



Q & A

Vikas Swarup

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Vikas Swarup's spectacular debut novel opens in a jail cell in Mumbai, India, where Ram Mohammad Thomas is being held after correctly answering all twelve questions on India's biggest quiz show, *Who Will Win a Billion?* It is hard to believe that a poor orphan who has never read a newspaper or gone to school could win such a contest. But through a series of exhilarating tales Ram explains to his lawyer how episodes in his life gave him the answer to each question.

Ram takes us on an amazing review of his own history - from the day he was found as a baby in the clothes donation box of a Delhi church to his employment by a faded Bollywood star to his adventure with a security-crazed Australian army colonel to his career as an overly creative tour guide at the Taj Mahal.

Vikas Swarup's Q & A is a beguiling blend of high comedy, drama, and romance that reveals how we know what we know - not just about trivia, but about life itself. Cutting across humanity in all its squalor and glory, *Vikas Swarup* presents a kaleidoscopic vision of the struggle between good and evil - and what happens when one boy has no other choice in life but to survive.

Q & A Details

Date : Published 2005 by Scribner

ISBN : 9780739467046

Author : Vikas Swarup

Format : Paperback 318 pages

Genre : Cultural, India, Contemporary, Asia, Drama, Fiction

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Kathryn says

I saw the movie made from this when it was on at the cinema - Slumdog Millionaire - and I thought it was a clever premise, although overly graphic in some respects. The book is just as clever, although different to the movie, because of course movies always change things. The book is less descriptive of disturbing scenes than the movie was graphic.

It was a very interesting read - I liked reading about the different places that Ram Mohammad Thomas lived and worked, and seeing how chance encounters gave him the knowledge to be able to answer 12 random questions on a quiz show - highly unlikely, but still fun to read!

Majenta says

What's the saying? "You are the sum total of your life's experiences"? This is the book that presents a very young man who has already racked up quite the collection of life experiences, just by experiencing each day of his existence. Luckily and happily, he can put this extraordinary existence to use and win himself a lot of money!

But wait! Here comes yet another unsavory event: he is arrested. For cheating. Nobody can believe that "someone like him" could have known all those answers.

They don't know this young man and what his time in this world has been like. They see a dark-skinned, humble peasant. They don't realize that they're looking at someone who could out-survive "Survivor." Someone who is now challenged with getting someone to sit down with him, listen to him, BELIEVE that he is telling the truth.

Seize your chance to sit down with him and go Behind the Answers.

I loved the chapter names, how the chapters flowed, and getting to know Ram Mohammad Thomas. He endured so much grime, he deserved to have his time to shine!

Whatever your opinion of the SLUMDOG MILLIONAIRE film, I humbly suggest that your experience isn't complete without Q & A.

Thanks for reading.

Abhinav says

Whoa. I must start by saying that I've surprised myself by reading the last 170 odd pages in just over a couple of hours.

I suppose the premise of 'Q&A' is known to everyone who hasn't been living under a rock, having been adapted into the Oscar-winning motion picture 'Slumdog Millionaire' in 2008. But that's pretty much where the resemblance ends, because the film takes very little inspiration from the events that take place in the book, which is not necessarily a bad thing.

I say this because I have no doubt that Danny Boyle's film is far more realistic & convincing. Swarup's novel is obviously flawed & has its shortcomings, but that shouldn't take away anything from the credible effort he has put into his first novel & he retells the age-old tale of the triumph of the perennial underdog in the modern backdrop of a popular quiz show.

I particularly liked the style of narration - how it switches effectively between non-linear narration in flashback mode at the start of every chapter & reverts to the present tense towards the end as the protagonist Ram Mohammad Thomas (shades of 'Life of Pi' in his name) goes on to explain how he happens to know the answer to every question he's asked in the game show.

Characterisation is not the strongest point of this novel, given one might happen to lose count of the different characters introduced throughout on account of Ram's numerous experiences. It's not that bad either but none of the characters apart from the protagonist leave much of an impression upon the mind of the reader. But then, one might end up ignoring that because there's just so much happening in Ram's life in the meantime.

