the religious origins of Hindustani Music, for instance, is sharpened by the sudden diversion into the Dagar brother’s soulful performance at a concert organized in Shivaji Park after the Babri Masjid riots. In Devidayal’s book, one finds the long-awaited account of listening, learning and growing up with classical music in the Seventies. If veterans like Kumar Prasad Mukherji and Sheila Dhar have given us glimpses of “the lost world” of Hindustani music, Devidayal looks at the residue of that vanished time. She examines the ruins of the Great Tradition unsparingly, often questioning its eccentric ethos. Dhondutai’s fierce celibacy versus her guru Kesarbai’s flamboyant lifestyle is one such oddity.

Namita Devidayal is an adamant follower of tradition and culture. According to her tradition and adventure are both contained within the ethical universe of this music even in the 21st century? Some of these traditions are still guarded by artists of the Old World and revived by their more oddly imaginative pupils. It has been proved with her relationship with her guru Dhondutai. Dhondutai and Namita become such a guru-shishya pair, when, in the most sublime moment of the book, they sing raga Sukhiya Bilawal before the goddess at the Mahalaxmi Temple in Kolhapur, on an ordinary morning. Just as Alladiya Khan and his sons, Bhurji and Manji, used to in some long-forgotten past.

When Namita is ten years old, her mother takes her to Kennedy Bridge, a seamy neighborhood in Bombay, home to hookers and dance girls. There, in a cramped one-room apartment lives Dhondutai, the last living disciple of two of the finest Indian classical singers of the twentieth century: the legendary Alladiya Khan and the great songbird Kesarbai Kerkar. Namita begins to learn singing from Dhondutai, at first reluctantly and then, as the years pass, with growing passion. A bestseller in India, where it was a literary sensation, *The Music Room* is a deeply moving meditation on how traditions and life lessons are passed along generations, on the sacrifices made by women through the ages, and on a largely unknown, but vital aspect of Indian life and culture that will utterly fascinate American readers. *The Music Room* is the story of Namita Devidayal herself, how a rather reluctant girl was driven into the world of Indian classical music and how it became the source of peace and salvation to her.

Both Dhondutai Kulkarni and Namita Devidayal are the representatives of Jaipur-Atrauli Gharana. Two major singing styles seem to have applied in the narrative technique of this novel. Firstly, unlike other Gharanas, in the Gharana the ‘notes are applied in an oblique manner with filigree involving immediately neighboring notes. Namita faces various problems in her personal life and finally gets the opportunity to offer her song to Mahalaxmi at the Mahalaxmi temple at Kolhapur where Alladiya Khan used to perform. The execution of the Raga at that very place brought a sense of completeness to her. As if, her life comes to a full circle. And the music keeps following through their lives. Many theories have been proposed on what should be the narrative style of an author in a post-modern age or from a post-colonial standpoint.

Any research scholar cannot categorize easily the story of *The Music Room*. It is part autobiographical account, part biography of her teacher Dhondutai Kulkarni, part a collection of anecdotes about the people who shaped Dhondutai’s own life and music-Alladiya Khan and Kesarbai Kerkar, part reflection on the nature of Indian classical music, part rumination on secularism and communalism. The author’s affection for her teacher is what comes through most clearly. She has learnt with Dhondutai for a long time and the bond between them is the most endearing part of the work. The author is on solid ground when she is talking about their relationship and about Dhondutai as a person and a singer. She paints a perceptive and moving portrayal of Dhondutai’s life and posits some hypotheses as to why she didn’t make it big as a performing artiste.

Further Devidayal talks about Dhondutai’s personality quirks without getting excessively judgemental about them: for all the obvious affection, she does not try to whitewash her subject into a sanitized ideal being. The sections about Alladiya Khan and Kesarbai are puzzling. The author seems to be attempting some kind of a history of the Atrauli-Jaipur Gharana to give a context to Dhondutai’s music but it has not been achieved.

Namita Devidayal is a great autobiographical novelist who advanced the frontiers of the Indian novels by adopting a revolutionary technique for the expression of her vision of life and human nature. She used the ‘stream of consciousness’ technique to get close to the mind of her characters, and expressed exactly the impact

of life on their personality. It has been said that Namita Devidayal's literary works are product of her memories, her acute sense of the past and her ties with her childhood. It is taken for granted almost from the very beginning that Namita Devidayal would be a writer. She is so closely connected with the recollections of her family members in her novels especially *The Music Room*. *The Music Room* is biographical in nature wherein the author has shared her own experiences of learning music with Dhondutai, a highly respected music teacher from the Jaipur Gharana. Like any ten year old Namita is forcefully taken to a music class by her mother; which she resents. The reason she resents is more because of the surroundings. The sentiments of Namita's mother behind sending her to a music class are very nicely depicted. As in the olden days a girl well versed with the knowledge of music was considered to be virtuous.

