



Fall 2019

FYS 101 Women Writing the World

Fall 2019

Corruption Subverts Itself

Emma Gifford
Butler University

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.butler.edu/fys_ww_f2019

Recommended Citation

Gifford, Emma, "Corruption Subverts Itself" (2019). *Fall 2019*. 36.
https://digitalcommons.butler.edu/fys_ww_f2019/36

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the FYS 101 Women Writing the World at Digital Commons @ Butler University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Fall 2019 by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Butler University. For more information, please contact digitalscholarship@butler.edu.

Emma Gifford

Corruption Subverts Itself

Behind the Beautiful Forevers encapsulates corruption faced by the untouchables of Annawadi. Katherine Boo illustrates corruption in Indian society as characters use it to seek freedom, only furthering these unethical ideals. Annawadians are completely dependent on buying into the nefarious actions of others. As a result of their vulnerability, Annawadians are taken advantage of by one of their own, Asha, and the police because they recognize the untouchables' reliance on a corrupt system. Unethical practices are used as a tool by Asha and other members of society to gain power and wealth over the Annawadians. When doing so, they perpetuate the theme that each person only cares about their personal gain.

Boo explicitly states that corruption is the people of Annawadi's only option for freedom. She says, "In the West ... *corruption*, had purely negative connotations ... [b]ut for the poor of a country where corruption thieved a great deal of opportunity, corruption was one of the genuine opportunities that remained" (Boo 28). Annawadians had two options: either partake in the unethical actions of others with the hope that they might succeed, or continue living as they are in inhumane conditions. Neither option comes without consequence; therefore, Annawadians choose the most rewarding one.

In Mumbai, India, corruption appears to be backwards as it is used to take advantage of the untouchables, yet it provides them with the means to survive in Annawadi. Early in the book, *Behind the Beautiful Forevers*, Asha states: "‘Corruption, it’s all corruption,’ she told her children, fluttering her hands like two birds taking flight" (Boo 20). Boo uses this imagery to show that it is the corruption that is freeing the people of Annawadi. When Annawadians

partake in this exploitation, they are able to progress within their caste level, or in Asha's case attempt to move up in the caste system. Nevertheless, Asha still profits from them as they seek her guidance in escaping their problems. Instead of helping the Annawadian people, she took advantage of their situations because she knew many people would pay high amounts even if they could not afford it. For example, Asha chooses not to give Mr. Kamble a loan to have heart surgery because she knows she could make him pay more (Boo 26). Rather than helping a man who is currently unemployed, Asha only looks out for her personal gain. Despite the immediate benefits Mr. Kamble will gain, he is unknowingly perpetuating the acceptability of unethical behaviors. Consequently, Asha will continue exploiting fellow Annawadians who have no alternative choice but to ask her for help.

As their leader, Asha should strive to build a community where people care about one another's success. After Asha is dubbed slumlord, Annawadi faces conflict with the airport as they look to expand into their slum. Once again, Asha reverts to corrupt actions to take full advantage of her neighbors. Boo questions: "[Should she] unite her neighbors in some fruitless opposition? It had seemed to her more realistic to pursue her private ambitions and make some money" (Boo 225). Asha finds it more constructive for her personal desires to be met before she turns to helping the common good of Annawadi. Earlier, Asha names this as fault in her younger self. Boo explains, "Before Asha had learned better, she had performed many such kindnesses for free" (Boo 21). Generally, people are naturally caring for one another, but corruption has taught them to be conceited.

Asha most directly contributes to the corruption in Annawadi, but the police officers and justice system also play a key part, as well. After Kalu's death, police officers beat the road boys

to prevent them from scavenging near the airport again and the police threatened to frame them for Kalu's death even though the case was closed already (Boo 169). The police knew that the boys' only option was to stay away, even if both outcomes would be consequential. If they went back, they would be imprisoned, but not returning would result in a loss of income. Not only are the police disregarding fraudulent behaviors of others, but they are also partaking in the unjust actions. The police probably are motivated to remove the road boys for their own gain. If the untouchables are absent, then the police's job becomes easier; they will not need to keep watch over the boys or chase them away for talking to tourists. By benefiting from the lack of Annawadians around the airport, the police are furthering the abuse of corruptive behavior.

During the trial, people are described again trying to take advantage of the untouchables, despite the fact the Husain family is innocent. A special executive officer attempts to persuade the Husains into paying him to call off the trial and Boo explains, "[she] seemed to be banking on the ignorance of slum dwellers" (Boo 219). Most often it is the innocent people who are most easily targeted in this fraudulent society. Since the society is structured so that the most vulnerable rely heavily on corruptive behaviors, the continuation of immorality becomes natural.

Although members of a higher caste are taking advantage of exploiting the untouchables, they completely disregard the fact that corruption exists or that poor communities are struggling, thus furthering the divide between them and the untouchables. Early in the book, Annawadi is described as a 'success story' because "the Annawadians were among roughly one hundred million Indians freed from poverty since 1991" (Boo 6). The people of Annawadi have been dehumanized and turned into a meaningless statistic for their government to use, evidence proving that their economy is thriving. Boo explains this corruption explicitly, stating, "The

poor took down one another, and the world's great, unequal cities soldiered on in relative peace” (Boo 237). Converting Annawadian people into an empty number has created a society where negligence of its people is tolerated, thus echoing the mentality that every person is secluded in their own self interest.

Katherine Boo perfectly summarizes the continued idea of corruption in a simple, yet complex question. She writes: “If the house is crooked and crumbling, and the land on which it sits uneven, Is it possible to make anything lie straight?” (Boo 254). Since India’s caste system is heavily ingrained into the culture, it appears to be impossible for the untouchables to rejoin the rest of society. Demoralization allows people to continuously take advantage of the Annawadian people for personal gain. Thus, the cycle of using unethical actions to improve their own lives Is maintained. Society continues to assume stereotypes of the untouchables seeking confirmation in their biases. If a society had a solid foundation, perhaps it could eliminate injustice stemming from corruption.

Works Cited

Boo, Katherine. *Behind the Beautiful Forevers*. Radom House Trade Paperbacks, 2014.