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Lillie Foley

Everyday Injustices for Annawadians

Katherine Boo wrote *Behind the Beautiful Forevers* with the motivation to inform readers about the everyday difficulties and hardships one faces while living in the slums of Mumbai.

Boo's research clearly lets readers know the injustices the individuals in Annawadi face, whether that may be through the corrupt criminal justice system, the views citizens of higher classes had of those in slums, or the harsh interactions between the citizens of Annawadi themselves.

While the caste system in India is illegal, the system still continues to live on through the citizens' views of those in different economic classes (6). The Dalits, or the untouchables of the caste system, have continually been treated poorly by those of higher economic classes (42). In Annawadi, the Dalits have been especially persecuted by the criminal justice system and rarely receive the justice they deserve.

Throughout the book, Boo provides a clear image to readers that the Dalits struggle to earn a living on a day to day basis. With this in mind, there are many examples where the criminal justice system are only interested in giving the Dalits "justice" if they are able to hand over their earnings to the system. The fact that the Dalits can barely afford to have a meal everyday, yet must pay to earn "justice," gives readers the understanding of how corrupt the criminal justice system truly is towards those in the slums. An example of Dalits having to pay for justice is displayed when Karam explained to Abdul that the police officers did not care about the fact of whether or not they actually burned Fatima, but rather about the fact they could make a lot of money from this incident (107). After Abdul heard this explanation, he understood how in the criminal justice system, "innocence and guilt could be bought and sold like a kilo of

polyurethane bags” (107). The thought of justice being bought further imposes the theme of injustice that Boo intends readers to be able to grasp.

While the Annawadians persist to make every effort to survive, it does not help that they continue their efforts right by the Mumbai Airport, where their struggles are in clear vision to those who are wealthier than them. Boo indicates that those who are in higher classes than the Dalits pay little attention to their constant struggles and efforts to rank higher in the caste system, and readers can see that this viewpoint is very dehumanizing towards those living in the slums of Annawadi. One of the most prominent examples of this is when Boo writes about Abdul’s career, stating: “It was a fine time to be a Mumbai garbage trader, not that that was the term passersby used for Abdul. Some called him garbage, and left it at that” (6). This quotation proves how those of higher classes view Dalits as though they are not even human, and they are seen to be worthless.

Another unjust occurrence of Dalits being treated as less than upper classes is when Fatima was in the hospital for her burns. One of the issues Fatima’s husband had to face in the hospital was the fact that he had to go out and buy the recommended treatment for Fatima’s burns himself (103). The fact that the hospital provides very few amenities for Dalit patients is an injustice that Dalits may not even recognize for themselves. Boo also wrote about Fatima’s husband applying her treatment, saying, “He had thought the nurses might help, but they avoided physical contact with the patients” (103). Nurses of higher castes not even doing their jobs proves how the Dalits are not seen as equals to others, and are not treated as people.

The residents of Annawadi face injustices so frequently throughout *Behind the Beautiful Forevers* that they have become desensitized by the time they see fellow Annawadians face

unfair situations. One occurrence of this that is brought to the reader's attention is when Mr. Kamble, an ill Dalit man, "was counting on Asha to save his life" (23). Ever since an accident that laid off Mr. Kamble from his sanitation job, he went around Annawadi begging organizations for donations to go towards the price of his heart valve surgery that would allow him to return to his job (24). Mr. Kamble went to Asha because they are friends, and he expected her to provide him a loan so he would be able to have enough money for his surgery, yet she chose not to give him anything (24). After Asha turns Mr. Kamble away, Boo wrote, "A dying man should pay a lot to live" (26). This quote itself gives readers the idea of how living in Annawadi means every man for himself, and that there is no time for the community to come together to help each other because every person has to work for their own living in order to survive. Readers are able to determine for themselves how unjust it is for a man to hand over a large amount of money just so he is able to continue living.

Another incident where Annawadians mistreat one another is when an injured scavenger on the road implored for anyone to help him (152). Boo wrote detailed accounts of how Zehrunisa passed by to care for her husband; Mr. Kamble passed by to find more people to contribute for his surgery; and a man even reported the injured man to the police as a disturbance (153). Boo specifying the fact that no one spared the hurt man any assistance further proves how unjust it is to live in a community that cannot even afford the time to help one another survive.

Whether it may be a system one relies on for justice, wealthy individuals who are able to support the less fortunate, or a community within slums where the idea of supporting one another is out of the question, the Annawadians experience injustices no matter what the circumstances may be. Katherine Boo writes about the many aspects of injustices the Annawadians face

because it enables readers to understand how wearying it is for Dalits to constantly overburden themselves in order to survive.

Works Cited

Boo, Katherine. *Behind the Beautiful Forevers*. Random House, 2014.