I thought the ending was too 'filmi' (Bollywood term for 'cliche') for my tastes with the reunion thing & the tiny bit about Ram's lucky coin (obviously inspired from 'Sholay'), but I managed to digest that somewhat. Guess some of us Indians are used to that by now.

Engrossing, gripping & with its heart in the right place, I rate Vikas Swarup's debut novel 'Q&A' 4 out of 5 stars simply for its immense entertainment value. It definitely makes for an enjoyable read, besides giving us a rather vivid & colourful version of modern India. Highly recommended for fans of Indian popular fiction.

Ahmad Sharabiani says

Q & A = Slumdog millionaire, Vikas Swarup

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Aliaa says

★★★★★

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Nikoleta says

To Slumdog Millionaire μου ?ρεσε πολ?!. Τρ?α χαρακτηριστικ? του ε?ναι φτιαγμ?να ?τσι που ?καναν αυτ? το βιβλ?ο ιδανικ? για εμ?να.

Το θ?μα του. Η ιστορ?α που διηγ?ται ο ?ρωας θα μπορ?σε να χαρακτηριστε? σκληρ?. Απ? τις πρ?τες σελ?δες του βιβλ?ου, οι εικ?νες που περιγρ?φονται δεν ε?ναι π?ντα β?λτα σε λο?να παρκ. Ο Swarup, στο ?ργο σχολι?ζει κοινωνικ? φαιν?μενα ?πως η διαφθορ?, η εκμετ?λλευση, ο ρατσισμ?, κ ακ?μα ποιο αποτρ?παια, ?πως η κακοπο?ηση, η παιδεραστ?α, η πορνε?α και η β?α σε πολλ?ς τις μορφ?ς.

Το χαρακτηριστικ? του βιβλ?ου ?μωζ, που με ?κανε να το αγαπ?σω, δεν ε?ναι το θ?μα του, αλλ? η αφ?γηση του. Ε?ναι τ?σο αν?λαφρη, ζωνταν?, αισι?δοξη που κ?νουν την αν?γνωση πλ?ρως διασκεδαστικ?!

Φυσικ? αυτ? ισχ?ει και για τον ?διο τον ?ρωα. Εφ?σον το ?ργο ε?ναι γραμμ?νο σε πρ?το πρ?σωπο απ? την οπτικ? γων?α του ?ρωα μας, δεν γ?νεται αφ?γηση και ?ρωας να μην συνδ?ονται.

Η αφ?γηση λοιπ?ν βγ?ζει τ?σο γλυκ? αισθ?ματα στον αναγν?στη, που θεωρητικ? ?ρχεται σε πλ?ρη κ?ντρα με τα γεγον?τα που περιγρ?φει, πρακτικ? ?μωζ ο τρ?πος που το κ?νει ο συγγραφ?ας, θεματικ? και αφ?γηση ε?ναι σε πλ?ρη αρμον?α, δι?τι ?χει πετ?χει την τ?λεια ισορροπ?α αν?μεσα στην συγκ?νηση και το χιο?μορ. Πραγματικ? τ?τοια βιβλ?α για εμ?να ε?ναι η απ?δειξη ?τι η αφ?γηση ε?ναι η ψυχ? εν?ς βιβλ?ου και ?χι το θ?μα του. Ε?ναι η απ?δειξη ?τι ακ?μα και ?να κουρελιασμ?νο slumdog μπορε? να με κ?νει να διασκεδ?σω και να περ?σω μορφα με τις ιστορ?ες του.

Ana Tijani? says

Bolna i surova knjiga o detetu koje je prinudjeno da se bori za goli opstanak u okrutnom svetu...

Istovrmeno nas uvodi u svet Indije, njenu kulturu i obicaje. Cita se u jednom dahu i definitivno ne moze nikoga da ostavi ravnodusnim. Preporuka.

Joe says

My review is based on the audiobook read by Christopher Simpson, who is absolutely outstanding given his vast array of accents and vocal gymnastics. His readings adds an ingredient that would have been sorely missed without him. Having just visited India, I found I was pulled right into the vivid storyline.

