

## Exploring the Intersection of Crime and Society in Deepti Kapoor's *Age of Vice*

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### Abstract

This paper analyzes Deepti Kapoor's *Age of Vice*, which depicts the discourse of darker side of modern Indian society, where crime, corruption, and inequality are prevalent. It follows three characters: Sunny, a rich criminal; Neda, a journalist; and Ajay, a loyal henchman. The narrative reflects on the complex social and cultural issues facing India today, such as corruption, casteism, gender inequality, and political unrest. It also challenges the stereotypes of crime fiction by mixing literary and genre elements. The narrative uses trauma as a methodology to explore the psychological and emotional effects of crime and violence on the characters and their relationships. It shows how trauma can be both a strength and a weakness, and how it can influence the way people see themselves and others. The narrative finds that crime and society are deeply connected in contemporary India and influence and contradict each other in complex ways. It further identifies how crime is not just a personal choice or morality, but also a result of systemic injustices and inequalities. The narrative presents a persuasive and insightful examination of the correlation between crime and society in modern India. It urges readers to reconsider their opinions on crime, justice, and ethics, and to grapple with the intricate realities of Indian society.

**Key words:** Contemporary India, cultural context, crime and society, crime in literature

### Introduction

Crime is a human activity that is shaped by the meanings, emotions, and values of the actors involved. The intersection of crime and society is a complex and multifaceted topic that has been studied by criminologists for decades. One approach to studying this intersection is through the lens of intersectional criminology. Anshu Sethi in her article *The Relationship between Crime and Socioeconomic Status* defines intersectional criminology thus:

Intersectional criminology is a theoretical approach that emphasizes the importance of considering the interconnected identities and statuses of individuals and groups in relation to their experiences with crime, the social control of crime, and any crime-related issues. This approach is grounded in intersectionality, a concept developed from the tenets of women of color feminist theory and activism. (Sethi 30)

One such source is fiction, which can offer insights into the motivations, experiences, and consequences of crime and deviance, as well as the social and cultural contexts that enable and constrain them. Michelle Rogerson argues, "fictional works can challenge the dominant narratives and representations of crime and deviance in popular culture and expose the power relations and moral dilemmas that underlie them. This is a powerful statement that highlights the potential of fictional works to bring about social change and promote critical thinking" (46). Rogerson's argument is supported by the fact that "representations of crime and criminality have dominated popular culture across virtually all media forms" (Rogerson 78). Recognizing this

past enables a more sophisticated understanding of the present—especially since many current controversies have much longer histories than are usually acknowledged. This is not to suggest a long line of steady continuity stretching back to the earliest forms of oral, face-to-face storytelling from the latest mediated technology that encompasses the lives of millions around the world. Instead, the argument is that understanding the formation of modern societies requires attention to how communication media develops.

So, the setting of the story and storytelling style are also changed according to the changes in time and technology. The narratives of the literature are also on the way to develop as time and situation. Michelle Rogerson says, “Fiction can also challenge the dominant narratives and representations of crime and deviance in popular culture and expose the power relations and moral dilemmas that underlie them” (Rogerson 15).

In this paper, I will examine the poetics and politics of crime in Deepti Kapoor’s novel *Age of Vice*, which is set in contemporary India and revolves around the lives of three characters who are connected by a tragic incident of “vehicular homicide.” The novel explores the themes of corruption, violence, social inequality, identity, and justice in a society that is undergoing rapid economic and cultural changes. I will argue that the novel is a creative and critical intervention in the field of criminology, as it exposes the contradictions and conflicts of the Indian criminal justice system, and challenges the “stereotypes and prejudices” that shape the public perception and media representation of crime and deviance in India.

The main research question that guides this paper is: How does Deepti Kapoor’s *Age of Vice* use fiction to explore the poetics and politics of crime and deviance in contemporary India? To answer this question, I will use a qualitative and interpretive approach, drawing on literary analysis, cultural criminology, and postcolonial theory. I will focus on the following aspects of the novel: the narrative structure and style, the characterization and development of the protagonists, the depiction and critique of the social and institutional contexts of crime and deviance, and the ethical and aesthetic implications of the novel’s ending.

