

**Social Reality and Post-Liberal Transformations in Vikas Swarup's Q & A and Six Suspects**

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**Abstract:**

Contemporary Indian English fiction provides a significant platform for exploring the social, political, and economic changes that have shaped post-liberalization India. This study focuses on the portrayal of social realities in Vikas Swarup's *Q & A* (2005) and *Six Suspects* (2008) by applying the perspectives of social realism and postcolonial criticism. Using a qualitative textual analysis, the research investigates how Swarup represents issues such as urban poverty, social inequality, corruption, communal tensions, gender-based challenges, and the struggles of marginalized groups. The study reveals that both novels capture the complexities of a transforming Indian society, where economic advancement exists alongside continuing disparities and institutional shortcomings. Through multiple viewpoints, crime-oriented narratives, and the personal experiences of ordinary individuals, Swarup highlights the connections between political influence, economic power, media control, and social injustice. The analysis suggests that these novels move beyond the framework of popular fiction and serve as critical reflections on contemporary Indian life. By presenting the voices and experiences of marginalized communities, Swarup questions conventional ideas of progress and modernization while drawing attention to issues of identity, exclusion, and inequality. This comparative study contributes to the broader understanding of Indian English literature by demonstrating the enduring relevance of social realism in interpreting the challenges and transformations of twenty-first-century India.

**Keywords:** Class inequality; Contemporary Indian English fiction; Corruption; Post-liberal India; Social realism; Social reality.

## 1. Introduction

The relationship between literature and society has long been recognized as an important area of academic inquiry. Literary texts are often shaped by the social and cultural conditions of their time, reflecting the concerns, values, and experiences of the communities from which they emerge. However, literature does more than simply represent reality. It also questions social norms, challenges existing power structures, and provides deeper insights into human life and society. In this regard, social realist fiction holds particular significance because it concentrates on the everyday experiences of ordinary people and draws attention to inequalities embedded in political, economic, and cultural systems (Williams, 1977). Through realistic representations of lived experiences, literature becomes a powerful means of understanding social tensions and collective anxieties.

A major transformation in India's socio-economic landscape occurred with the introduction of economic liberalization policies in 1991. These reforms encouraged globalization, accelerated urbanization, promoted technological advancement, and contributed to the emergence of a consumer-oriented middle class. While economic growth and global integration were strengthened, the benefits of development were not distributed equally. Existing inequalities widened, and new forms of social exclusion emerged. Persistent problems such as poverty, unemployment, corruption, and unequal access to resources continued to affect large sections of society, raising serious questions about the inclusiveness of development (Corbridge & Harriss, 2000). As a result, post-liberal India has often been characterized by contradictions in which economic progress exists alongside deprivation, and democratic ideals coexist with institutional inefficiency and systemic corruption.

These socio-economic realities have become central themes in contemporary Indian English fiction. Several writers have attempted to capture the complexities of modern India by examining issues related to globalization, migration, class divisions, and identity politics. Authors such as Aravind Adiga, Amitav Ghosh, Kiran Desai, and Vikas Swarup have portrayed the tensions and inequalities accompanying India's rapid transformation. Among them, Vikas Swarup occupies a unique position because his novels combine popular storytelling with strong social and political criticism.

Swarup's novels *Q & A* (2005) and *Six Suspects* (2008) offer important insights into the realities of post-liberal Indian society. *Q & A* narrates the story of Ram Mohammad Thomas, an orphan from the slums whose unexpected success in a television quiz show becomes a means of exposing broader social issues, including child labour, urban poverty, religious diversity, and institutional corruption. In a similar manner, *Six Suspects* centres on the murder of Vicky Rai and employs multiple narrative perspectives to uncover political corruption, media sensationalism, deficiencies within the judicial system, and deep-rooted social inequalities. Through these narratives, a broad and multifaceted picture of

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contemporary India is presented, highlighting the paradoxes associated with modernization and development.

