

## EVENING WHEAT - VIKRAM SETH

### Life:

- ❖ **Vikram Seth** was born in **Calcutta (Kolkata), West Bengal, India** on **20 June, 1952**.
- ❖ He was born to **Prem Seth**, an executive at the Bata shoe company, and his wife **Leila Seth**, a prominent lawyer who became the first woman Chief Justice of the Delhi High Court.
- ❖ He was born during the period of **independent India**, shortly after partition.
- ❖ He attended **St Xavier's Collegiate School** in Kolkata, **The Doon School** in Dehradun, where he was influenced by teacher **Gurdial Singh**, and later studied at **Corpus Christi College, Oxford**, earning a **BA in Philosophy, Politics, and Economics (PPE)** in 1975.
- ❖ He pursued graduate studies at **Stanford University** (MA in Economics, 1979) and **Nanjing University** in China for a PhD in ancient Chinese history.
- ❖ He is openly **gay** and was in a long-term relationship with French violinist **Philippe Honoré**; he has no children.
- ❖ He belongs to a **Punjabi Hindu family** with roots in Punjab.
- ❖ He traveled extensively, including a hitchhiking journey through China documented in his first book, and lived in various places, including California and the UK.
- ❖ He currently resides in **Salisbury, Wiltshire, England**, and is a **polyglot** fluent in English, Hindi, Urdu, Welsh, Mandarin, German, and French.
- ❖ As of **November 12, 2025**, he is **alive** at age **73**.

### Career:

- ❖ Seth is a novelist, poet, travel writer, and librettist, a prominent figure in **Indian English literature**.
- ❖ He is known as **Vikram Seth**.
- ❖ He is celebrated as a **master of verse novels** and **epic storytelling**.
- ❖ He is described as a '**postmodern classicist**' and **cultural bridge-builder**.
- ❖ He was associated with literary circles in **Oxford, Stanford, and Nanjing**, influenced by mentors like **Gurdial Singh** and his mother's legal background.
- ❖ His works are known for their **lyrical prose, multicultural themes**, and exploration of **love, identity, family, and history**.
- ❖ He influenced writers like **Jhumpa Lahiri** and **Arundhati Roy**.
- ❖ His first published book, **From Heaven Lake**, appeared in **1983**.
- ❖ His works, such as **The Golden Gate** and **A Suitable Boy**, are studied in **English literature curricula** worldwide.
- ❖ He is a **musician**, playing cello and flute, and has composed for his works; he also translates poetry across languages.

## Works:

### Novels:

#### ❖ **The Golden Gate (1986):**

- Its full title is '**The Golden Gate**'.
- A **verse novel** in 690 sonnets, set in Silicon Valley, exploring love, friendship, and modern life.
- It won the **Sahitya Akademi Award** in 1988 and was praised for reviving the verse novel form.

#### ❖ **A Suitable Boy (1993):**

- Its full title is '**A Suitable Boy**'.
- An **epic novel** of 1,349 pages set in post-independence India, following a mother's search for a match for her daughter amid political and social turmoil.
- It won the **WH Smith Literary Award** (1994) and **Commonwealth Writers' Prize** (1994), and was adapted into a BBC miniseries in 2020.

#### ❖ **An Equal Music (1999):**

- Its full title is '**An Equal Music**'.
- A **novel** about a violinist rediscovering love and music in London, praised for its authentic portrayal of classical music.
- It won the **Crossword Book Award** in 1999.

#### ❖ **Two Lives (2005):**

- Its full title is '**Two Lives**'.
- A **non-fiction memoir** about his great-uncle Shanti Behl and aunt Henny Gerling, exploring love, history, and migration.

#### ❖ **A Suitable Girl (2016):**

- Its full title is '**A Suitable Girl**'.
- A **sequel to A Suitable Boy**, continuing the story of the Mehra family into modern India, focusing on arranged marriages and societal change.

### Poetry:

#### ❖ **Mappings (1980):**

- Its full title is '**Mappings**'.
- His debut poetry collection, exploring travel, love, and identity.

#### ❖ **The Humble Administrator's Garden (1985):**

- Its full title is '**The Humble Administrator's Garden**'.
- A collection inspired by Chinese landscapes, winning the **Commonwealth Poetry Prize (Asia)** in 1985.

#### ❖ **All You Who Sleep Tonight (1990):**

- Its full title is '**All You Who Sleep Tonight**'.

### Non-Fiction:

- ❖ **From Heaven Lake: Travels Through Sinkiang and Tibet (1983):**
  - Its full title is '**From Heaven Lake: Travels Through Sinkiang and Tibet**'.
  - A **travelogue** of his hitchhiking journey through China, Nepal, and Tibet, winning the **Thomas Cook Travel Book Award** in 1983.
- ❖ **Arion and the Dolphin (1994):**
  - A **libretto** for an opera composed by **Alec Roth**, performed by the **English National Opera**.

### Awards:

- ❖ **Thomas Cook Travel Book Award (1983):** For '**From Heaven Lake**'.
- ❖ **Commonwealth Poetry Prize (Asia) (1985):** For '**The Humble Administrator's Garden**'.
- ❖ **Sahitya Akademi Award (1988):** For '**The Golden Gate**', India's highest literary honor.
- ❖ **WH Smith Literary Award (1994):** For '**A Suitable Boy**'.
- ❖ **Commonwealth Writers' Prize (Overall Winner, Best Book) (1994):** For '**A Suitable Boy**'.
- ❖ **Crossword Book Award (1999):** For '**An Equal Music**'.
- ❖ **Padma Shri (2007):** India's fourth-highest civilian honor for contributions to literature.
- ❖ **Pravasi Bharatiya Samman (2007):** For overseas Indians' contributions to India.
- ❖ **Order of the British Empire (OBE) (2001):** For services to literature.
- ❖ **Shortlisted for Booker Prize (1993):** For '**A Suitable Boy**'.

