

UNDERSTANDING ENDURING LOVE AND FRIENDSHIP IN VIKRAM SETH'S THE GOLDEN GATE

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Abstract

Companionship is a medicine that cures the disease called loneliness. Loneliness is a social pain that disconnects a person from society, where an individual feels nothing and brings nothing out of him. People in general, long for a partner to share and care for, in every step of their life. Similar liking, rapture and priority build a relationship. Reducing uncertainty between two or more person results in friendly relationship and vice versa can break the relationship. Vikram Seth is one of the well-known Indian writers of current era. The major themes of his writings are loss, music, love and longing. His playful and tongue-twisting style attracts the readers in a broader way. One such way of writing is seen in his novel The Golden Gate. The novel focuses on longing and survival in contemporary relationships, especially among yuppie groups at San Francisco. In this fast-paced world, prioritizing relationships and spending time for them has become digitalized. Messages and video calls have become the source of building a relationship. This Research paper tends to analyse the characters John and Liz of The Golden Gate using Charles Berger and Richard Calabrese's Uncertainty Reduction Theory in relational building and concludes by providing the readers the knowledge about the importance of relationships and the human bonds as the core foundation for generations to grow.

Keywords: Loneliness, Longingness, Love, Relationship and Separation

Introduction

Vikram Seth is a widely recognized Indian writer, a diasporic writer and a post-modern author. "Vikram Seth is five-feet-two-inches of all brain." (Meer). His stories are mostly on the Indian and American backdrops. He has written many novels and several books of poetry. He was born on 20th June

1952 in Kolkata. His poetic prowess is reflected in his writings, especially in the novel *The Golden Gate* (1986), which brought him literary recognition by making him the Sahitya Academy Awardee in the year 1988. He is also the recipient of other prestigious awards like Padma Shri and Cross Book Award. He is also a recipient of many accolades including Pravasi Bharatiya Samman, and WH Smith Literary Award. His collections of poetry titled *Mappings* and *Beastly Tales* are among the most important contributions to the genre of Indian English poetry. The anthology *Mappings* was his first book that got published in 1980. After that, his first full-length novel, *A Suitable Boy* was released which is about 1,349 pages in length and consists of three volumes. This novel launched him into the limelight. The novel required over 10 years to finish and it is regarded as one of the longest English novels. In 2009, *A Suitable Girl* was announced as a sequel to *A Suitable Boy*. The other works that propelled him into the public are *An Equal Music*, *Beastly Tales*, *Two Lives* and a travel book titled *From Heaven Lake: Travels through Sinkiang and Tibet*. The aim of this study is to expose the endeavours of an individual in finding out the faithful relationships through the select theory and novel and to make readers aware on the significance of trust, care and responsibility to maintain healthy human bonds (Meer).

The Golden Gate is the humorous critique of the moral beliefs of American culture. The novel explicates a variety of viable and acceptable love in a metropolis. The characters of the novel exhibit their attitudes about love. Seth's projection of women characters is highly influential where they are framed with power and courage to maintain the family and society. Realism is a part of Seth's style. The select novel has California's Silicon Valley of the 1980s as its real backdrop setting. Seth has adapted the novel's characters and action to a contemporary Californian scene. The young people of the place are the source of the story where their love, adventure and life are focused in a broader way. It is also significant to note that *The Golden Gate* has won the British Airways Commonwealth Poetry Prize in 1986. The novel *The Golden Gate* is famous for its verse form with 590 one gin stanzas also known as Iambic Tetrameter with the rhyme scheme ABABCCDDEFFEGG. According to Vikram Seth, "Writing poetry without rhyme and meter is like playing tennis without a net," (Sharma).

