



# The intersection of Crime and Social Inequality in Vikas Swarup's *Six Suspects*

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**Abstract**— The article focuses on how crime and social inequality intersect in Vikas Swarup's *Six Suspects*, a post-millennial Indian novel. This post-millennial Indian fiction reflects crime and social inequalities. In *Six Suspects*, the murder of the protagonist, Vicky Rai, exposes how the investigation of his murder treats the suspects differently, who belong to different classes. Arun Advani narrates the lives of these suspects. Through a multi-narrative perspective, the novel examines the contradictions within modern Indian society. The novel explores how crime is entangled with societal structures, emphasising that the elite can protect themselves while the underprivileged are criminalised. It criticises the economic disparity and social inequality in contemporary Indian society.



**Keywords**— Crime, Social Inequality, Corruption, Economic Disparity, Post-Millennial India.

Post-Millennial Indian fiction represents the literary works produced by Indian authors after the year 2000. This era has resulted in substantial changes in Indian writing, which has focused on globalisation, multiple narratives, socio-economic transformations, urbanisation, corruption, and technological advancements. Varughese observes on this as, “of the texts also look to offer insight and understanding into new Indian society through the explanation of key cultural terms, practices and events” (21). She has examined how these narratives move beyond traditional postcolonial themes, delving into contemporary issues such as urbanisation, identity and speculative futures. Leigh Wilson says in *The Cambridge Companion to British Fiction: 1980-2018*, reading post-millennial novels, “...I want to suggest that parallel to a desire for a return the ‘real’ there runs an anxious awareness of the limits of the novel in achieving such a return” (02).

In particular, post-millennial Indian fiction has revealed the darker side of modern Indian society. Some of the prominent authors like Aravind Adiga, Vikram Chandra, Vikas Swarup, Meena Kandasamy and Arundhati Roy have exposed the contemporary issues of Indian society in the post-millennial era. Vikas Swarup is one of

the Award-winning contemporary Indian writers in English who portrays the reality of exploitation, pain, suffering and personal agony of underprivileged people. He depicts the realities of Indian society in his writings. He has raised crucial issues such as corruption, class, injustice, poverty, oppression, discrimination and crime in modern India. He is an admired novelist. *Q&A*, his first novel, was adapted into a film, *Slumdog Millionaire*. It has won several awards, including Oscar Awards. His second novel, *Six Suspects*, was adapted as a web series, ‘The Great Indian Murder’, by Tigmanshu Dhulia. *Six Suspects* is a crime novel that criticises social inequality, corruption, and crime.

The novel explores how the crime is entangled with societal structures, emphasising that the elite can protect themselves while the underprivileged are criminalised. Through a multi-narrative perspective, the novel examines the contradictions of modern Indian society. The protagonist Vicky Rai's suspicious murder serves as a focal point of the novel. Arun Advani, an investigative journalist, says, “That is why the murder of Vivek ‘Vicky Rai’, the thirty-two-year-old owner of the Rai Group of Industries and son of the Home Minister of Uttar Pradesh, has been dominating the news for the past two

days" (SS 13). Vicky Rai, a corrupt businessman, represents the uncontrolled power of an elite. The police suspect six people who are from different social classes: Jagannath Rai, Vicky Rai's father, a corrupt politician; Mohan Kumar, a former bureaucrat; Shabnam Saxena, a Bollywood actress; a tribe man named Eketi, Larry Page; Munna, a mobile thief; and a tourist from America. Arun Advani narrates about these six suspects.

Conversely, the novel focuses on systemic disparities, corruption, and injustice. Vicky Rai, a wealthy industrialist, was involved in bribery, scams, and murder. Despite committing various crimes, he uses his influence to escape legal consequences. Through the character Arun Advani, Swarup states that "how Vicky Rai engaged in insider trading at the stock market, defrauded investors of their dividends, bribed officials and cheated on his corporate tax. Still, he didn't get caught, always managing to exploit some loophole or other to stay out of reach of the law" (SS 13). His murder is the result of the anger of those who have been exploited by him. The Six Suspects in the novel represent different aspects of Indian society, from a wealthy person to a tribal man. The novel claims that the irony of Vicky Rai's death remains unclear.

Vicky Rai had the privilege and liberty to commit a crime with the support of wealthy politicians. His inhuman nature is evident when he runs over a homeless man. He had just stepped out of the car to check for his car damage, and without any glance or guilt, he drove away. This shows how Vicky Rai commits crimes without guilt, his disrespect for human life, and the fact that he avoided punishment for his ruthless crime reflect the social inequality and the protection given to the elite, highlighting that justice is unequal for all in society. Vicky Rai's murder is exposed in the section 'Solution' and Arun Advani says, "A violent crime is committed in Indian every three minutes, a murder every" (SS 515).

