

# A Critical Analysis of Class Struggle and Bureaucratic Dysfunction in Death in The Deccan by Aditya Sinha

Chetan Nikhare<sup>1</sup>, Dr Vaibhav Masram<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Research Scholar, PGT Department of English, University Campus, Gondwana University, Gadchiroli, Maharashtra.

<sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor, PGT Department of English, University Campus, Gondwana University, Gadchiroli, Maharashtra.

## Abstract

The present research paper examines Aditya Sinha's *Death in the Deccan* which is a crime novel set in Hyderabad, India. The novel precisely portrays class conflict and bureaucratic failure. The novel narrates a police officer who investigates a murder linked to systemic inequality and corruption. The study is critique of social hierarchies in India where wealth and caste privilege clash with marginalized voices through a Marxist lens. The paper highlights the issue of dysfunction of bureaucracy i.e. delays, red tape, and power abuse. It deepens societal divides and leaves justice inaccessible to poor people. Characters from varied classes like elites, labourers, and officials show the conflict between personal ambition and collective welfare of the marginalized people. Sinha's novel uses crime as a metaphor for exposing the perpetuation of exploitation in the institutions. The study argues that the novel deals with the human cost of unchecked capitalism and failures of the government. The novel titled *Death in the Deccan* combines fiction with social critique and appeals to the readers to reflect on equity and accountability in modern India. This analysis contributes to discussions on literature's role in addressing real-world injustices.

**Keywords:** Death in the Deccan, Aditya Sinha, Class Struggle, Bureaucratic Dysfunction, Caste Discrimination, Systemic Corruption, Media Hegemony, Institutional Inequality, Capitalist Exploitation.

## Introduction

Aditya Sinha's *Death in the Deccan* sheds light on the tensions between social inequality and flawed government in modern India. The novel, through the characters and plot, highlights the issues of class divisions and bureaucratic failures which harm marginalized communities. This paper is an attempt to critically analyze these themes using Marxist theory and Max Weber's ideas on bureaucracy to show the prevalence of systemic issues which perpetuate injustice in society. Class struggle is a key theme in the novel. It reflects the argument of Karl Marx that society is structured by conflicts between the "oppressor and the oppressed."<sup>1</sup> Sinha portrays the acute level of exploitation of the poor farmers by the wealthy landlords. It is mirrored in Marx's claim that "economic power defines social hierarchies."<sup>2</sup> These scenes

<sup>1</sup> Marx, Karl, and Friedrich Engels. *The Communist Manifesto*. Penguin Classics, 2002, p. 9.

<sup>2</sup> Sinha, Aditya. *Death in the Deccan*. Westland Publications, 2023, pp. 45–46.

expose the elite people's control over the resources. It throws the workers into the trap of poverty. Similarly, the bureaucratic dysfunction is illustrated through the futile attempts of the protagonist to seek justice from corrupt officials. Weber meticulously describes bureaucracy as a system where rigid rules dominate human needs.<sup>3</sup> This is evidenced through apathetic officials who always ignore the pleas of villagers.<sup>4</sup>

Critics like Sharma argue that bureaucracy is symbolized in Indian literature in the form of "structural violence" against the poor.<sup>5</sup> Sinha's novel is similar to this view which shows the inefficiency of the system that worsens societal divides. Meanwhile, Sen links this class struggle in postcolonial fiction to unresolved colonial power dynamics.<sup>6</sup> It is a pattern seen in *Death in the Deccan's* portrayal of land disputes. By blending narrative and theory, this paper critiques social and administrative systems of India. Thus, the novel emphasizes the urgent need for reformation to solve the issues of inequality and governance failures.

### **Class Struggle and Bureaucratic Dysfunction**

The damaging assumptions about the qualifications of marginalized groups always result in caste-based discrimination within institutional structures. In *Death in the Deccan*, the quote, "She is a Dalit, he thought, probably in the force through reservation",<sup>7</sup> shows that affirmative action policies meant to rectify historical exclusion but are instead used to distort into tools of disdain. Bryan D. Palmer's *Marxism and Historical Practice* examines that systemic inequities will be prevalent whenever progressive measures like India's reservation system are framed as undeserved concessions rather than necessary corrections for the upliftment of the marginalized people.<sup>8</sup> The character's dismissal of the merit of the officer is mirrored in Palmer's argument that dominant groups weaponize stereotypes to delegitimize marginalized communities' achievements. It reduces their success to "quota" status instead of acknowledging systemic barriers they have gone through over the years.<sup>9</sup> This mindset spreads casteist hierarchies in the society. It illustrates that institutions aim to uphold equality internalize and reproduce the very biases they are supposed to dismantle.

The novel titled *Death in the Deccan* argues that administrative reforms are devised by political power and the public interests are not taken into consideration. The novel throws light on this issue through two key quotes. The first quote, "An officer is only as corrupt as the political leadership",<sup>10</sup> suggests that unethical politicians allow systemic corruption by protecting elites and pressuring bureaucrats to comply with the vested interests of the politicians. Reforms, without accountability at the top, become a medium to protect power and not to curb the wrongdoing of the leaders. Second, the dismissal of merit in promotions is systematically portrayed in the quote, stating, "You might have solved a few high-profile cases in Mumbai, but you will never be an IPS officer even if you qualify technically."<sup>11</sup> It shows that the competence is always repressed by the political connections. This creates a system where loyalty to leaders determines the career success of the aspirant not skills. It ensures the dependency of the bureaucrats on

<sup>3</sup> Weercing, Helena. *Weber's Bureaucracy in the 21st Century*. Cambridge UP, 2020, p. 112.