The Golden Gate is the uproarious love story between John and Liz that is analysed using the Uncertainty Reduction Theory of Charles Berger and Richard Calabrese in this research paper. It is a communication theory also known as Initial Interaction Theory. The theory examines the behaviours and

activities of a person that reduce uncertainty when he/she communicates with a stranger. It uses interactive tactics and is divided into two types; Cognitive Uncertainty and Behaviour Uncertainty. The first type relies on beliefs and attitudes in the process of communication and the other is a prediction perceived about a person. At first, the theory is exclusive to analyse only communication strategies later it is extended in many research areas and used in the fields like verbal and non-verbal communication, information seeking, reciprocity and romantic relationships. The motivation behind every human communication with fellow human is analysed using this theory.

Uncertainty Reduction theory has its base from Shannon and Weaver's theory of Information. It has its versatile influence in the fields of information seeking, reciprocity and non-verbal communication. The uncertainty reduction addresses the basic process undertaken to gain knowledge on the life, style and approach of the other people whom one interacts. This eventually leads to a judgment or an evaluation through likes and dislikes. When the uncertainty is not reduced the relationship loses its confidence in its initial stage itself. The theory states that through active, passive and interactive strategies a person can reduce uncertainty. It is one of the major theories used by the scholars to analyse and predict the human interaction and their interpersonal communicational strategies.

The Research paper entitled "Quest for Love and Self-fulfilment in Vikram Seth's *The Golden Gate* studies love as a common emotion that goes beyond gender. It discusses the way homosexuality and its role in American Society. The character Phil falls in love with Ed, both are male and their love is between man and man. This effort by Seth through his characters is to reflect his American society of the time. (Mishra and Mohd 2327)

Methodology

The study applies a qualitative research design to exhibit Vikram Seth's projection of the theme of love in his novel *The Golden Gate* through the lens of Charles Berger and Richard Calabrese Uncertainty Reduction theory (URT) in Relationship.

Results

Application of Berger and Calabrese Uncertainty Reduction theory in relationship through Vikram Seth's romantic novel *The Golden Gate* introduces the readers to the insightful understanding of love and its role in an individual's life. It is one of the strongest emotions that has the capacity to

move mountains. It's an essential phase in one's life which is quite nostalgic. The definition of love is not constant; it is something abstract that gets modified to the person's experience. The unconditional love seems to be the engine that binds millions of human lives. Being in love makes people to do the so far called the impossible tasks in their lives. It is quite natural that love can change or alters a person's personality and his/her perception. It would result in an optimistic view of life to the lovers that inspires and motivates them to do more.

John and Liz love story gives the understanding of endeavours a couple undergoes in building a relationship. It starts from a stranger's talk to every day talk. The characters adapt love in their own sense and decide the final attachment of whom they are going to travel with throughout their lifetime. Through the lens of the theory chosen, readers can get the knowledge of love and also can find similar experience in their life. The research would help them to get the overall knowledge of love and its role. On the other hand, it will help them to self-analyse the level of uncertainty in their relationship as well. Through this concept Seth attracts the readers' attention to confront their own biases and teaches them to engage and make a virtuous relationship. There are also strategies that have the capacity to tackle the uncertainties. They are passive, active, interactive and extractive strategies. In a passive strategy, the person gains information about the other passively without much effort and only by observation. The active strategy does not inculcate personal approach but indulges in collecting information from other sources like through friends and workplace. Interactive strategy directly meets the other and engages in spending time for them and the extractive strategy is the trendy uncertainty reduction, which extracts information through online and other outside resources for information seeking. These can bring a drastic change that is a transformation one experiences. From interacting with someone new to communicating with someone familiar is the success of uncertainty reduction in a relationship. Gaining information will quickly reduce the uncertainty that helps in future interactions.

Discussion

The term love is derived from the Sanskrit word 'lubhyati' with the meaning desire. Psychologist Mert Seker states that commitment, understanding, and shared feelings make the love unique in its own way where it changes from person to person and their approach towards their love differs accordingly. The trust and support one has on their partner will

eventually create a space where one freely expresses their positive and negative sides without fear and awkwardness. These gradually strengthen the relationship and help in gaining power to face the difficulties of life. Love is a good teacher that teaches the virtuous qualities of being selfless and kind enough to understand and adjust the imperfections of the partner. Every individual strives for somebody beside them to care and share for lifetime. Love is the way of life and the source of happiness. Human beings are naturally gregarious. Having someone to adore and rely on is vital. "In life's brief game to be a winner/A man must have oh yes, above/All else, of course, someone to love (Seth 6.13).