Existing scholarship on Swarup's fiction has primarily focused on themes such as crime, globalization, and social injustice (Rosyadi, 2020; Sridevi, 2021; Waykar, 2024). However, only limited attention has been given to a comparative analysis of *Q & A* and *Six Suspects* as literary representations of social reality. Likewise, the combined application of social realism and postcolonial criticism in interpreting Swarup's depiction of contemporary Indian society remains relatively underexplored. Addressing this gap, the present study examines how these novels reflect the socio-political realities of post-liberal India and investigates the ways in which they function as literary critiques of inequality, corruption, and institutional failure.

### **Research Objectives**

1. To explore the ways in which social reality is depicted in Vikas Swarup's *Q & A* and *Six Suspects* through the lens of social realism.
2. To examine how the novels portray the socio-economic and political changes that emerged in post-liberal India.
3. To investigate the representation of major social issues, including poverty, corruption, class disparities, and the marginalization of vulnerable groups.
4. To analyse the literary and narrative methods used by Swarup to critique the complexities of contemporary Indian society.

### **Research Questions**

1. In what ways is social reality portrayed in *Q & A* and *Six Suspects*?
2. How do these novels reflect the socio-economic and political developments of post-liberal India?
3. How are issues such as poverty, corruption, social inequality, and marginalization represented in the selected texts?
4. What narrative and literary strategies does Vikas Swarup employ to highlight the contradictions and institutional shortcomings of contemporary Indian society?

## **2. Literature Review**

Contemporary Indian English fiction has increasingly engaged with the social, economic, and political changes brought about by globalization and economic liberalization in India. Since the introduction of the economic reforms in 1991, Indian writers have shown a growing interest in themes such as poverty, corruption, social exclusion, identity crises, and the uneven effects of modernization. Their works often reveal the contradictions of a society where economic progress exists alongside deep social inequalities and persistent marginalization.

The present study is primarily grounded in the framework of social realism. According to Williams (1977), social realism enables literature to depict the everyday experiences of ordinary people while exposing the structural inequalities that influence their

lives. In a similar vein, Abrams and Harpham (2015) argue that realism seeks to present society in an authentic and critical manner rather than offering idealized representations. These perspectives are especially relevant to the fiction of Vikas Swarup, whose narratives consistently focus on marginalized individuals and critique social injustice and institutional failures.

The socio-economic consequences of economic liberalization have also received considerable scholarly attention. Corbridge and Harriss (2000) point out that the post-1991 reforms created new opportunities for economic growth and modernization. At the same time, however, they also widened socio-economic disparities. Sharma (2017) similarly observes that rapid modernization has intensified class divisions and produced new forms of social marginality. Consequently, these issues have emerged as major concerns in contemporary Indian English literature.

Globalization and its literary representation have also been widely discussed by scholars. Lahiri (2017) notes that contemporary Indian novels frequently portray urban spaces as sites of contradiction, where prosperity and affluence coexist with poverty, exclusion, and deprivation. Likewise, Prasad (2018) suggests that Indian English fiction increasingly serves as a medium for critiquing socio-political realities and exposing institutional inequalities.

Critical attention to the works of Vikas Swarup has largely centred on themes such as poverty, corruption, crime, and globalization. Sridevi (2021) argues that *Q & A* offers a realistic portrayal of urban deprivation through its depiction of child labour, exploitation, and institutional corruption. Rosyadi (2020) further examines issues of multiculturalism and identity and suggests that the protagonist's composite identity symbolizes India's pluralistic yet fragmented social reality. Similarly, Waykar (2025) interprets the novel as a socio-political narrative that highlights class inequality, gender-based violence, and the exploitation of marginalized communities.

Scholarly discussions of *Six Suspects* have mainly focused on crime and institutional failure. According to Waykar (2024), the novel moves beyond the conventional boundaries of detective fiction by presenting crime as a reflection of broader socio-political inequalities. Hemavathy and Senthamarai (2025) likewise argue that criminal behaviour in the novel emerges largely from structural inequalities and institutional inadequacies. Mukherjee (2012) also observes that contemporary Indian fiction increasingly uses crime narratives as a means of critiquing neoliberal social structures and exposing the ethical contradictions of modern society.

