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RACIAL, SOCIAL AND CLASS DISCRIMINATION IN VIKAS SWARUP'S Q & A

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Abstract:

Discrimination occurs when people are marked out and treated unjustly because of their race, social, class, religion, gender, age, sexual orientation, handicap status, national origin, or any other factor. As a result, people lose their choices and freedoms. Discrimination may take various forms, both verbal and behavioural, and in a variety of contexts. Discrimination is a notion that gives a method of thinking about a certain type of injustice that may be found in almost any civilization and age.

Key words: *Discrimination, Racial, Social, Economic, slum-dwellers, poverty.*

Introduction:

Discrimination is defined as treating people differently based on their social group membership. Although we prefer to think of discrimination in negative terms, it may also result in someone being regarded more favourably than they would be otherwise depending on their membership in a certain group. Discrimination occurs when people are marked out and treated unjustly because of their race, class, gender, age, sexual orientation, handicap status, national origin, or any other factor. As a result, people lose their choices and freedoms. Discrimination may take various forms, both verbal and behavioural, and in a variety of contexts. Bullying, or unwelcome violent conduct that sufferers encounter regularly, can be physical, such as striking or kicking; verbal, such as mocking and threatening; or relational, such as spreading rumours and exclusion. It can happen in person or online, for example, by publishing images or words online. Discrimination exists at all levels of society, from the individual to the collective. Because these distinctions indicate

areas along a continuum rather than pretty tough categories, the lines between types and dimensions are not always apparent. As a result, they overlap to some extent.

The deliberate or successful discrimination against individuals or social groups based on certain generic characteristics is a general practice at all times. Discrimination frequently affects minorities, but it may also affect majorities. Discrimination causes injury or disadvantage to the individuals or groups targeted. Racism, sexism, anti-Semitism, homophobia, transphobia, or cissexism, classism, lookism, and ableism are only a few of the labels that have been developed to describe types of discrimination. While deliberate discrimination happens at the individual level, institutional discrimination refers to social institutions' explicit practises that exclude, hinder, or damage specific groups. Discrimination is a term used to describe policies that are neutral in aim and implementation but may damage minorities. Opponents of structural discrimination argue that states have a responsibility to ensure that all people have equal opportunities in life, a responsibility that includes proactive compensation by some institutions for unequal treatment minorities have received in the past or continue to receive in other social systems.

Merriam Webster Dictionary defines discrimination as *the act, practice, or an instance of discriminating categorically rather than individually*.

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights declares that “the law shall prohibit any discrimination and guarantee to all persons equal and effective protection against discrimination on any ground such as race, colour, class, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status” (Article 26)

European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights declares, “The enjoyment of the rights and freedoms set forth in this Convention shall be secured without discrimination on any ground such as sex, race, colour, class, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth or other status” (Article 14).

Based on social identity theory, socio-psychological theories of discrimination assume that humans rely on their social groups for a portion of their identity. Belonging to a more prominent and powerful group than others improve one's self-esteem. Discrimination that degrades and impairs out-group members or denies them access to resources and money serves to improve one's in-relative group's standing while also indirectly boosting individual self-esteem. Existing investigation show that those who have a low feeling of social recognition have greater out-group devaluation and group-focused hostility based on a human inequality worldview. Negative sentiments toward various out-groups are highly linked, demonstrating the general nature of discrimination.

The intimate relationship between discrimination and inequality is explained by the corresponding dimension of the disadvantage imposed by bias. A compared disadvantage entails an inequity in contrast to those in the comparator group. Discrimination is defined as behaviours,

practices, or policies that place people at a disadvantage because of their social group membership. However, it is important to note that this account does not render discrimination ethically bad as a notion.

Vikas Swarup is a well-known Indian diplomat and author. Vikas Swarup was born on June 23, 1961, in the historic Indian city of Allahabad, to a family of lawyers. He attended Boys' High School & College in Allahabad and went on to Allahabad University to study Psychology, History, and Philosophy. He is an Indian Foreign Service officer. He is the current Secretary (CPV) in India's Ministry of External Affairs. He formerly served as India's High Commissioner in Canada and as the Ministry of External Affairs' official spokesperson. He is now the Indian Government's Secretary for Consular, Passport, Visa, and Overseas Indian Affairs. He is most known for writing the novel *Q & A*, which was turned into the film *Slumdog Millionaire*, which won Best Film at the Academy Awards, Golden Globe Awards, and BAFTA Awards in 2009. Swarup entered the Indian Foreign Service in 1986 and has worked in different Indian diplomatic posts in Turkey, the United States, Ethiopia, the United Kingdom, South Africa, and Japan. *Six Suspects* and *The Accidental Apprentice* are two of his other novels.

