



Vikas Swarup's Q&A as a Critique of Contemporary India

Dr. Vaibhav Pimpale

Assistant Professor

Head of English Department

Vidyabhart College, Seloo, Wardha

Email: vaibhaopimpale@gmail.com

Abstract

Q&A is Vikas Swarup debut novel. He captures the essence of Indian culture and delivers a razor-sharp critique of modern Indian society, concentrating on the marginalized isolation and misery. This article follows an incredible tour through India, from Delhi to Mumbai. Although India portrays itself as a cohesive nation aspiring to be a superpower, the novel problematizes the concerns of slum dwellers that are constantly persecuted and alienated. Swarup exposes the rising authoritarianism in the ruling administration and the occasional, comparably unsuccessful resistance to it within the narrative framework of the novel, drawing on events and people from recent Indian history. Despite the employment of a number of non-realistic literary tropes, "Q&A" is primarily a realistic storey, depicting an Indian diplomat's vision of a corrupt and degrading India.

Keywords: critique, slum, dwellers, narrative, suffering

Vikas Swarup is a prolific and astute author with a broad range of thought and creativity. He is a fearless, inventive writer who aims to convey the story in a bold manner. In a broader sense, he attempts to depict a universe of experience that is brimming with burning issues, problems, and concerns. He has a distinct theme and vision. All of his works are about contemporary sociocultural and political concerns, and they cover a wide range of topics. As Swarup attempted to put his views and experiences in to his books, a number of themes arose and found expression in them.

The books of Vikas Swarup, which feature serious analyses of modern socio-cultural and political concerns, might be arranged in the following sequence. He began his career as a novelist with "Q&A" which he completed in sixty days while stationed in London. "Q&A" became a worldwide bestseller, selling over half a million

copies. It was nominated for the Commonwealth Authors' Prize for Best First Book and won South Africa's Exclusive Books Grand Prize in 2006, as well as the Paris Book Fair's Reader's, The Prix Grand Open in 2007. It was voted the most popular book in Taiwan in 2008 and the winner of the Best Travel Product award in 2009. The book recording, read by Kerry Shale, received the award for Best Audiobook of the Year in 2005. It was well appreciated in India and a foreign nation, and it became a worldwide success, with translation rights sold in forty-three languages. As he said about his first creative writing,

"Q&A is a kaleidoscope of colossal, vibrant, chaotic, and enchanting India. It delineates the destiny of underprivileged youngsters vis-a-vis the destiny of India today. *The Independent* calls it "A beginner's guide to quintessential India" (qtd. in Swarup, "Six Suspects" blurb)

Q&A, his first novel, is set mostly in Mumbai. Vikas Swarup exposes the slum residents and their difficulties in Asia's largest slum, Dharavi, which is located in India's financial centre, Mumbai. Through his detailed and minute portrayal of the ghetto, the slum culture, he expresses great sympathy for slum dwellers. The underbelly of "India Shining," the nasty side of Mumbai, is shown via Ram, the protagonist, who lives in a slum. The slum's deplorable living conditions reflect Mumbai's and India's socioeconomic disparity.

As such, Dharavi is a tiny wasteland that houses almost one million people. It provides a modest and moderate option for those who go to Mumbai to make a life. Ram Mohamed Thomas, the protagonist, likewise lives in Dharavi, which lacks natural light and air, and where dwellings can be destroyed at any time because they are all unlawful structures. Many children in the ghettos, like Ram, begin working at a young age with little chance of receiving any training. Cloth picking, selling papers on roads that have been transformed into parking lots, padding medicines, and begging for money are all ways they generate money. They, like other medical concerns, are vulnerable to misuse. Ram, an orphan, grows up on the streets, struggling to make ends meet.

Ram is raised by Father Timothy, a Catholic priest in Delhi, after being abandoned at birth. To please local religious elders, the priest names him Ram Mohammad Thomas. Ram is transferred to a Juvenile Home when his father dies, where he meets his best buddy Salim Ilyasi, an eight-year-old from Bihar orphaned by communal rioting. Ram and Salim are sold to a group of beggar-masters and arrive in Mumbai. Ram works for former Bollywood star Neelima Kumari after leaving the gang, while Salim works as a tiffin guy. Even amid the harsh existence of the chawls, Ram's hunger for education and compassion is obvious. He injures a drunken neighbour who attempts to molest his daughter one day.

He flees to Delhi, where he works for an Australian diplomat who is subsequently arrested for espionage. A train thief steals Ram's hard-earned pay on the way back to Mumbai. He kills one of the

thugs and flees to Agra, where he works as a guide at the Taj Mahal. He falls deeply in love with Nita, a young woman forced into prostitution. He is unable to get the funds to release her and returns to Mumbai, where he is reunited with Salim.

Ram's remarkable adventure culminated in his appearance on "Who Will Win A Billion?" a game show. He's working as a bartender in a budget hotel when he notices an advertisement for the game show "Who Will Win A Billion?" He takes part not for the money, but to assassinate Prem Kumar, who tormented two people close to him: his late boss Neelima Kumari and his beloved Nita. Prem Kumar makes fun of him and threatens him. Ram refuses to be intimidated by the wealthy and powerful. Ram defies the odds and wins the lottery thanks to his wits, great memory, and unbelievable luck. He gets arrested shortly after on allegations of cheating. When a guy cannot be vanquished on his own merits, the author, like Shashi Tharoor in "The Great Indian Novel," reveals that he is always revealed by uprooting his background. Swarup critiques the trend in Indian society of judging people based on their birthplace rather than their brains. Through the tale of Ram, he has addressed this element of Indian society. It sends a strong message that everyone can overcome adversity.