From a postcolonial perspective, concepts such as hybridity, marginality, and subalternity have been emphasized by scholars like Bhabha (1994) and Spivak (1988). These

theoretical perspectives are particularly relevant to Swarup's fiction because his novels foreground characters whose experiences are often excluded from dominant narratives of modernization and national development. The marginalized voices represented in *Q & A* and *Six Suspects* challenge mainstream ideas of progress and reveal the uneven nature of social transformation in contemporary India. Despite these valuable contributions, certain gaps remain in existing scholarship. Most previous studies have examined *Q & A* and *Six Suspects* separately, and comparatively little attention has been paid to analysing the two novels together. Furthermore, limited research has combined the perspectives of social realism and postcolonial theory to examine Swarup's representation of post-liberal Indian society. This gap highlights the need for a more integrated and comparative approach to understanding the social concerns embedded in his fiction.

### **3. Research Gap**

Existing research on Vikas Swarup's fiction has primarily focused on individual themes such as poverty, corruption, crime, globalization, and identity. While these studies provide important insights, relatively little attention has been given to *Q & A* and *Six Suspects* as interconnected narratives that collectively portray the complexities of post-liberal Indian society. Moreover, only a limited number of studies have attempted to combine social realism and postcolonial perspectives in analysing Swarup's works. Issues such as marginalization, institutional failure, social inequality, and the experiences of subaltern communities have not been examined comprehensively through this combined theoretical framework.

The present study seeks to address this gap by offering a comparative reading of *Q & A* and *Six Suspects*. It argues that these novels function as powerful literary commentaries on contemporary Indian society and expose the contradictions, inequalities, and institutional shortcomings that continue to shape post-liberal India.

### **4. Theoretical Framework**

The present study is guided by two closely related theoretical perspectives: Social Realism and Postcolonial Theory. Together, these frameworks offer a comprehensive basis for examining the social realities and socio-political concerns represented in *Q & A* and *Six Suspects*.

#### **4.1 Social Realism**

Social realism is primarily concerned with portraying society in an authentic and critical manner. Instead of presenting an idealized picture of social life, it focuses on the everyday experiences of ordinary people and draws attention to issues such as poverty, class divisions, social exclusion, and corruption. According to Williams (1977), literature gains social significance when it reflects common human experiences and exposes systems of injustice and oppression.

This perspective is particularly relevant to the fiction of Vikas Swarup. His novels consistently portray the harsh realities of post-liberal India, including poverty, exploitation,

institutional corruption, and widening class inequalities. Through realistic narratives and marginalized characters, Swarup reveals the contradictions and social tensions that accompany economic progress and modernization.

#### **4.2 Postcolonial Theory**

Postcolonial theory provides another important framework for understanding Swarup's novels. This theoretical approach examines issues related to identity, cultural hybridity, marginalization, and the representation of subaltern groups. Bhabha (1994) argues that postcolonial societies are characterized by fragmented identities and cultural ambivalence. Similarly, Spivak (1988) emphasizes how marginalized voices are often silenced within dominant social and political discourses.

These concepts are particularly useful in interpreting the experiences of the socially excluded characters portrayed in Swarup's fiction. The novels highlight the tensions that arise between globalization and local realities, between modernization and traditional social structures, and between dominant narratives of progress and the lived experiences of marginalized communities.

Taken together, social realism and postcolonial theory provide a broad and effective framework for analysing the socio-political concerns represented in *Q & A* and *Six Suspects*. Through these perspectives, the novels can be understood as significant literary critiques of inequality, exclusion, and the contradictions embedded within contemporary Indian society.

#### **5. Methodology**

The present study adopts a qualitative and interpretative research design to examine the selected novels. Since the research focuses on literary representation and socio-cultural meanings, qualitative textual analysis is considered the most suitable approach for addressing the research objectives.