I loved the movie but I found the stories in the book far more appealing. It's originally entitled "Q&A" which is actually the story's format. I haven't been teary-eyed over many stories, but this one really touched my heart. The narrative jumps around a bit, but it all still plays out quite powerfully. The movie is based on the dynamics from this book, but I wish it used a few more of these stories (while politically, I can

understand why they didn't). Ram Mohammad Thomas (Jamal in the movie), is still quite unforgettable. Salim and the host of other good and bad guys and all of their stories will stay with me for a long time. Even the charismatic TV show emcee has important history... I loved it. It's heavy at times, but a powerful read.

Amy says

I was completely unenchanted with the movie *Slumdog Millionaire*; the story, I felt, was predictable with characters that were totally uninteresting or completely unlikable. However, much as I was unimpressed with the movie, I couldn't shake the feeling that there was the kernel of a very interesting story there, and that maybe, just maybe, I might have a good experience with the book.

I am pleased to report that I was correct - the book [u:]Q&A[/u:] is far superior to the film. A few things that I preferred in the novel:

1. Not a linear time-frame; in the movie, the progression of questions in *Millionaire* followed the progress of the boy's life. In the book, this is not the case - the time-line slips around a bit, and answers to certain questions give hints of things not yet revealed that have occurred in the past. It is far more intriguing, I thought, than a simple recitation of "then this happened; then this; and then this."

2. Sunil is not a heartless murderer. One of the main problems I had with the film was the Sunil was detestable from the get-go, locking his brother in the toilet, then selling his hard-won autograph. By contrast, the character of Sunil in the novel is a sweet boy, with no relation to the narrator, who loves films, who doesn't kill anyone, and who does not become hardened by the life around him. Sunil from the book is very much what I imagine what they wanted Jamal from the movie to be, except somehow in the movie Jamal was completely lacking in charisma and was actually kind of creepy.

3. Minimal love story. I am not a person who is opposed to a love story, certainly; however, as soon as Latika was introduced in the film, I groaned inwardly, that such an interesting premise was being wasted on yet another pair of star-crossed lovers. The book, while there is certainly a romance, it does not span the entire book. Which allows Ram Mohammad Thomas (which is the character of Jamal's name in the book) to develop as a character beyond love-sick obsessive. It also allows the story to develop in interesting ways, as not everything is viewed through the lens of a forlorn lover. There are a lot more characters in the book who get their own stories, with more settings and more things happening. The book creates a believable story of how life experiences can prepare a man to win a billion Rupees on a quiz show that is entertaining, funny, tragic, and horrible, that deserves, rather than is cheapened by, its happy ending. The movie just cannot compare.

Catie says

This is one of those rare occasions when I am going to have to say that I like the movie much more than the book. For one, the movie has the absolutely adorable Dev Patel. For two, I think that it was a fantastic decision on the part of Danny Boyle et. al. to edit out the homophobic stereotyping that permeates the beginning of this book.

I've only read seventy five pages, so maybe it gets better. I don't know. This sort of thing tends to bother me quite a bit and I just can't get past it.

Let's review specifically what has turned me away from finishing this book:

1) In the vignette for the opening question, the hero's childhood best friend is obsessed with film star Armaan Ali, who has recently been featured in the gossip rags for a very public break up with his co-star. What's even worse is that those slanderous writers have accused him of homosexual tendencies, which leads the best friend to buy up all the copies of said magazine that he can afford and burn them. The hero tells us that his friend "hates homosexuals" and then goes on to say:

"I, too, know of perverts and what they do to unsuspecting boys. In dark halls. In public toilets. In municipal gardens. In juvenile homes."

2) As the hero and his BFF are watching Armaan's latest, a creepy old man sits down next to them, and then proceeds to fondle himself and molest the best friend, prompting the friend to jump up and threaten murder. In a brief moment of clarity, they realize that their attacker is none other than Armaan himself, wearing a fake beard.

3) For the very next vignette, the child hero is living in a church, as the ward of a priest. When a young priest arrives, the hero spies on him and observes homosexual pornography stuffed in his mattress, men dressed in leather and chains (and riding motorcycles!) showing up at all hours of the night, and cocaine use. The young priest cheekily flaunts his behavior and taunts the young hero.

4) About 24 hours after a 15 year old visitor arrives at the church, the hero walks in on the young priest raping him.

