

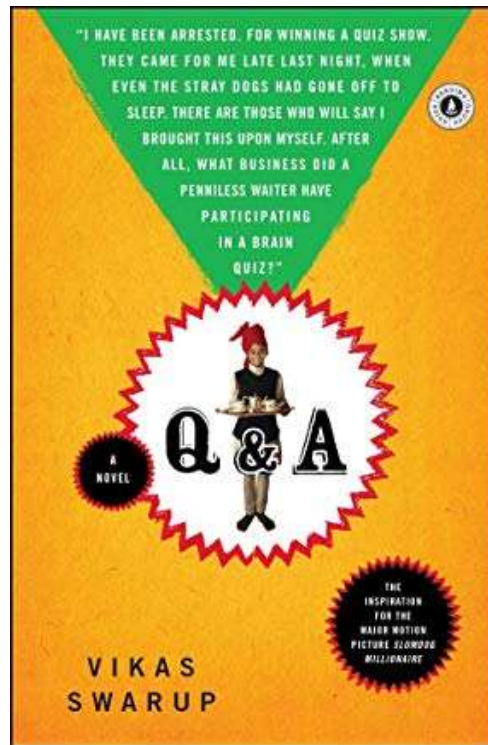
## Sadism and Despotism in Vikas Swarup's Novel *Q & A*

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### Abstract

Sadism is the tendency to derive pleasure, especially sexual gratification, from inflicting pain, suffering or humiliation on others. Despotism, on the other hand is something dominance through threat of punishment and violence. The novel *Q & A* has huge social impact and it represents some of the serious problems that haunt the Indian society. This paper analyzes the consequences of Sadism and Despotism through the characters of Premkumar, Shantaram and Shyam. It also highlights the real sufferings of women in India.

**Keywords:** Vikas Swarup, *Q & A*, Sadism, despotism, chauvinistic, livid bruises, pockmarks, poignant, melancholy, scald, stupor.

Vikas Swarup is a famous Indian English writer who formerly served as the official spokesperson of the Ministry of External Affairs of India and currently the High Commissioner of India to Canada. Swarup is well known for his novel *Q & A* published in 2005, adapted in film as *Slumdog Millionaire*, the winner of Best film for the year 2009 at the Academy Awards, Golden Globe Awards and BAFTA Awards. *Q & A* novel is set in India and tells the story of how a penniless poor young waiter becomes the biggest quiz show winner in history. Critically acclaimed in India and abroad, this book is an international best seller and has been translated into forty two languages. It is a funny, poignant and colourfully written first novel of the author. The TV quiz show is used as a vehicle through which the Indian society is examined in its real colours.

Swarup presents Nita as a Bedni girl, engaged in prostitution in Basai Mohalla in Agra. It has once been a notorious place where the flesh trade flourished with all other sinful activities. A village near the Taj Mahal called Basai was historically set up for prostitutes who entertained the Mughal Army personnel and later British Soldiers. Swarup takes such a place to picture it as an example based on typical Redlight areas that thrives in India. In Basai Mohalla, the protagonist of the novel meets a Bedni girl named Nita. Nita is a Seventeen year old girl from the Bhand district in Madhya Pradesh.

The Bedia Community in this district has a strange tradition, that one girl from each family must serve as a communal prostitute called the Bedni. The Bedia woman is both the bread winner as well as the home-keeper. For both these roles, she is dependent on prostitution. Sex is a family business where young girls engage in prostitution. Gangs from the Bedia and Nutt communities kidnap girls, and give them injections to make them to reach puberty. The girls are then sent to Mumbai and even to the Gulf countries for prostitution. India is a source, destination, and transit country for women and children subjected to sex trafficking. India has three million sex workers, of whom 1.2 million are below the age of 18, according to a government estimate, and the South Asian nation traffics more women for sex than any other country. Shreya Pareek Experts estimate millions of women and children are victims of sex trafficking in India.

Shreya Pareek in her article ‘This community celebrates Birth of a Girl child. Here’s why it is not Good News’ tells:

The Bedia Community of MP celebrates the birth of a girl child for a very different reason. In the heart of Madhya Pradesh, every time when a woman is pregnant the family hopes the child won’t be a boy. The Bedia Community wishes to have more girls. As soon as a girl attains puberty, she is considered ‘ready’ to take up the profession that has been followed by many generations in her community.