Smita Shah, a young lawyer, assists Ram. Ram informs her about how incredible encounters provided him with the answers to each inquiry. He abandons his preparations for murder and vengeance and instead donates his prize money to people in need. His true success is based on his reassuring faith, compassion, and bravery. Ram proves what Swarup said,

My novel was about luck, my book was about survival and hope and the triumph of the underdog. The story is a slice of Indian life and he does not see India's slums as a place of despair. They are teeming with vigour, industry and energy with people trying to improve their lives, trying to break that vicious cycle of poverty. (Good Housekeeping | Swarup)

The writer also shows how the impoverished and slum dwellers suffer as a result of unfair legal

practises. Only the wealthy are served by the law, and only at their whims. It's shown genuinely right at the start, when Ram gets imprisoned after winning the quiz. The show's producers, who don't want to give up the one-billion-dollar prize, bribe the Home Minister and the Police Commissioner to force Ram to admit that he won through cheating. The wealthy may buy law enforcement agents to oppress the poor. The cops brag about how they use third-degree torture to get confessions without leaving a single scratch on the victim's body.

Here, Swarup emphasises the importance of wealth and power in exploitation, and that impoverished and disadvantaged people are always the victims of exploitation. In the chapter headed "The Burden of a Priest," Swarup discusses another kind of exploitation: child molestation, in which a young priest sexually assaults a kid. In the preceding chapter, the protagonist describes the entire episode. When John, a young parent, sexually abuses Timothy's hidden son and Ram discovers it, they are caught red-handed. Young Father John is portrayed as a homosexual man who regularly invites people from outside the church for his sexual pleasure. He attempts this nefarious technique on father Timothy's hidden son one day, but is discovered by Ram. Swarup brilliantly depicts the modern man's weak psyche.

Swarup reveals the average man's dread of both cops and criminals, as well as the sad situation of civilian security in modern India. He harshly criticises the economic-based society, in which men are not valued equally for their brains and hard effort. The country's positive aspects have been glaringly overlooked. The protagonists in this storey are two Indians. One is wealthy, while the other is impoverished. Both India's reflections are sad. The poor part is incorrect, while the wealthy part is polluted with crimes, cheating, artificiality, the abolition of human values, corruption, and so on.

Swarup brings the audience to a government-run juvenile detention centre in Delhi. Little Ram had been transferred to this halfway house/jail after the assassination of his protector Father Timothy. The authorities squander government funds, allowing people to suffer

without enough nutrition, clothing, cleanliness, medicine, education, or sports. They are tormented by the superintendents. Every child has a tragic narrative to tell, one that mirrors the barbaric fate of a country's bright future.

Vikas Swarup draws readers' attention to another issue involving orphanages and beggar lords who acquire children from these institutions by paying large sums to government authorities and then abusing them for profit. Orphans are wounded and forced to beg after being enticed to major cities by the promise of a good existence. They blind the youngsters so that they can beg on the streets more effectively. Ram and Salim are purchased by Mamman Pillai, a beggar-master from Bombay. Salim, with his Bollywood ambitions, falls into raptures when they arrive in Bombay.

Swarup exposes India's corruption, the opulent lifestyle of the neocolonial ruling elite, and the opaque deals that plague the government apparatus. In addition, he reveals bigotry and mental slavery among whites in contemporary India. Ram becomes a servant for Colonel Taylor, an Australian ambassador, since he speaks English. According to the Taylors, an Indian will do anything for a bribe. The postman, the electrician, the phone repairman, and even the census taker who ignores the servants all show a penchant for bribes to establish their point.

Through his vast number of female characterizations in this storey, Swarup aims to demonstrate the paralysing effect of women's aggression. The continuance of women's violence leads to an ecological imbalance in society. This vulgarity towards women must be stopped if society wants to avoid greater female deserts. To create a violence-free, safe society for our girl-child, some behavioural adjustments in male look towards fair-sex are required; otherwise, the slogan "SAVE THE GIRL-CHILD" will not be realised. As a result, the issue must be addressed from the ground up. Women's treatment must be judged from a humanitarian standpoint, not from a sense of sympathy, but from a genuine sense of equality. In this regard, Swarup's motivation for portraying a character like Ram is a difficult one to decipher.

While the culture is screamed with that of violence, he is at least the personification of non-violence and seeks to introduce a new gender-free society. This is a tremendous achievement as well as comfort for those worried ladies of our society.

Despite the use of literary devices such as myths, symbols, slum, disrupted, and question & answer narratives, the novel is realistic because of the vivid portrayal of India as seen through the lens of an Indian diplomat – who can touch the deepest nerves of India and voice the concerns of the marginalised. The storey is told in such a way that it looks to be a roller coaster trip through the current Indian psyche since it is linked with different major events from India's recent history. The fragmented memories in the narrative can be equated to Rushdie's notion in *Imaginary Homeland* when he says: "Memory... selects, eliminates, alters, exaggerates, minimizes, glorifies, usually coherent version of events; and no same human being ever trust someone else's version more than his own" (17). These recollections are recovered by skilled authors who go through the same process as the people and assist them to construct and verify their memories based on their experiences in India's current socio-political environment. "Q &A" lays a claim to be regarded as one of the best novels of our time as a critique of contemporary India, told with tremendous narrative intensity.

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