##### **5.1 Research Design**

The study employs textual and thematic analysis to investigate the representation of social reality in Vikas Swarup's fiction. Particular attention is given to recurring themes, characterization, narrative techniques, and socio-political contexts that contribute to meaning-making within the texts. Through this approach, the underlying social concerns embedded in the novels are examined in detail.

##### **5.2 Primary Sources**

The primary texts selected for this study are:

1. Swarup, V. (2005). *Q & A*. London, England: Doubleday.
2. Swarup, V. (2008). *Six Suspects*. London, England: Doubleday.

These novels have been chosen because they offer valuable insights into the socio-economic and political transformations of post-liberal India. They also foreground important issues such as marginalization, corruption, social inequality, and institutional failure.

##### **5.3 Secondary Sources**

To support the analysis, a range of books, journal articles, and critical studies related to social realism, postcolonial theory, globalization, and contemporary Indian English fiction

have been consulted. These secondary sources provide the theoretical and contextual foundation necessary for interpreting the selected texts and situating them within broader literary and socio-political debates.

#### **5.4 Method of Analysis**

Close reading and thematic interpretation constitute the primary methods of analysis in this study. The discussion focuses on several recurring themes found in the selected novels, including:

- poverty and social exclusion;
- corruption and institutional failure;
- class inequality and the impact of globalization;
- communal tensions and cultural diversity;
- gender discrimination and marginalization; and
- crime and social disorder.

The findings are interpreted through the combined perspectives of social realism and postcolonial criticism. This analytical approach helps explain how Swarup transforms fictional narratives into powerful commentaries on contemporary Indian society. It also demonstrates that *Q & A* and *Six Suspects* should not be viewed merely as works of popular fiction. Rather, they emerge as significant socio-cultural texts that critically engage with the realities, contradictions, and inequalities of post-liberal India.

#### **6. Analysis and Discussion**

Vikas Swarup's *Q & A* and *Six Suspects* offer insightful portrayals of the socio-political realities of post-liberal India. Through realistic characters, multiple narrative voices, and crime-based storylines, the novels present a society shaped by economic transformation, social inequality, and institutional contradictions. Far from being merely popular fiction, these texts function as critical reflections on contemporary Indian life.

One of the central concerns in both novels is poverty and social exclusion. In *Q & A*, Ram Mohammad Thomas represents the marginalized sections of society that remain outside the benefits of globalization. His life as an orphan growing up in the slums reveals persistent social problems such as child labour, exploitation, and urban deprivation. Poverty is depicted not simply as a lack of financial resources but as a condition that limits access to education, dignity, and opportunities for upward mobility. Likewise, *Six Suspects* highlights the experiences of tribal and subaltern communities through characters such as Eketi. Such representations challenge dominant narratives of development and expose the unequal distribution of power and resources in Indian society. From the perspective of social realism, these inequalities arise from structural conditions rather than individual shortcomings (Williams, 1977).

Another important aspect of Swarup's social critique is corruption and institutional failure. In *Q & A*, corruption permeates institutions such as the police, the media, and religious organizations. Ram's arrest and torture after winning the quiz show expose the class

prejudices embedded within legal and social systems. Similarly, *Six Suspects* portrays corruption as deeply rooted in political and judicial institutions. The character of Vicky Rai symbolizes the privileged elite who use wealth and political influence to evade justice. Through irony and satire, Swarup reveals the close connections between politics, crime, business, and the media, thereby drawing attention to the moral crisis of contemporary society.

The novels also examine the effects of economic liberalization and globalization. Although modernization and economic growth have created new opportunities, they have also widened social divisions. In *Q & A*, the sharp contrast between affluent urban spaces and impoverished slums emphasizes the unequal distribution of wealth and resources. Likewise, *Six Suspects* presents characters from different social, cultural, and economic backgrounds, reflecting the fragmented and hierarchical nature of post-liberal Indian society. Through these diverse perspectives, Swarup demonstrates that globalization produces both opportunities and exclusions, giving rise to new forms of social inequality (Corbridge & Harriss, 2000).