It is very touching to see Namita gradually fall in love with music and absorb it into every part of her being. As Namita observes Dhondutai's dedication to music she realizes that music is much more than just ragas and taalams. Learning music opens new windows for her through which she sees a different life. She sees the endless possibilities that are spread out before her. She understands what dedication is when she sees Dhondutai remain unmarried her entire life only for the sake of music. She sees a new form of love when she feels music in her every heart beat. She recognizes life as she hears music is almost everything around her. Dhondutai sees her as next Kesarbai, a very famous singer; and it is her belief which pushes Namita to keep giving her best till she succeeds.

This book is a well written one covering various aspects of music in a lot of detail. The author has explained minute details related to music like the various gharanas and their history. It is said when you do something which is close to your heart, the results are fabulous. The author has taken a subject which is very close to her heart. Her passion for the same reflects in her writing creating a mesmerizing effect on the reader.

Vikram Seth is a famous English writer. He is a Prominent librettist, travel writer, Novelist, Poet, Children's writer, biographer and memoirist. He connects music and literature in his famous work "an equal music". He is one of the most towering writers in Indian Writing in English today. With the complexity and depth of his work and his significant achievement in prose as well as verse, Seth has proved as a master of English language. His many themes and concerns, from land ceiling in Post-Independence India to Western Classical Music and relationships, all cast in formally perfect prose or poetry.

Vikram Seth is the first Indian English Novelist to get a fabulous amount of rupees two crores as advance for his epoch-making novel *A Suitable Boy* [1993]. He has received the Commonwealth Writer's Prize and WH Smith Literary Award for *A Suitable Boy* in 1994. Seth's third novel, *An Equal Music* [AEM], a novel set in London with Western Classical music as its backdrop. The novel was awarded EMMA [BT Ethnic and Multicultural Media Award] in 2001. This novel focuses on the lives of classical musicians and their music cannot but seem a daring venture and risk.

While writing the novel Vikram Seth sat in on quartet rehearsals, understood details of music, musical instruments, sales, events, halls, tours, took lessons for six weeks in lip-reading to get into the character of his deaf heroine and the subject of the novel. The novel is a first-person narrative, in the present tense, of sensitive and volatile violinist and Seth attempts with fine delicacy to convey the effect of music through words. Vikram Seth's third novel *An Equal Music* is the tale of an emotionally volatile musician Michael Holme and his gradual recovery of the self. The backdrop of the novel is the enchanted, romantic world of contemporary London, Vienna and Venice and the subject is Western Europe's supreme cultural achievement: classical music. Brilliantly interweaving the themes of loss, longing and power of music, Vikram Seth has created a deeply moving story about the strands of excitement that run through all our lives. The book is about the unspeakable pain of violinist. *An Equal Music* by Vikram Seth is a classic in every sense of the world. An exceptional novel is often woven out of the lives of exceptional people. It is a novel of musicians who dedicated their life to music. Music has been presented in this novel as a noble addiction. Michael and Julia are musicians. The book centres on two gifted musicians: Michael Holme and Julia McNicholl. As Michael works on a Beethoven piece for the Maggiore Quartet, he grows increasingly preoccupied with recollections of his student days in Vienna where he met Julia.

When the two are re-united by chance in London, their relationship is re-kindled. One of the most impressive aspects of this novel is the way in which it manages to convey music through language. While Seth is modest about his musical abilities, the fact that he was commissioned to write a libretto for the English National Opera in 1994 suggests he is no novice. 'An Equal Music' is a tour de force of poetic, impassioned writing. It is an unforgettable tale of love lost and nearly regained. It is a story of the force of love, its magical spell over the heart and its forceful impact over the mind. It is a poignant saga of love and lovelorn lovers torn apart by circumstances and how a strange quick of fate sees them come together again. The common strand that connects the lover is their passionate love for music.

It is a love story blended with the strokes of a Mozart piano, synced with a Bach Harmonica and a Schubert violin. It is a treat for the connoisseur and the laity, the lover and the ignorant, the classes and the masses. His knowledge and wonderful usage of musical pieces and its blend with the theme of the story is a joyous experience. The book shines where other attempts have failed, the deeper implications dialogues and

confrontations between Michael, the lover and his beloved Julia is a treat. Consider this at their second meeting. Julia tells Michael she is married.

When he asks why she doesn't wear a wedding ring, she answers. 'I don't know. It distracts me. It distracts me when I play the piano. I look at it and I can't concentrate on the music'. Wow now do I need to say more on this, if Michael is longing for her, so is she, and what better way to express this than the subtle ways just narrated. Both are the sources of inspiration for each other, music to them are incomplete without the other, this is love at its best.