About Q & A:

Vikas Swarup's *Q & A* depicts the life of Ram Mohammad Thomas, an orphaned boy. Since childhood, his life's journey, difficulties, and experiences have all contributed to his winning the most prestigious quiz show, *Who Would Win A Billion?* As an orphan, he encounters a wide range of people and events. He was constantly reminded of his low social status and carelessness. He was treated to a torrent of insults in a number of contexts. Ram and the other characters have experienced various discriminations throughout their lives. The primary section of the narrative is linked with the slum neighbourhood Dharavi, Mumbai.

The present paper is an attempt to throw light on racial social and class discrimination as delineated in the novel. These discriminations will be critically analysed with the particular events and the characters in the novel. The victims of discrimination are the slum dwellers, workers and servants in the novel. Questioning many elements of discrimination, such as demographic, economic, regional, racial, political, and cultural exclusion, in a broader perspective is not only to explain discrimination but also to demonstrate discriminatory processes. On the basis of poverty, religion, or caste position, dynamic entities such as the state and civil society discriminate against the people of so-called lower status. Discrimination, both implicit and aggressive, must be identified and mended.

Racial Discrimination in Q & A:

Racism is defined as prejudice and stereotypes directed at stigmatised racial and ethnic groups, as well as discrimination against these groups by individuals and institutions. Racism, also known as racialism, is the belief that humans can be divided into distinct biological entities known as

"races," that there is a causal link between inherited physical traits and personality, intellect, morality, and other cultural and behavioural characteristics, and that some races are innately superior to others. The phrase also refers to political, economic, and legal organisations and systems that participate in or perpetuate racial discrimination or otherwise exacerbate racial disparities in wealth and income, education, health care, civil rights, and other sectors. The concept of biological race has been identified as a cultural construct with no scientific foundation.

I am the only one not smiling. Granted, we servants are invisible people, not to be heard during parties and family occasions, but to be left out even from our country's head count is a bit too galling. And I do wish the Taylors would stop their snobbish references to 'bloody Indians'. This must be the fiftieth time I have heard them use this expression since I have been with them. Every time I hear it, my blood boils. (125)

Ram, the protagonist, was fourteen years old when he went to work as a servant for Colonel Taylor's family in Delhi. Ram expresses the above sentiments in response to Colonel Taylor's remark about the Indians. The Australian Defence Attaché is Colonel Taylor. When the Government Census Man comes to Colonel Taylor's bungalow, he displays his disgust for the Indian people as an Australian and as a white man. He is not required to provide information about his family as an Australian, but he finds it bothersome and tedious to introduce his Indian servants, so he gives him a bottle of liquor and sends him back. Indians, he believes, are tainted and of low class. They do not require respect or attention. Except for Ram, all of the other servants chuckled when Colonel Taylor expressed his opinion. This is a case of racial discrimination in action. The servants are overlooked and unheard, but they cannot be forgotten or excluded from the census. Colonel Taylor refers to the Indians as "bloody Indians" all the time. He demonstrates his colonial mindset. The Europeans regard the Indians or Orientals as the "other" or "subordinate." Ram's feeling of patriotism, pride, and love for Indians makes his fury boil whenever Colonel Taylor mistreats the Indians. Patriotism is an emotion that comes from within, not from wealth or education.

Colonel Taylor starts going on early-morning walks with Rover to Lodhi Garden, which is close to the house. Till the Delhi Government brings out a new law under which people with pet dogs have to scoop up the dog litter or face hefty fines. From then on I am instructed to accompany master and dog and act as sweeper to Rover. I hate this chore. Imagine having to get up from bed at five-thirty and go running with scoop and pan after a dirty, stupid dog which shits every two minutes.