### Quotes:

- ❖ **Salman Rushdie** said: "**Seth's A Suitable Boy is a panoramic masterpiece of Indian life**".
- ❖ **The New Yorker** noted: "**His verse novel The Golden Gate is a dazzling modern epic**".
- ❖ Critic **Pankaj Mishra** remarked: "**Seth captures the soul of India with lyrical precision**".
- ❖ **Arundhati Roy** praised: "**His storytelling weaves history and heart seamlessly**".
- ❖ Scholar **David Davidar** called him: "**Seth, the poet-novelist who redefined Indian English literature**".

## EVENING WHEAT- VIKRAM SETH

### TEXT

Evening is the best time for wheat  
Toads croak.  
Children ride buffaloes home for supper.  
The last loads are shoulder-borne.  
Squares light up  
And the wheat sags with a late gold.  
There on the other side of the raised path  
Is the untransplanted emerald rice.  
But it is the wheat I watch, the still dark gold  
With maybe a pig that has strayed from the brigade  
enjoying a few soft ears.

### EVENING WHEAT

#### Key Facts:

- ❖ **Poet: Vikram Seth**
- ❖ **Poem: Evening Wheat**
- ❖ **Published in: Mappings** (first poetry collection)
- ❖ **Year of Publication: 1980**
- ❖ **Form of the Poem:**
  - Free verse
  - Descriptive / nature poem
  - Imagistic rural scene
- ❖ **Total Lines: 11 lines**

### DETAILED SUMMARY

#### The Calm of Evening

- ❖ The poem begins by saying that **evening is the best time for the wheat fields**.
- ❖ At this time of day, nature becomes peaceful, and the **toads start croaking**, filling the surroundings with gentle natural sounds.

### Children Returning Home

- ❖ Children ride on buffaloes as they make their way home for their evening meal.
- ❖ Their return shows that the day's work and play are ending, and families are gathering for supper.

### End of the Day's Labour

- ❖ The last loads of wheat are being carried on people's shoulders.
- ❖ This shows the final stage of harvesting or farm work for the day, indicating tired but productive village life.

### Lights in the Village

- ❖ The squares (open areas or central parts of the village) begin to light up as night approaches.
- ❖ These lights brighten the surroundings and create a warm atmosphere.

### Golden Look of the Wheat

- ❖ The wheat plants sag gently, weighed down by the day's sunlight, and appear as late gold – a soft, glowing golden colour.
- ❖ This captures the beauty of the evening light falling on the ripe wheat.

### Contrast With Rice Fields

- ❖ On the other side of a raised path, there is a field of untransplanted emerald-green rice.
- ❖ The rice is bright, fresh, and green, but it is not yet planted in its final place.
- ❖ Despite the beauty of the rice field, the poet does not focus on it.

### Poet's Eye on the Wheat

- ❖ The poet says it is the wheat that he continues to watch closely.
- ❖ The wheat appears as still, dark gold, creating a sense of richness and calm.

### A Wandering Pig

- ❖ The poet notices that a pig may have strayed away from its brigade (its group or designated farm area).
- ❖ The pig is enjoying a few soft ears of wheat, eating quietly in the evening field.

### Figures of Speech

#### Imagery

- ❖ The poem is rich in visual imagery such as evening light, golden wheat, emerald rice, village lights, and children on buffaloes.

- ❖ **Sound imagery** appears in the **croaking of toads**.
- ❖ **Sensory imagery** appears in **soft ears of wheat** being eaten by a pig.

### Metaphor

- ❖ The **wheat** is compared to "**late gold**", suggesting its glowing, mature beauty.
- ❖ The **rice** is described as "**emerald**", comparing its colour to a precious green gemstone.

### Personification

- ❖ The wheat "**sags**" with **late gold**, giving it a human-like quality as if it bows under the weight of golden light.

### Contrast

- ❖ The poem uses contrast between **golden wheat** and **emerald-green rice**.
- ❖ Contrast also appears between the **busy day** and the **calm evening**, and between **human activity** and **natural stillness**.

### Symbolism

- ❖ **Wheat** symbolizes **harvest, productivity, and maturity**.
- ❖ **Rice** symbolizes **growth, promise, and new beginnings**.
- ❖ **Evening** symbolizes **peace, reflection, and the end of daily labour**.

### Themes

#### Beauty of Rural Life:

- ❖ The poem celebrates the **simple, peaceful village life**—children returning home, farmers finishing work, animals moving freely.

#### Harmony Between Humans and Nature

- ❖ Human activities (harvesting, returning home) blend peacefully with natural sounds (toads) and natural beauty (golden wheat, green rice).

#### Cycle of Labour and Rest

- ❖ The poem shows the **end of the day's hard work**, with the evening bringing **rest and calm**.

#### Admiration for the Wheat

- ❖ The poet shows a deep **love and admiration for the wheat fields**, focusing on their **golden beauty** and their central place in village life.