The novel highlights how crime leads to corruption. In Vicky Rai's murder, the fifth suspect is his father, Jagannath Rai. Valiyamattam states that, "He is a powerful politician who embodies the denigration of Indian politics. His political career is a chronicle of horrifying crimes" (191). Jagannath Rai, a corrupt politician, has no hesitation in committing crimes, even murder, in such matters. He killed the police officer Navneet Brar, who was an obstacle to him in doing illegal activities. Jagannath says, "First, I have to do something about that police officer. I have put Mukhtar on the job" (SS 201). Later, when the chief minister asks him about Navneet's death, he pretends to be ignorant and tells him, "The death of Navneet Brar in the landmine blast has come as a great shock to me" (SS 201).

Thombare states that, "This novel offers a kaleidoscopic portrait of modern India. It narrates various divisions of national culture. It shows the corrupt political system with subtle, serious issues" (3). Mr. Page's passport seemed fake to the official, and he was imprisoned. However, the official himself suggests how he can escape from the punishment. He asks for a hundred dollars as a bribe, but says that he is interested in foreign currency collection. The official said, "I collect foreign-currency notes, he whispered. I have all the notes from America except the hundred-dollar bill. Can you give me a hundred-dollar note? Just put it inside your passport and slide it over" (SS 224).

The novel criticises the economic disparity and social inequality in contemporary Indian society. Through the character of Eketi, a tribal man, Swarup addresses the exploitation of indigenous culture, illustrating the systemic injustice faced by marginalised communities. His story represents systemic injustice rather than an act of revenge. Eketi was punished for stealing; however, the elite who actually stole faced no repercussions. This exposes how social inequality corrupts the marginalised and encourages the elite to liberty. The story of Eketi highlights indigenous exploitation and shows that justice is uneven in contemporary Indian society.

Munna, a mobile thief, is a fourth suspect in Vicky Rai's murder. A boy born in the slums had to be invisible or become a criminal. If someone wants to live, he has to become criminals for their survival. It represents how poverty compels the marginalised people to commit crimes as a cause of survival. Munna, a petty thief, has become a criminal not because of greed or to be a wealthy person, but to fulfil his needs. This reflects the painful reality of economic inequality. He is an unemployed university graduate. Even though he has tried to do some minimal jobs, it did not work. When he worked as a servant, he experienced the heartlessness of the upper-class people. His masters are rude and criminals.

He reveals how poor people become criminals and take revenge on their masters: "Beware a servant's revenge. There are so many elderly couples in Delhi whose throats have been slit by their Bihari cooks and Nepali guards" (SS 73). He says that he worked as a book-keeper, supervisor and finally as a servant for the Bhusiyas. He was a failure in all three. As he faces inequality in all sides of his life, he decided to go back to his theft of stealing expensive mobile phones. Munna says, "There is no place for the poor in our metropolises. Doesn't matter how honest you earn a living; you can still get accused of thieving and thrown into a cell simply because you are poor and powerless. As long as I had the briefcase full of money, I had power" (SS 229). He

commits a crime to survive. Crime has become a key tool of resistance for marginalised people. Swarup claims that the rich manipulate the legal system to escape from crime while the underprivileged are trapped in it.

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## CONCLUSION

*Six Suspects* explores how social inequality in society changes people's lives. It decides who has to face criminal charges and who can escape from justice. In modern society, crime is a systemic problem where power and privilege define morality; however, it is hard for the underprivileged to attain justice. *Six Suspects* is a thriller which covers India's socio-political situation from the perspective of crime and corruption. Vikas Swarup presents an inspiring novel with multiple narratives. The novel critiques systemic issues which fortify a significant place in post-millennial Indian crime fiction. The novel is a typical example of post-millennial Indian fiction that exposes crime, corruption and inequality in a modernising society. The plot reveals how these suspects encounter societal inequalities, including class privilege, exploitation, injustice, and economic disparity, each shaping their involvement in crime. The novel fits into post-millennial Indian fiction, employing the themes of crime and corruption to criticise the wide gap between the rich and the poor, and the economic and social inequality of Indian society. The novel ends by highlighting the ambiguity of justice in society and how Vicky Rai had escaped from legal consequences but faces punishment outside the legal system.

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