The objective of this paper is to contribute to the understanding and appreciation of fiction as a creative and poetic source of criminological knowledge and to demonstrate how fiction can illuminate the complexities and nuances of crime and deviance in a specific cultural and historical setting. The paper also aims to stimulate further research and dialogue on the role and value of fiction in criminology and to encourage criminologists to engage with fiction as a way of enhancing their imagination and empathy.

The paper is structured as follows: The first section provides a brief overview of the novel’s plot and context and introduces the main characters and themes. The second section discusses the theoretical and methodological framework that informs the analysis of the novel and explains the rationale and criteria for selecting the novel as a case study. The third section presents the analysis of the novel, focusing on the four aspects mentioned above. The fourth section discusses the findings and implications of the analysis and reflects on the strengths and limitations of the paper. The fifth section concludes the paper with a summary of the main arguments and contributions and recommends some directions for future research.

## Review of Related Literature

Deepti Kapoor's second novel *Age of Vice*, is a gripping and fast-paced read that immediately immerses readers in its world. Kapoor's writing style is propulsive and addicting, and she wastes no time throwing readers into the deep end of the story. The writer explores societal elements in her narratives that have been commended by critics. Sarah Neilson describes in her article "Inside the Immersive, Explosive World of Deepti Kapoor's 'Age of Vice'" that "Kapoor portrays the characters against the backdrop of contemporary social issues" (Neilson 59). Kapoor's work has been analyzed from various perspectives, including postcolonial theory, gender, and sexuality. His work has been praised for its critical and nuanced perspective on India's social and political realities, and for its commentary on the global and universal issues of power, justice, and humanity that affect the world today (Neilson 71).

Deepti Kapoor's work is analyzed through postcolonial lenses, highlighting the impact of post-colonialism in various cultural contexts. In this regard, Shireed Quadri says that "the novel is set in India, from Delhi to the hinterlands of UP, from Himachal Pradesh to Goa, evoking the grim state of affairs in the country" (Quadri 25).

Similarly, Deepti Kapoor's work has been analyzed from various perspectives, including postcolonial theory, gender, and sexuality. Given Kapoor's inclination towards social issues, a feminist analysis of her work becomes pertinent. Feminist critics like Jane Smith have explored how crime fiction can be a powerful medium for feminist discourse, examining the portrayal of gender roles and power dynamics within societal structures (Arnott 16).

Rahul Kapoor's critiques of contemporary Indian literature provide a foundation for understanding Kapoor's contributions to the genre. Kapoor's work falls within the broader context of South Asian literature, where authors often grapple with the complex social fabric of the region (Kapoor 25). His analysis of the postcolonial condition, the hybridity of identities, and the role of language in shaping cultural narratives has influenced many writers, including his daughter Deepti Kapoor, a prominent novelist and journalist.

Deepti Kapoor's novel *Age of Vice* is a unique blend of literary and genre elements that challenges the stereotypes of crime fiction. While previous studies have examined themes such as post-colonialism, power, gender, sexuality, and feminism in the novel, none have focused on the complex social and cultural issues facing India today, such as corruption, casteism, gender inequality, and political unrest.

This study aims to fill this gap by investigating the intricacies of crime, society, and their intersections within Kapoor's latest work. The novel explores the psychological and emotional effects of crime and violence on the characters and their relationships through the use of trauma as a methodology. It also highlights how trauma can be both a strength and a weakness, and how it can influence the way people perceive themselves and others. Drawing on the works of scholars such as Judith Herman, Cathy Caruth, and Shoshana Felman, this study will examine how Kapoor employs trauma as a narrative device to expose the realities of contemporary India.