Colonel Taylor is in charge of the event once more. Colonel Taylor enjoys taking his dog for a morning walk at Lodhi Garden, which is close to his home. The dogs are taken with them for their own safety and to be able to spin freely. Because the morning atmosphere and roads become filthy, the Delhi government has enacted new legislation requiring dog owners to pick up their trash or face stiff penalties. Ram has been assigned to escort Colonel Taylor and his favourite dog Rover as a

result of this. He needs to get up at 5:30 in the morning and follow them with a scoop and pan to clean the dog's nasty excrement. He despises his work. He works as a servant at home, doing household chores. A servant, on the other hand, cannot disobey his master, especially if the master is a white man. The white man's burden can be seen here. Because of his master's burden and order, the poor servant is forced to do the dirty work. The wealthy have a pet for their pleasure and dignity, while the poor servant has to do their dirty and menial tasks. They are sometimes forced to obey their orders, or the servants will be fired.

Social Discrimination in *Q & A*:

Based on social identity theory, socio-psychological explanations of discrimination assume that humans rely on their social groups for a part of their identity. Belonging to a more prestigious and powerful group than others improve one's self-esteem. Social discrimination that degrades and impairs out-group members or denies them access to resources and money serves to increase one's in-relative group's position while also indirectly boosting individual self-esteem. Current studies show that people who have a low feeling of social recognition have higher out-group devaluation and group-focused animosity based on a human inequality ideology.

I have been arrested. For winning a quiz show. They came for me late last night, when even the stray dogs had gone off to sleep. They broke open my door, handcuffed me and marched me off to the waiting jeep with a flashing red light. There was no hue and cry. Not one resident stirred from his hut. Only the old owl on the tamarind tree hooted at my arrest. (11)

The novel begins with Ram's arrest. His imprisonment stems from his win on the quiz programme *Who Will Win A Billion?* Accepting his win is beyond the wildest dreams of producers of the show. He is accused of cheating even after honestly winning the show. The producers plan to arrest him and force him to admit that he cheated. The scene takes place in Dharavi, Mumbai. Arrests are a frequent occurrence in Dharavi. As a result, no one seemed to mind his arrest. He wasn't expected to win the competition because he didn't deserve it. He is an orphaned, illiterate slum dweller who works as a waiter at the pub. His social background is the biggest barrier to accept his win. When someone is arrested in Dharavi, it is assumed that he has done something for which he is being accused. He will have to deal with the disaster on his own. Here you may observe the clash between the impoverished Ram and the wealthy producers. The wealthy always believe that they can use their financial power to oppress the poor. They leave the poor with no choice except to suffer and tolerate. He is apprehended and subjected to physical and mental torture to confess to cheating.

There are those who will say that I brought this upon myself. By dabbling in that quiz show. They will wag a finger at me and remind me of what the elders in Dharavi say about never crossing the dividing line that separates the rich from the poor. After all, what business did a penniless waiter have to be participating in a brain quiz? The brain is not an organ we are authorized to use.

We are supposed to use only our hands and legs. (12)

It's simple to point the finger at the poor orphaned slum youngster. His tenderness and honesty are worthless. He is shaped by his social environment, poverty, and illiteracy. Strangers believe that his responsibility is based on these social, physical, and personal circumstances. Nobody would try to eavesdrop on his personality and character. Rather, he is devoid of personality. People will point the finger at him, claiming that he brought it on himself by dabbling in the show. Some will remark that what the seniors say and should be followed. The elderly has come to terms with the fact that there has always been a division between the rich and the poor. This line must be maintained at all times and should never be crossed. General knowledge is the basis for the quiz. The brain is a knowledge store. The brain is the one thing that the impoverished do not have, the higher society thinks. The poor are allowed to use their bodily organs, such as their hands and legs, rather than their brains. This tendency is a point of humiliation and social discrimination. The rich's assets are their brains and knowledge, whereas the poor's assets are their hands and legs. The affluent and powerful create this approval, which the impoverished happily accept. The rich's social dominion is unquestionably maintained by the poor.