Though Uncertainty Reduction theory was built to analyses the interpersonal communication strategies while communicating with others, its influence in relationship framed three stages. The three phases involve the development of a relationship with strangers that eventually reduces uncertainty between the partners as they start knowing better about each other day by day. The theory at first is generated as a communicational theory to examine the communicational process. The three stages of relationship pertaining to uncertainty are the Entry stage, the personal stage and the Exit stage. In the Entry stage, strangers become close when their behaviors match and impress each other's taste. Then they enter into the second stage, where they explore their attitudes, morals and personal emotions. The dislike of this stage makes them enter into the exit stage. In the final stage, they come out of the relationship. Uncertainty can be reduced through passive, active and interactive strategies. Self-disclosure, observation and gathering information about a person help in connecting the two different beings. The protagonist John in *The Golden Gate* is alone and depressed because of the lack of a companion. John's mother is dead and he has a retired father in his native who rarely responds to his letters. The novel starts with a description of his loneliness.

There is nobody to feel for him even if he dies of 'self-pity'. "He thought, "If I died, who'd be sad? /Who'd weep? /Who'd gloat? Who would be glad? /Would anybody?" As it pained him"(Seth 1.1). Loneliness hurts him when he thinks he has no siblings, no spouse and no children. He watches everyone with the companion, young school lovers and friends but he has none. "It hurts that only he's alone." (Seth 1.7). He even tried to call his college friend Phil but there is no reply from him. His frustration made him to call his ex-lover Janet Hayakawa. She understands his loneliness and suggests him to get rid of it by finding a match through advertisements in print media "You

need a lover, John, I think."/He listens. Jan says: "Advertise." (Seth 1.31). The advertisement they gave in the newspaper Bay Guardian is as follows; "Young, handsome yuppie, 26, / Straight, forward, / sociable, but lonely, / Cannot believe that he's the only/Well-rounded and well-meaning square/Lusting for love. If you, out there, /Are friendly, female, under 30, /Impulsive, fit, and fun, let's meet. /Be rash." (Seth 2.3).

"They each break silence with, "Well, I'm—"" (Seth 2.36). Even Liz liked him, their love is reciprocal. "... This man's a charmer/I like him, and he likes me, though/I can't imagine why it's so." (Seth 2.40).

The second stage of the theory in relationship is Personal Stage. Here, the partners try to explore the behaviour, beliefs, actions and attitudes of the other. This stage is possible only when several of the entry stages happened. Personal becomes impersonal, official becomes unofficial in this period of relationship as the friendly bond has created. There are no secrets or things to hide to the partner. They start believe and feel comfortable with each other as the uncertainty reduces gradually. Togetherness is high in this stage. The amount of communication, intimacy level and reciprocity act as the foundational stimulators in this phase. The similarity and liking will enrich the affection and attraction. John and Liz spent their maximum time with each other in an apartment. In their private space, their norms and attitudes are experienced and they feel comfortable with each other. Sharing of Personal facts, Eye contact and compliments made their bond stronger. "How beautiful it is, when waking/To find one's lover at one's side;" (Seth 6.1).

This is a good sign of reducing uncertainty. Touch and Cuddling relieve the stress of the partner states various research studies in this area. Hormones like oxytocin which can also be called as love hormone kindles emotions and reduces the mental and physical pain of the partners in love. Their bond is decorous until it is disturbed by Liz's cat Charlemagne, which she loves the most. John expresses this to Hayakawa as "That—more than me—Liz loves that cat." (Seth 9.7). Every relationship has ups and downs and a healthy partnership balances it easily. Acceptance and adjustment are the two powers that can stop the growth of bitterness in a relationship. The absence of these two is too dangerous that it can break even long-lasting alliances. Liz's love for the cat and John's hatred towards the same created frustration in their bond in the personal stage. "Some people like cats, and some hate 'em/I must be of the second kind/Excuse me if I'm sounding bitter/I did my best to like this critter/But, Liz it takes two—and your cat/Just loathes my innards—and that's that." (Seth 6.26).

