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Sofia Smock

The Connection Between Current Events and *Behind the Beautiful Forevers*

In *Behind the Beautiful Forevers* by Katherine Boo, a true story of a slum community in the city of Mumbai is told. The people of the slum, Annawadi, are subjected to extreme poverty and poor living conditions, as well as many types of discrimination and inequity. These disparities can also be seen in the current day through news articles and stories from many different media outlets, including topics of discrimination against Muslim people, distrust in the police, displacement due to gentrification, and high rates of suicide among rural communities. Anti-Islamic rhetoric, the corruption of police, and the exploitation of rural communities are symptoms of social structures that both contribute to and perpetuate the oppression of minority groups.

The first connection between a current event and *Behind the Beautiful Forevers* can be seen in an article from “Daily Sabah: Europe” titled, “Muslim community in Germany feels unsafe amid growing Islamophobia”. In the text, a common theme is the theme of Islamophobia and how it can affect social standing and personal relation with a community. The Husain family, a family followed through the slum of Annawadi in the book, face adversity due to Islamophobia on many different occasions throughout the text. “The party’s animus toward the city’s Muslim minority was of longer, more violent standing,”(Boo 12). The creation of the Shiv Sena party, and one of their main beliefs being Islamophobia, created a fear in the Muslim community of Annawadi. The article from “Daily Sabah” talks about the Muslim community in Germany not feeling safe due to several bomb threats being made on the mosques in the area. This same feeling of not being safe can be seen when the Husains are facing the court case and

are afraid that the court system will not give a fair trial due to their religion. The Husain family faces injustice and prejudice because they are Muslim, which instills fear in their lives of unfair treatment and discrimination.

Another common theme in the book is the corruption of power, which can be seen through the police force taking bribes to change the outcomes of certain cases.”Innocence and guilt could be bought and sold like a kilo of polyurethane bags,” (Boo 107). In the case between the Husains and Fatima, the police were constantly asking for bribes to change the outcome of the case in favor of the Husains. The police also publicly beat Abdul, and everyone turned a blind eye. This corruption caused the people of Annawadi and pretty much anyone without the money to pay these bribes to not trust the police, who are supposed to be there to protect them. This same distrust can be seen in the African American community of Fort Worth, Texas after the killing of Atatiana Jefferson. Officer Aaron Dean was responsible for shooting and killing Jefferson in her home. This act of police brutality and corruption caused distrust with police in this community, much like the distrust of Annawadian citizens with their own police force.

The text also delves into inequities among rural communities, including gentrification and displacement and the high rates of suicide among farmers and others that live in rural areas. In *Behind the Beautiful Forevers* farmers in the rural hometown of Asha, Vidarbha, were committing suicide at an astounding rate.” In the new century, the government counted an average of a thousand farmer suicides a year in Vidarbha; activists counted many more,” (Boo 137). A similar trend could be seen in current rural communities in West Virginia. An article from “The DA” stated that suicide rates in rural areas are higher than those in urban areas. This could be attributed to inequities in access to mental health care as well as other stressors such as

economic problems. Another instance of inequity in the book in this same community is the gentrification of the area and displacement of citizens. In Mumbai, a city on the rise, rural areas were becoming more modernized and ready to contribute to the economy on the business front. This modernization, however, caused displacement for the rural farm community that was originally living in the area. “One of the government’s hopes was to stop villagers from abandoning their farms and further inundating cities like Mumbai,” (Boo 138). The inner-city slums of Mumbai were already incredibly crowded and did not want the displaced rural communities to add to the population. Their initial place of residence also did not want them because the area was becoming modernized and the farmers were not the intended new residents of the growing metropolitan area. This same displacement and gentrification could be seen in Mount Vernon. The area was predominantly African-American and immigrant populations and had become increasingly modernized and urbanized over the years. This caused property values to skyrocket and the original inhabitants were no longer able to afford to live in the area, and lead to subsequent displacement. These two examples from the text tie into current day disparities for areas with rural populations and low socioeconomic status.

Behind the Beautiful Forevers contains many common themes that are still relevant in the current day. The overall theme of discrimination and oppression of marginalized groups can be cited in both the book and in the news today. These instances of discrimination, corruption, and inequity all contribute to the oppression of minority groups both in current events and in the book. Katherine Boo told a story of real people in real instances of oppression and was able to connect the text to relevant themes of life when the book was written and in the current day.

Behind the Beautiful Forevers was able to push the envelope and bring awareness to issues that will continue to be relevant until a change is made.

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