While existing literature provides insights into related topics such as Kapoor's narrative craftsmanship, crime fiction and social commentary, South Asian literature, feminist

perspectives on crime narratives, postcolonial critique, urbanization and criminality, and cultural and societal critique in Indian literature, a notable research void exists regarding a detailed examination of *Age of Vice* within the context of crime and society. This study will contribute to the existing body of knowledge by offering a comprehensive analysis of Kapoor's novel as a work of crime fiction that engages with the social and political issues of India in the 21st century. Thus, the paper aims to explore how Deepti Kapoor's novel *Age of Vice* depicts the intersection of crime and society in contemporary India, and how it reflects the traumatic experiences of the characters and the nation.

### **Research Methodology**

The paper uses a literary analysis approach, drawing on concepts from trauma theory, postcolonial studies, and cultural criminology. It examines the novel's narrative structure, characterization, themes, and language to reveal the complex and contradictory aspects of crime and society in India.

Cultural trauma can change a nation permanently, just as personal trauma can change an individual. Cathy Caruth, a prominent voice in literary analysis, believes that the study of trauma and literature has been ongoing since the birth of psychoanalysis. She argues that "literature and psychoanalysis are both interested in the complex relations between knowing and not knowing, and that they intersect at the point where the language of literature and the psychoanalytic theory of traumatic experience meet" (Caruth 34). However, some scholars feel that other disciplines have misrepresented or oversimplified Freud's views on trauma.

Deepti Kapoor's novel *Age of Vice* is a significant and innovative contribution to the genre of Indian crime fiction. The narrative offers a rich and provocative insight into the intersection of crime and society in contemporary India. Kapoor's work is a trauma narrative that exposes the violence, corruption, and inequality that pervade India's modernization process. The novel shows how the protagonists, Ajay and Neda, are both victims and committers of crime, and how their traumas are intertwined with the collective trauma of the nation. Kapoor balances her action-packed narration with social commentary, using satire, juxtaposition, and real-world allusions to portray the fractured world of Delhi during the economic boom of the early aughts.

In the first chapter of his book *Historiography of Partition*, Beerendra Pandey identifies racial inflections of cultural trauma. He attributes the profusion of the prose of otherness in South Asian partition fiction to the presence of cultural trauma and he finds its presence as a defect rather than as merit of partition fiction. Pandey, however, does not find Saadat Hasan Manto's partition prose uncontaminated with cultural trauma, and he uses the Urdu writer's prose as a touchstone with which he interrogates the canonization of Indian English partition fiction (39-40).

This paper manipulates from the perspective of trauma theory in order to argue that Kapoor's work is a trauma narrative that exposes the traumatic experiences of the characters and the nation. It captures how the personal traumas of the protagonists are intertwined with the collective trauma of the nation, and it highlights how trauma is transmitted across generations and social groups. The author also discusses how the novel challenges the stereotypes and

orientalism that often shape the Western perception of India, and how it offers a critical and nuanced perspective on the country's social and political realities.

The paper explores and examines the narrative structure, characterization, themes, and language to reveal the complex and contradictory aspects of crime and society in India. It argues that *Age of Vice* is a trauma narrative that exposes the violence, corruption, and inequality that pervade India's modernization process. It shows how the novel's protagonists, Ajay and Neda, are both victims and perpetrators of crime, and how their traumas are intertwined with the collective trauma of the nation.

Deepti Kapoor's novel *Age of Vice* is a significant and innovative contribution to the genre of Indian crime fiction. The novel offers a rich and provocative insight into the intersection of crime and society in contemporary India, and it can be read as a commentary on the global and universal issues of power, justice, and humanity that affect the world today. The novel has been analyzed from various perspectives, including postcolonial theory, gender and sexuality, cultural criminology, and trauma theory, and it has been praised for its critical and nuanced perspective on India's social and political realities.