They start fighting when Liz supports the cat and John asks her to take Charlemagne to a cat psychiatrist. "His exact words were 'Go to hell—/And take your fucking cat as well!" (Seth 7.36). Too much of anything is good for nothing. Their endless fight brought an end to their relationship. Risks and adventures are the part of the life, where it can make the relationship strong or ruin the relationship easily. The final stage of the theory is the Exit Stage. This is the decision face, where an individual decides whether to continue with the relationship or quit the relationship. If there is no more mutual understanding and liking, in the exit stage the pair separates. 'Reduction' of uncertainty is good, but here between John and Liz the uncertainty started increasing. It pushed the couple into the Exit stage where they decided to move away from each other. Liz expressed their break-up to Phil as follows, "Phil—it's over—it's no use—/ I'll never marry him." Phil, sighing" (Seth 11.19).

Liz started moving away from John and decided to connect with Phil, with whom she felt comfortable now. This happens in most of the break-ups where the individual searches for someone to replace and match better than their previous relationship. Phil turned into a comfort place for Liz. "Liz seems so happy, though. She's clowning/ With Phill now Would she carry on/ So unconstrainedly with John?" (Seth 11.11). On the other side, John felt a refreshing relationship with his former lover Hayakawa. "His new companionship with Jan," (Seth 12.8).

If a person is looking for emotional or physical fulfilment from others outside rather giving importance to the pair, it is the time to quit the relationship. "Based on the Uncertainty Reduction Theory, people should retrieve general demographic information about other people to reduce the level of uncertainty they have about other people behavior... as soon as the necessary information about interactants has been retrieved, it will be easier for both predict behaviors and actions of each other." (Zeeman).

The Research article entitled "Dejection of Love and Loneliness in Vikram Seth's *The Golden Gate* discusses the collaboration of love and loneliness expressed by the writer through his characters of the select novel. It indulges in exploring the chance people get to change themselves in order to maintain a healthy human bond. Disbelief has the capacity to collapse the relationship. (Srinivetha 818)

Conclusion

In life, love and hatred are like the two sides of a coin. They are handled in the right way through 'balancing'. Being with a companion is the most significant and fulfilling experience in the life of an individual. Research studies prove that a person can fall in love in less than four minutes. 'Looking into each other's eyes can make you feel very close to someone' (Pace). The persons one frequently interacted with become a part of one's life. Their communication becomes habitual. A small change in the partner's behaviour will upset the mind of the other by making them feel lonely. This is because of the strong ties one creates with their mind and heart. The human bond is broadened when an individual connects with fellow beings. Sharing innermost thoughts and self-disclosures help in establishing a deep relationship. Building and maintaining a relationship are facilitated by attentive listening and understanding of the other person. "When one partner feels that the other isn't fulfilling a requirement, Wadley says, it's important to communicate that. If that person's partner isn't willing to try harder to fulfill that need, it's probably time to move on," (Breit).

One can also improve oneself by offering support to others. John and Liz missed the balance in their relationship and deprived of supporting each other in the later stages of their life. These eventually break their relationship into pieces. The happiness of an individual will increase morality and decrease mortality. Loneliness is a higher level of depression that has the capability of decreasing the purpose in life. Giving love and receiving love is a mutual transaction that eventually keeps the society balanced. Love is contagious and every person should seed it within himself/herself and spread it to their surroundings, regardless of the obstacles created by the bitterness within a relationship. By focusing on reduction of uncertainty and understanding the partner better one can gain a greater insight in a relationship that will reduce doubts, misunderstanding and ultimately result in a more personal understanding of the partner. As Mother Teresa rightly says, "What can you do to promote world peace? Go home and love your family." ("Quotes").

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