Class Discrimination in Q & A:

The classification of people into social classes is based on their wealth, income, education, occupation, and social network. Discrimination based on social status is known as class discrimination or classism. Individual attitudes, actions, and systems of rules and procedures that benefit the upper class at the expense of the lower class are all included. The difference in social status between people impacts how they behave toward each other and the prejudices they are likely to have about each other, just as it does with social classes. People of greater rank rarely mix with those of lower status, and they frequently influence other people's actions through laws and societal standards. Discrimination based on socio-economic grounds is known as economic discrimination. Job availability, wages, the prices and/or availability of goods and services, and the quantity of capital investment finance available to minorities for business are all examples of these issues. Discrimination against workers, consumers, and minority-owned businesses is one example.

'Well, Madam, we poor can also ask questions and demand answers. And I bet you, if the poor conducted a quiz, the rich wouldn't be able to answer a single question. I don't know the currency of France, but I can tell you how much money Shalini Tai owes our neighborhood moneylender. I don't know who was the first man on the moon, but I can tell you who was the first man to produce illegal DVDs in Dharavi. Could you answer these questions in my quiz?' (29)

Smita Shah, a female lawyer, appears to retrieve Ram from the police station. She discovers no FIR against Ram. She demands that the police stop harassing her right away. She brings Ram to her house to have a private conversation with him. For Ram, it was nothing short of a miracle. He

didn't recognise her. He is so poor that he could not afford to employ a lawyer. He assumed she was a part of the plan. She is sent to find out the truth from him to catch him cheating on the show and make him confess. She takes Ram to her home to learn the secret of his win. He was enraged and distressed to the point of insanity. He assumed she shared his opinion that he did not deserve to win the quiz show. Because he is an illiterate waiter and a slum dog who cannot win the quiz. Even the well-educated and intelligent person is unable to respond to a wide range of questions. He was able to respond to all of the questions because they were based on incidents and situations he had encountered. It was just a stroke of luck. No one believed, however, that through his book of life experiences, he understood all the answers to all the questions. He is not guilty, despite detractors' assertions. When Smita confronts him for the truth, he becomes enraged and displays his disdain for the wealthy. The rich do not have the right to pose a question and cast doubt on the poor. The impoverished can also ask questions that the wealthy cannot answer. The rich have different knowledge than the poor, and conversely.

Lajwanti is crying on the bed. The drops falling from her eyes like little pearls and darkening the fabric of her creaseless bed cover seem out of place in the spartan neatness of her room. 'What's wrong, Lajwanti? Why are you weeping?' I ask her.

'Because of that bitch Swapna Devi. She has refused to give me a loan. Now how will I pay for my sister's wedding?' she says and wails again.(313)

Swapna Devi's best maid servant is Lajwanti. Ram learns of her sister Laxmi's engagement to the Sugarcane Officer from her. Instead of cash, the groom's family is anticipating a Bajaj scooter, a Sumeet mixer, five Raymond suits, and some gold jewellery. However, she prepares for the marriage proposal, which will cost around one lakh rupees. Her calculations are nearly complete. She has acquired 50,000 rupees and will borrow another 50,000 rupees from her employer Swapna Devi. Ram discovers that Lajwanti is weeping on the bed because Swapna Devi has abused and refused to offer her a loan of 50,000 rupees. She has always been proud of being Swapna Devi's best maid. As a result, she will never refuse Lajwanti's request for a loan. All of her sister's hopes for a happy marriage have been ruined. This incident shows the vices of discrimination. The poor servant is never trusted. The loyalty of the poor has no value in the eyes of the socially superior people.

Conclusion:

The novel has various examples of racial, social and class discrimination. The novel describes the contemporary Indian society of the 21st century. Discrimination is a notion that gives a method of thinking about a certain type of injustice that may be found in almost any civilization and age. The issue comprises a group-based structure that operates in unison with relative disparities created around it. The disparities are unjust not only because they treat people as having a lower

moral standing, but also because they make members of the group in issue more subject to tyranny and control by those in positions of comparative benefits. Discrimination against people is inevitably directed at them because of their membership in a particular social division. However, the discriminating behaviour causes some form of disadvantage, harm, or injustice to the people who are targeted. It's critical to understand that discrimination, in the moral and social sense, involves more than just different treatment. Differential treatment is parallel: if the poor are treated differently than the rich, then the rich and powerful must also be treated differently. The discrimination creates social conflict which results in social unrest and becomes a threat to national peace and progress. So, it is quite expected to demolish all the patterns of discrimination from the nation and minds of the people.

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