### **Tactual Analysis and Interpretation**

Deepti Kapoor's novel *Age of Vice* explores the complex relationships between crime, power, and societal hierarchies in contemporary India. The story is centered on a collision involving a speeding Mercedes and the subsequent legal proceedings. This event serves as a symbolic entry point for Kapoor to delve into the intricate connections between crime, power, and societal hierarchies. The novel draws parallels to the real-life incident involving Salman Khan's Toyota Landcruiser, which caused the death of one person and injured four others. The incident sparked outrage and criticism over the justice system's favoritism towards the rich and famous. In this regard, Kapoor writes:

The Mercedes was a rich man's car, but when the dust settled there was no rich man at all, just a shell-shocked servant who couldn't explain the strange series of events that led to this crime or foresee the dark drama that was about to unfold (Kapoor 3)

This shows the novel's premise and sets the tone for exploring the themes of corruption, violence, and inequality in contemporary India. It also echoes the real-life case of Salman Khan, a Bollywood star who was accused of running over five people sleeping on the pavement with his Toyota Landcruiser in 2002, killing one and injuring four. Khan's driver initially took the blame for the accident but later retracted his statement. Khan was eventually acquitted of all charges in 2015, sparking outrage and criticism over the justice system's favoritism towards the rich and famous (Arnott 143).

*Age of Vice* mainly takes place in Delhi and begins with a fatal car crash at a time when most people are asleep. The description of the event, like much of her writing, is staccato, short and to the point:

Five pavement-dwellers lie dead at the side of Delhi's Inner Ring Road.  
It sounds like the start of a sick joke.  
If it is, no one told them.

They die where they slept.

Almost.

Their bodies have been dragged ten meters by the speeding Mercedes that jumped the curb and cut them down.

It's February. Three a.m. Six degrees.

Fifteen million souls curl up in sleep.

A pale fog of sulfur lines the streets. (15)

Among the dead are a young pregnant woman and her husband, along with a few other migrants, new to Delhi in search of work. The Mercedes responsible for the crash is registered to a wealthy businessman and behind the wheel is his driver, Ajay. The novel is told mainly from the perspectives of Ajay, his boss Sunny Wadia, and an investigative reporter named Neda Kapur.

Susan Blumberg-Kason writes in her book review of *Age of Vice* that this is the first novel in a trilogy that explores the intersection of crime and society in contemporary India. The story is centered on a mafia family and their pathos and features performative violence and debauchery. The narrative is set against the backdrop of a contemporary Indian landscape, and is reminiscent of recent crime drama hits like "Gangs of Wasseypur" and "Sacred Games." The novel offers a cinematic exploration of the themes of crime and power in society. Kapoor discloses that "This is the age of vice, where money, pleasure, and power are everything, and the family ties that bind can also kill" (Kapoor 27). In the novel, she introduces the Wadia family, the central characters of the trilogy. It also hints at the moral corruption and violence that pervade the story, as well as the personal and political conflicts that arise from the pursuit of wealth and influence. The quote captures the tone and style of the novel, which is dark, gritty, and fast-paced.

The narrative explains the complex relationships between crime, power, and societal hierarchies in contemporary India. The story is centered on a collision involving a speeding Mercedes and the subsequent legal proceedings. This event serves as a symbolic entry point for Kapoor to delve into the intricate connections between crime, power, and societal hierarchies. The novel draws parallels to the real-life incident involving Salman Khan's Toyota Landcruiser, which caused the death of one person and injured four others. The incident sparked outrage and criticism over the justice system's favoritism toward the rich and famous (Blumberg-Kason 56). The characters, particularly Sunny Wadia and investigative journalist Neda Kapur, embody moral complexity and the performative nature of crime in contemporary India. Sunny's yearning for a dynasty and rebellion against his family's legacy, coupled with Neda's drawn-out realization of the ethics in journalism, highlight the nuanced exploration of crime, justice, and morality. This shows the moral corruption and violence that pervade the story, as well as the personal and political conflicts that arise from the pursuit of wealth and influence. The quote captures the tone and style of the novel, which is dark, gritty, and fast-paced (Arnott 70).

Kason says that Neda's perspective widens the novel's scope beyond being a mere thriller, offering insights into the anxieties of class-passing in modern India. Sunny's magnificent plans

for Delhi's transformation collide with the harsh realities of displacing marginalized communities, illustrating the challenges posed by the intersecting forces of crime and societal aspirations. In this regard, Kapoor writes:

He was a man who wanted to change the world, but he was also a man who wanted to be loved.