Now, if you can read all of that and it doesn't bother you at all, I suggest you pick up this book. Maybe I am overreacting, but this feels too much like blatant stereotyping of homosexuals as perverted pedophiles. It's the broadcasting of the homophobic belief that homosexual men will "go after" young boys at any opportunity. A belief that, in 1970, 70% of Americans agreed with.⁽¹⁾ In a 2005 survey, only 54% of Americans said that they "would allow gay people to be elementary school teachers."⁽¹⁾

So, I think that this erroneous belief is still out there, and I don't intend to support anything that keeps it alive. Now, in fairness, Vikas Swarup has stated that he did not intend for this to be homophobic, but instead highlight the "exploitation of the weak by the strong."⁽²⁾ Honestly, I don't buy that at all. I hope that this review can inform those that, like me, have a very low tolerance for this sort of thing.

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Sure, Tom Morello is a guitar-playing god, but doesn't this second rate cover just make you want to listen to the M.I.A. version? Likewise this book just makes me long for the much more intelligent movie.

1. <http://psychology.ucdavis.edu/rainbow...>

2. [http://www.thefullwiki.org/Q_%26_A_\(n...](http://www.thefullwiki.org/Q_%26_A_(n...)

David Rose says

I came late to the party - very late. Fortunately I'd not seen the film either (still haven't, but now I hope to), so my impressions of the book are untainted and without any movie-derived preconceptions.

The book is cleverly constructed and offers a whirling kaleidoscope of the India a tourist never sees, except for the Taj Mahal - and then you get an unregistered guide's perspective. From the tragedy and the despair of sprawling slums, to the cheek by jowl living in a chawl, to the darting touches of ever-optimistic, aspirational India, Vikas Swarup shares his India with the world. For this alone it is an amazing read.

I found one or two aspects of the plot a little contrived - but then, we're talking about a plot where the unlikely hero wins a billion rupees on a game show! For the greatest part of the book, however, the story flowed very naturally. The pace is quite quick for such a substantial book, but the structure was, I thought, just a little repetitive. Only a little. There are a couple of great twists.

There are moments of hilarity, volumes of excellent social observation, some quiet wit and some heavy-handed puns. By the end, I felt that I'd enjoyed a literary banquet.

Be warned, there are some unpleasantly true-to-life passages and pages. To give a list of specific cautions would spoil the book, so I will just say that these parts are not recommended for sensitive readers. There are, however, no detailed sex scenes (not the same thing as *no* sex scenes) and minimal use of foul language. In the end, I call this a wonderful read, which I was unable to put down until I'd finished.

Pooja says

A book that was suggested to me by many of my friends.

I'm sure it would be as fantastic as the movie.

Archit Ojha says

Story of a tiffin-boy who plays and wins the biggest game show on the planet and becomes a Millionaire. Each chapter has been crafted beautifully.

Recommended.

Lexie says

I have rarely been as ambivalent about a book as I was about Q&A. I realized about half-way through that I could put it down, never pick it up again, and not feel any remorse at all. Yet it was just engaging enough to

continue reading, and I finished it. I was moderately intrigued throughout, but nothing in it lit a passion in me at all.

Basically, I'm glad I checked it out of the library.

Ashwood (?? ??). says

Really liked this book, surprisingly it was as good as the movie. So, great read :)

Tea Jovanovi? says

MUST READ! MUST READ! One of the books I've discovered for Serbia, and I'm very proud of doing it much before the movie is made or won the Oscar... This book has that "something" that makes you instantly fell in love with it from first sentence... And you don't forget it ages later... It took quite a time to catch readers' attention in Serbia... Although this book had many editions in Serbia, his publisher completely ignored his second novel, pity... :(

Leigh-ann says

I was torn about how to rate this book. On one hand, I just loved the unusual plot, and could have easily given it 5 stars. On the other hand, wow, I don't remember the last time I read anything so blatantly homophobic. Three different male characters, two of whom are clearly identified as "gay", were predatory pedophiles who abused young boys. A third man was also a pedophile who abused young boys, but at least the author never claimed he was gay. I didn't feel any of these characterizations were necessary elements of the plot, either, so they just seemed gratuitous. It's too bad, because this book could have easily made my list of my favourite novels of all time, but the homophobic overtones sort of ruined it for me.