The Bednigirl kept for this purpose earns money and sustains the entire family while the men of the family remain doing nothing and spend their time drinking and playing cards. Nita's situation proves to be more ironic as her own brother Shyam acts as her pimp. He is not ready to release her and lose her earning potential. He has even disregarded her injuries as he had allowed Premkumar to use her for five thousand rupees. Nita refuses to satisfy him and as a result Sadist Premkumar abuses her, "She has livid bruises all over her face and her lips are peculiarly twisted, as if her jaw has been dislocated. There is blood on two of her teeth, and her left eye is blackened. "(328) Nita is in the emergency ward of Singhania Hospital with "deep red welt marks on her slimback, as if someone has used a horsewhip.... There are cigarette-burn marks all over her chest, looking like ugly pockmarks" (329).

It is a village girl's fate in wealthier India. Mumbai and Calcutta have the country's largest sex industry.

In the novel Nita's parents are still alive and she has a brother, and a sister who is happily married. Her mother had the right to decide which of her two daughters would marry and which one would become a prostitute. Her mother chose Nita to become the Bedni, because her "beauty became a bane." (305). At the age of twelve, she lost her virginity and she was put on sale. She is the "goose which lays golden eggs" (315) for their family.

Premkumar behaves terribly with another woman, the great actor Neelima Kumari, the Tragedy Queen of India. Sadist Premkumar exploits the women as they are poor and vulnerable. She tortures Neelima slowly. There is a core of melancholy surrounds (Neelima) her.

She almost invokes and welcomes death with this twisted logic. She even recalls her role in a film name Woman and renders the lines "oh life, how fickle you are, it is death, which is my real lover, my constant companion. Come death, take me in your arms, whisper the sweet sound of silence in my ears and waft me away to the land of eternal love." (260)

Neelima has a larger family, but she lives like an orphan. Her ex-lover Premkumar visited her often. Whenever he comes to meet Neelima he makes some marks. "But this time things are more serious. She is in bed with a deep cut above her left eyebrow and her cheek is swollen. She has difficulty speaking". (264). She suffers in silence. "It is the destiny of a woman to suffer in silence." (265). Later her injuries become more serious with swollen cheeks and cigarette burn marks all over her chest. "She is crying too. 'I do not want to live with a mask anymore... I want to be a real woman for once in my life'" (265). She wants to remove her mask but does not have the mental strength to do so. She becomes more depressed and finally she ended her life by committing suicide. Premkumar's Sadistic and chauvinistic behaviour makes Neelima Kumari, the famous Tragedy Queen of India to commit suicide.

Another character named Shantaram, used to work in the Aryabhata Space Research Institute, a famous space scientist and a violent drunker. Shantaram fights with his wife and also with his colleagues and lost his job and fortunes. Finally, he works as a sales assistant in a clothes showroom and they are forced to live in a Chawl. Shantaram beats his wife and throws a piping hot cup of tea at his wife. Gudiya, daughter of Shantaram tries to shield her mother and the burning liquid scalds her face. Mrs. Shantaram takes her daughter to the hospital. “Her face is completely bandaged; only her black eyes can be seen.” (78).

Barely a week after Gudiya returns from the hospital, he does something to her again. “He tries to touch her. But not like a father... Gudiya screaming, ‘Papa, don’t touch me! Papa, please don’t touch me!’” (81). The next night, Shantaram again comes home in a drunken Stupor and tries to molest Gudiya. “You are more beautiful than all the stars and planets. You are my moon. You are my Gudiya, my doll. Yesterday you evaded me, but today I will not let you leave me.”

Shantaram continuously tries to molest Gudiya, his own daughter. He breaks a bottle over his wife’s head and molests his daughter. Gudiya was depressed because of her father’s behavior losing her mind says “I will not live much longer, Ram Mohammad Thomas,’ She sobs. ‘I will commit suicide rather than submit to my father” (84) Ram, the protagonist promise Gudiya that he will never allow such things to happen. But what was Gudiya’s crime? Simply that “She was born a girl and Shantaram was her father.” (84). Garima Tiwari opines, “Anyone who has watched ‘Slumdog Millionaire’, the Oscar-winning movie, would have seen tiny speck of this dark side of India”.

Thus, the novel portrays Despotism and Sadism through the characters of Premkumar, Shantaram and Shyam and shows a clear picture of Bedia Community and their culture through the character of Nita, a Bedni girl. The novelist penned his talents to focus on the real living characters from the Suburbs of Delhi.

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