Music is the strongest element in Vikram Seth's *An Equal Music*. It acts like a glue holding the story and characters together, and Seth offers the readers a peek in to the works of Beethoven, Bach, Mozart and Hayden, offering a unique glimpse into the world of chamber music. The interpersonal dynamics of the Quartet that influence their performance, their approach and method of rehearsing are also clearly pictured. Throughout the novel we find the novelist sharing an intimacy with music and identifying himself with the characters. Music and Love co-exist in the novel. The protagonist's dilemma in choosing one over the other is portrayed. Loneliness as the only companion the life of a music composer has been beautifully conveyed. The elaborate process of music-making also finds a place in the novel. Michael has a less laborious pursuit to obtain a rare Beethoven Quintet that he did in search of a Mozart Divertimento: 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. (380) Making music and making love become one of the important themes of the novel. The love story with its traditional structure of meetings, partings, heartbreaks, promises and betrayals is beautifully intertwined with the theme of music in the novel. Vikram Seth emphasizes this when he describes how Michael and Julia after making love are able to work together on music,

One morning, after making love, we tried making music together. It did not go well; we were both too nervous. Later in the week we gave it another try, and were taken aback by how naturally, how responsively – to each other, to the music – we were playing (80). Music-making is an important phase before it comes out as a form of music. Music is soothing to the ear, but it is made up to that perfect state through the elaborate process of music-making. Music for Seth is the result of a concerted effort; of the senses and the musculature when the musician plays, of the musician and the audience, and of the two musicians together. The novel *An Equal Music* expounds the art of music-making and is substantially technical for music lovers. *An Equal Music* provides an in-depth look into the non-glamorous side to music-making. Michael sums it up: "Years of training, long hours, pathetic pay – and being no good for anything else – and having no chance in what you play – you could feel trapped even if you loved it once" (7).

An Equal Music is a lucid and ambitious attempt to capture the mysteries and sufferings experienced by those in the field of music, through the form of prose. Seth's novel examines the impact of western classical music on the lives and hopes and fears and final, desperate choices of its European protagonists. Music has been presented in this novel as a noble addiction. Seth highlights the problem of being a professional musician. The problems highlighted in the book are those that are faced in real life – the cost of instruments, the irregular income, the creative tensions of playing in a group and the diminishing likelihood that anyone from a poorer background will ever be able to train as a musician with all the expenses involved.

The love, love regained and love lost in the novel also affect the emotion of the individual. Michael was desperately in love with Julia, but unfortunately, he had to leave her and loneliness becomes his only companion. This is evident in the words of Michael, "Life settles into bearable aloneness" (56). The instrument each member plays must be suited to his or her temperament. Thus, Piers, abrasive, demanding, the leader in the group, makes a classic first violinist. Helen, who provides the viola's supporting role, is constantly pouring oil on troubled waters; Billy, genial, brilliant, selfless, eager to please, is the group's cellist, "light and profound; the base of our harmony, the rock on which we rest." (10)

Seth's language of music can convey every minutiae of the art form. The love story pales in comparison. Moving as Julia's meeting with Michael after the performance at Wigmore Hall, it cannot compare with the sublimity of the music that has preceded it, particularly of the arresting encore, the first contrapuntist of Bach's "Art of Fugue". Music and love are inseparable and make a natural corollary in the events unfolded in the novel. The world of music is all embracing. The English, the Viennese, the Venetian, the French and the American characters engaged in the common pursuit of love of music meet, perform and feel together. The life so envisioned in the novel is global, music, therefore, is a potentially unifying a binding force.

The two powerful passions, the one for music and the other for romance gets intricately blended in the novel. Seth tries to work out as to how music can form the theme of a novel and connect not only individuals but also their souls. Michael's life has very little room for anything else other than music. He seems to share his fascination for music with Seth, his creator. Michael teaches music to Virginia, who confesses her love to him but in reality, does not leave any impression on his consciousness as Julia does. The narrative deals with Michael's passionate relationship with his music, his deeply moving twelve-year-old attachment to his two seventy-year-old Carlo Tononi Violin.

In “An Equal Music”, with the magical world of Beethoven and Bach as background, Seth weaves an impassioned tale of Heartache, longing and the power of music. Music is part of Michael’s life. It gives relief to a man when he was in the midst of difficulties. So, when we read the novel, we feel the presence of music in its each and every line. Music unites Julia and Michael. The rhythm of their romance makes the novel more musical. Seth’s greatest achievement is the narrative voice, which is always self-effacing and utterly transparent. Themes and issues are presented with a steady consistency of imaginative objectivity. Thus the both writer highlights the musical device through their literary works. We relish the ideas of the writers through their melodies note of their writings.

References:

1. Seth, Vikram, AN equal music. Vintage, 2000.
2. Benson, Stephen. Literary Music: Writing Music in Contemporary Fiction. 1st ed., Routledge, 2006.
3. Mohanty, Seemita. (2002), A Critical Analysis of Vikram Seth’s Poetry and Fiction. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, Print.
4. Devidayal Namita, The Music Room, Random House India, 20-Nov-2011-Fiction.
5. <https://penguin.co.in>
6. <http://www.privetrytrifles.co.in>
7. <http://www.publishersweekly.com>