Rosie Nguy?n says

R?t l?i cu?n, r?t gi?t gân, r?t d? d?i. Tình ti?t nhanh và h?p d?n. Nhi?u thông tin thú v? v? l?ch s?, xã h?i ?n ?? . Và trên h?t là cách cho ra ??i quy?n sách này c?a tác gi?. M?t ng??i vi?t t?n tâm.

Trin says

Wow. Simon Beaufoy *really* deserved that Best Adapted Screenplay Oscar. I didn't think that *Slumdog Millionaire* was the Best Movie EVAR! as some people seem to, but the book is just awful. Scattered and poorly written, with a narrative that relies on more farfetched coincidences than a cracked-out Dickens novel, *Q&A* also manages to make its protagonist completely unsympathetic, and its romance entirely unromantic. Oh, and the whole thing—the first few chapters especially—is cringingly homophobic. If you loved *Slumdog*, this will merely taint your appreciation of it. Though I guess it's interesting to see how the same

concept can be taken in two wildly different directions—one that'll make people hand out Oscars, and one that'll make them want to mimic Oscar the Grouch.

Megha says

I should mention that this 1-star review is not at all related to my opinion of the movie *"Slumdog Millionaire"* which I liked much better than the book. I am glad that the movie-makers smartly retained the only decent thing about this novel that is the game show plot device and tossed almost all of the rest into the trash because that's where this novel truly belongs. This book badly needs some editing or even better, a different author. I read in some review that *"Slumdog Millionaire"* feels like a juvenile's attempt at writing and I have to agree. It is not even L of literature. It does not take long to get tired of the flat narration.

Anyway, writing style is perhaps not the biggest problem with this novel. The story is so full of cliches. Every episode in the life of the protagonist seems as if it is pulled out of some cheap bollywood masala movie (the episodes in the movie *Slumdog* are way better). Swarup took all the vices and social issues he could think of and stitched it all together into a story. Child abuse, murder, suicide, incest, prostitution, theft, robbery, corruption, eve-teasing, poverty, riots, religious squabbles, underworld, India-Pak war it's all there. Homophobia and pedophilia is way overdone. Such is the cheap drivel Swarup is selling in the name of realism. He has played out the religion card too and named the hero 'Ram Mohammed Thomas'. With this selling recipe in place Mr.Swarup perhaps didn't think there was any need put an effort into the actual writing anymore.

These are a few snippets of this book's review from Amazon by people outside India:

"Despite heartrending descriptions of sexual abuse, racism, poverty, homeless and much, much, more in modern India, this is an utterly enjoyable picaresque adventure that is one of the best reads of the year."

"..this is an easy and entertaining story that captures much of the essence of this fascinating country. "

"It offers a very good look at several different societies and life-styles in India."

"...an exciting and fascinating glimpse into the life in modern India. Well written and full of both common day-life and historical facts about the densely populated peninsula,..."

"Gives some overview of reality in India."

"...that gives you enough of the misery that exists in India.."

"It is well-written and describes India, as it is today."

Oh, Puhleeze! This ain't modern India (or even India in the older times for that matter). None of the episodes in the book has even a faint resemblance to the life of a common man in India. A common man doesn't spend all his life amidst every imaginable crime and misery. Swarup is pandering to the western audience by giving an impression that abuse, poverty, misery and what not is all there is to Indian way of life. And that too from

a person like Vikas Swarup who is an India diplomat and is supposed to represent India to the world outside. At least I think it was pretty clear in the movie that it was just a story of an orphan boy from slums. The depiction of Bombay slum life as a backdrop was perhaps much closer to reality in the movie than Swarup's novel. The movie never seemed to claim that that was the essence of life in India. Swarup, on the other hand, draws his characters from different economic classes, different religions, people ranging from movie stars to diplomats, priests, businessmen, middle-class, slum-dwellers and all. And he presents every possible way of life in India with just a dark side to it.

Swarup himself does not even live in India. And even during his visits to India I am sure he has only experienced the life of rich upper class who form only a small fraction of our population. It is not a surprise that he is completely out of the touch of the reality of common life in India. Someone please tell him that watching a bunch of bollywood movies is not how you get an experience of Indian life.