Cultural diversity and communal tensions also occupy an important place in the novels. The symbolic name Ram Mohammad Thomas combines Hindu, Muslim, and Christian identities and thus represents India's multicultural character. At the same time, the novel reveals the persistence of communal prejudices and social divisions. Similarly, *Six Suspects* depicts a heterogeneous society marked by regional, linguistic, and cultural differences, thereby questioning idealized notions of national unity and social harmony. Gender inequality constitutes another significant dimension of social reality in Swarup's fiction. Female characters are frequently portrayed as victims of exploitation, violence, and marginalization. These representations suggest that economic progress has not necessarily resulted in social equality. Traditional patriarchal structures continue to shape women's lives and restrict their autonomy and opportunities.

Crime functions as a powerful metaphor in both novels. Rather than depicting criminality merely as an individual moral failure, Swarup presents it as a consequence of poverty, social inequality, and institutional inadequacies. Crime, therefore, becomes a symbolic representation of broader social disorder and systemic failure. Overall, *Q & A* and *Six Suspects* emerge as important literary representations of post-liberal Indian society. Viewed through the lenses of social realism and postcolonial criticism, the novels expose the contradictions of globalization, foreground marginalized voices, and critique enduring inequalities and institutional failures.

## **7. Findings**

The analysis of *Q & A* and *Six Suspects* reveals several important findings regarding the representation of post-liberal Indian society.

First, both novels offer realistic portrayals of contemporary India and effectively capture the contradictions that characterize the nation in the age of globalization. Although India has witnessed rapid economic growth and modernization, the benefits of development remain unevenly distributed.

Second, the study demonstrates that poverty and social marginalization continue to be persistent realities despite economic progress. Swarup illustrates that large sections of society, particularly economically disadvantaged and socially marginalized communities, remain excluded from the opportunities associated with globalization.

Third, political corruption and institutional inefficiency are portrayed as major barriers to social justice and democratic governance. The novels reveal that legal, political, and administrative institutions often fail to protect vulnerable individuals and, in many cases, reinforce existing inequalities.

Fourth, class divisions and economic disparities continue to influence access to opportunities, power, and social mobility. The experiences of the characters suggest that privilege, wealth, and social status frequently determine success more than merit alone.

Fifth, the study highlights the continuing relevance of issues such as gender discrimination, communal tensions, and cultural fragmentation in contemporary Indian society. These concerns are presented as integral elements of the broader social reality depicted in the novels.

Sixth, crime in Swarup's fiction is not represented merely as an individual moral failing. Instead, it emerges from wider socio-economic inequalities, political corruption, and institutional failures. Criminal behaviour thus becomes symptomatic of deeper structural problems within society.

Finally, the analysis demonstrates that Swarup effectively combines social realist and postcolonial perspectives to expose systems of power, inequality, and marginalization. Through his narratives, he brings to the forefront voices that are often excluded from dominant discourses of development and national progress.

## **8. Conclusion**

This research shows that Vikas Swarup's *Q & A* and *Six Suspects* offer insightful portrayals of contemporary Indian society. Through realistic characters, multiple viewpoints, and engaging narrative techniques, the novels bring attention to pressing social issues such as poverty, corruption, class divisions, communal conflict, gender discrimination, and institutional failure. Swarup depicts India as a country shaped by striking contrasts. Economic growth and modernization exist alongside deprivation, inequality, and social exclusion. Democratic ideals are frequently challenged by corruption and injustice. A significant aspect of these novels is their focus on ordinary people and marginalized communities. By giving voice to those on the fringes of society, Swarup questions dominant narratives of development and exposes the structural inequalities that continue to influence

post-liberal India. The experiences of his characters reveal the human cost of rapid economic and social transformation.

The analysis also indicates that social realism and postcolonial criticism provide useful perspectives for understanding these texts. These approaches help explain the complex relationships between globalization, identity, marginalization, and social change. More importantly, the novels extend beyond the boundaries of popular fiction and serve as meaningful socio-political commentaries. They encourage readers to reflect on issues of justice, equality, and human dignity, while highlighting the enduring inequalities that continue to shape twenty-first-century Indian society.

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