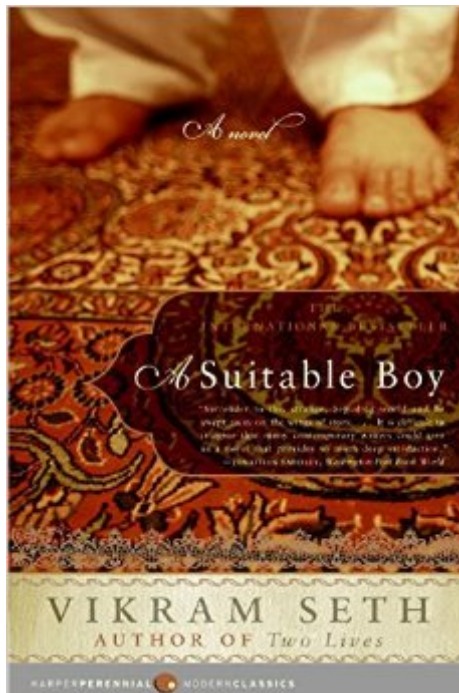


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A Suitable Boy: A Novel (Modern Classics)



Synopsis

Vikram Seth's novel is, at its core, a love story: Lata and her mother, Mrs. Rupa Mehra, are both trying to find -- through love or through exacting maternal appraisal -- a suitable boy for Lata to marry. Set in the early 1950s, in an India newly independent and struggling through a time of crisis, *A Suitable Boy* takes us into the richly imagined world of four large extended families and spins a compulsively readable tale of their lives and loves. A sweeping panoramic portrait of a complex, multiethnic society in flux, *A Suitable Boy* remains the story of ordinary people caught up in a web of love and ambition, humor and sadness, prejudice and reconciliation, the most delicate social etiquette and the most appalling violence.

Book Information

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Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (303 customer reviews)

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Customer Reviews

Just finished my second reading of "A Suitable Boy", it will always be one of my favorite books. Looking over some of the other reviews here I see that this 1474 page novel has been called "just" an Indian soap opera, and while I think soap-opera may be an apt description, it is one of the best books I have ever read. This novel reminded me of an old fashioned English novel in the style of Dickens or Trollope or Eliot, with a large cast of characters, a thick tome with many divergent plot lines that are eventually tied together by the ending, an incredible journey for a reader. They just don't write them this way any more. The title story of the novel is the one of Lata Mehra and her search (or rather her mother's search) for a suitable boy to marry. The novel opens at the wedding of Savita & Pran and introduces many of the characters we will be seeing more of later. Lata is struck by the fact that her sister is marrying a total stranger, accepting passively a marriage

arranged by the family, later she will choose between passion and an arranged marriage for herself. Maan Kapoor is another central character that we get to know in depth following him through his obsession for Saeeda Bai, exile from the city and the dramatic scene involving Firoz. There's far more though than the stories of only Lata and Maan, both of whom are sometimes almost forgotten for several chapters, so many other unforgettable characters amongst the Mehra family, Kapoors, Chatterjis, Rasheed & his family, the Nawab Sahib & his family, Saeeda Bai's establishment. I found Arun & his wife Meenakshi, the anglophile snobs absolutely hilarious.

I will be brief and merely add some comments to the many reviews already written on this book. First of all, I think it is a very good book, but definitely not for everyone. If you're thinking about reading it, you're probably wondering if it's worth the effort of investing in such a long undertaking. Here are some suggestions: If you are yourself Indian and/or interested in India, especially early post-independence Indian history, then you will probably find this a very interesting read. Vikram Seth manages to pack an extraordinary amount of historical, economic, social and cultural detail in his novel, which is, after all, essentially a love story. But it is also a story about -- not just set in -- India. If you have no interest in India or Indian culture (or Pakistan and sub-continental Muslim culture), you will likely be confused by many words and references, and you should keep away from this book. Likewise, if you are interested in Hindu-Muslim relations, Seth does a good job at highlighting some of the key issues and the different ways some Hindus and Muslims look at the same issues. In this, it is amazing to compare what he wrote about the 1950s with the situation in India today. You can't understand what's going on in India today without a good dose of history, and Seth knows that. Well, what if you're not really one way or the other as regards Indian history and culture, but you like big family dramas? This book is also for you. Seth has so much compassion for his characters, that you will find it very hard not to empathize with at least several of them. Moreover, he injects a great deal of humor into the book. It is a book about people, about life -- in all its aspects, about death, about family, and more.

A contemporary critic reacted to *War and Peace* with the exclamation, "It's not a book, but an elephant!" *A Suitable Boy* is a lengthier book of similar scope (although more tightly-structured, I think). Tolstoy is a genius because He Did It First, but that does not take away from the fact that with *A Suitable Boy*, Seth has earned his place in the Canon alongside *War and Peace*, *Anna Karenina* and other nineteenth-century greats, for every reason one can name. Let me get it over with. Yes, this is a big book. It is a very long book. It is 1,488 pages long. Yes, let us all say it again:

That makes it a Very Long Book. Those readers whose attention spans have been permanently shrunk by 30-second commercials and 50-minute TV programs will have a hard time with this book. There are also lots of important characters, too, just as in Anna Karenina, where you have three families closely depicted. So there are lots of people to keep straight. The good news is that Seth's characterizations are such that you can tell who's speaking, often, merely with the dialogue. You very often don't need the tags, "Arun said," or "Kakoli said." But yes, there are lots of characters, lots of things happening, and it takes a long time to read because it's yes, Very Long. To those whose major complaint is the length: Don't be afraid -- it won't bite. Open it up and read it, one page at a time. And let us get this out of the way, too: No, this is not a Sweeping Tumutuous Saga. If you loved Kristin Lavransdatter, you will not like A Suitable Boy. It is not a romance novel, even though it begins and ends with weddings. It has a similar feel to Anna Karenina, but with a little more hilarity and a lot less heartbreaking tragedy (in the literary sense).

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