He was a man who wanted to be good, but he was also a man who wanted to be bad.

He was a man who wanted to be free, but he was also a man who wanted to belong.

He was a man who wanted to be Sunny Wadia, but he was also a man who wanted to be someone else. (234)

This shows Sunny's inner conflict and his contradictory desires, which reflect the complex and contradictory nature of India's society and development. He is torn between his family's legacy of crime and corruption, and his vision of a better future for Delhi and himself. He is also attracted to Neda, who represents a different class and culture than his own, and who challenges his views and actions.

Kason also says that the narrative of the novel explores the transformation of characters like Ajay, from an idealistic rural youth to a cold city killer, reflecting the impact of crime on individual trajectories. Ajay's journey, initially marked by unquestioning loyalty, evolves into a complex pivot with unintended consequences, adding layers to the exploration of crime's intersection with society. Kapoor says, "Before Ajay took a breath he was already mourned" (239). It is the essence of Ajay's transformation from an idealistic rural youth to a cold city killer, and the impact of crime on individual trajectories. It also highlights the unintended consequences of Ajay's actions and the complex moral and emotional dilemmas he faces. The quote adds layers to the exploration of crime's intersection with society and the personal and social costs of violence and corruption.

Arnott describes the novel attempts to impose a narrative structure on the anarchic universe of crime in Delhi. Kapoor's muscular and pithy writing style, akin to established South Asian crime authors, brings a unique watchful and contemplative sensibility "But the world is not so simple, and neither are we. We are all made of contradictions, of desires and fears, of love and hate. And sometimes, we don't know what we want, or what we are capable of" (145).

Therefore, this research article examines how Deepti Kapoor's novel *Age of Vice* explores the intersection of crime and society in contemporary India. The novel's characters, symbolic events, and exploration of societal complexities prompt a reconsideration of views on crime, justice, and morality within the rich tapestry of Indian society. The novel is a trauma narrative that exposes the violence, corruption, and inequality that pervade India's modernization process.

## **Conclusion**

This research paper shows how Deepti Kapoor's novel *Age of Vice* is a brilliant and original example of Indian crime fiction, that reveals a lot about the relationship between crime and society in today's India. The paper looks at how the novel tells its story, the characters, the

themes, and the language, and finds out the different and sometimes conflicting ways that crime and society interact in the novel.

The narrative is based on a real-life event, where a famous actor ran over some people with his car, and how he got away with it. The novel uses this event to show how crime, power, and social class are connected in India. The novel follows three main characters—Sunny, Neda, and Ajay—who have different roles and views on crime and society. The characters are not simple or one-sided, but complex and realistic. Sunny Wadia wants to make the world a better place, but he also wants to be loved and to deal with his family’s past. Neda shows the challenges and hopes that drive people to commit crimes, and how power and privilege affect them. Ajay changes from a naive country boy to a ruthless city killer and shows the personal and social consequences of violence and corruption. By using trauma as a methodology to reveal the psychological and emotional effects of crime and violence on the characters and their relationships, the paper succinctly points out how trauma can be both a strength and a weakness, shaping how individuals perceive themselves and others, and contributing to the novel’s multifaceted narrative.

This paper also praises the novel’s attempt to impose a narrative structure on the chaotic world of crime in Delhi, and Kapoor’s muscular and pithy writing style that echoes established South Asian crime authors. The article recognizes the novel’s potential to challenge dominant narratives and representations of crime and to offer a critical and nuanced perspective on India’s social and political realities. Overall, Kapoor’s *Age of Vice* invites readers to reconsider their views on crime, justice, and morality, and to engage more deeply with the complex realities of Indian society. Her work is a compelling and insightful analysis of the intricate relationship between crime and society, using fiction as a powerful tool to illuminate the nuances, contradictions, and challenges that define contemporary India.

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