<sup>4</sup> Sinha, *Death in the Deccan*, pp. 102–03.

<sup>5</sup> Sharma, Ritu. *Bureaucracy and Inequality in Modern Literature*. HarperCollins, 2015, p. 78.

<sup>6</sup> Sen, Anupama. *Postcolonial Shadows: Class and Power in Indian Fiction*. Oxford UP, 2018, p. 54.

<sup>7</sup> Sinha, *Death in the Deccan*, p. 3.

<sup>8</sup> Palmer, Bryan D. *Marxism and Historical Practice*. Vol. I, Brill, 1995, pp. 403–39.

<sup>9</sup> Palmer, *Marxism and Historical Practice*, I: 392.

<sup>10</sup> Sinha, *Death in the Deccan*, p. 12.

<sup>11</sup> Sinha, *Death in the Deccan*, p. 15.

the decisions taken by the politicians. While critiquing reform, critics like Bowornwathana and Poocharoen claim that “reforms usually mean the struggle over power between involved actors”,<sup>12</sup> where redistributing control matters more than improving governance. Most of the politicians’ devise systems to weaken and threaten bureaucrats and it is evidenced globally. It is done so to maintain dominance over the “state machine”.<sup>13</sup> Ultimately, the novel and critical analysis show reforms as political battles which trap governance in cycles where power decides outcomes not fairness or efficiency. Corruption is everywhere, merit is sidelined, and reforms reinforce inequality instead of solving it.

Aditya Sinha’s *Death in the Deccan* is a critique of bureaucratic hierarchies through a media house where unpaid staff exist “on the brink of desperation.”<sup>14</sup> It indicates that class conflict is worsened by the institutional power structures. Drawing on Allison and Halperin’s bureaucratic politics paradigm, the Reddy family is positioned as “senior players”<sup>15</sup> which prioritizes cost-cutting and institutional prestige over the welfare of workers and systematically exclude “junior players” from decision-making roles.<sup>16</sup> They enforce rigid “organizational routines”<sup>17</sup> and “authoritarian leadership”<sup>18</sup> that give birth to a “precarious underclass”.<sup>19</sup> Their actions are rooted in “personal or political interests”<sup>20</sup> and a drive for “organizational autonomy.”<sup>21</sup> This exposes weak accountability mechanisms that give rise to exploitation. Sinha’s narrative closely resembles with the observation of Allison and Halperin that “institutional outcomes reflect power-balance compromises.”<sup>22</sup> It reveals that bureaucratic hierarchies lead to worker neglect and it becomes part of the institution. It also results in class divides by giving priority to the elite people’s vested interests over equitable labour practices.

The novel exposes the control of feudal and caste hierarchies over modern Indian society. It shows that historical injustices become a part of everyday life. The novel also precisely portrays the coercion and violence. It shows that the systemic power structures perpetuate inequality in the society. By describing officers who “tried to eradicate it, but in this feudal society it’s the only effective way to make some talk. A few tight slaps”,<sup>23</sup> Sinha shows the generalization of violence in routine life. Arnold gives a term to this type of power abuse as “wage slavery”, where those in power never consider or think about the interests of those they control.<sup>24</sup> Even though workers are technically free to work, economic pressure traps them in exploitative systems run by the capitalist class.<sup>25</sup> It is similar to the police using force without any real legal purpose.<sup>26</sup> The commissioner’s question, “Will India ever stop being feudal and casteist? If not, how

---

<sup>12</sup> Bowornwathana, Bidhya, and Ora-orn Poocharoen. “Bureaucratic Politics and Administrative Reform: Why Politics Matters.” *Public Organization Review*, vol. 10, no. 4, 2010, pp. 303–321. Springer, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11115-010-0129-0>, pp. 305 & 307.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. 307.

<sup>14</sup> Sinha, *Death in the Deccan*, p. 27

<sup>15</sup> Allison and Halperin, p. 47.

<sup>16</sup> Sinha, *Death in the Deccan*, p. 52.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. p.16.

<sup>18</sup> Sinha, *Death in the Deccan*, p. 56.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. p.54

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. p.48.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. p.72.

<sup>22</sup> Allison, Graham T., and Morton H. Halperin. “Bureaucratic Politics: A Paradigm and Some Policy Implications.” *World Politics*, vol. 24, no. S1, 1972, pp. 40–79. JSTOR, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2010559>. p.53.

<sup>23</sup> Sinha, *Death in the Deccan*, p. 52.

<sup>24</sup> Arnold, Samuel. “Capitalism, Class Conflict, and Domination.” *Socialism and Democracy*, 2016, p. 2.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. pp. 7–8.

<sup>26</sup> Arnold, “Capitalism, Class Conflict, and Domination,” p. 11.

will we ever catch up with China?”<sup>27</sup> shows Arnold’s warning that wealthy people are the biggest hurdle in democratic change as they control both money and politics and by forming the “consciousness industry”.<sup>28</sup> Both feudal violence and capitalist domination promote inequality in the socio-political sphere. So, Arnold argues that we must break down these inhuman structures and practices through socialist policies or caste reforms to achieve real social and economic progress.<sup>29</sup>

The present study is a critique of India’s media hegemony by examining the dominance of the Hindu mercantile class, stating, “Another member of the Hindu mercantile class that already dominates publishing and mass media in India”.<sup>30</sup> This concentration and misuse of media power is a reflection of a class-based hegemony, wherein the vested interests of elite influence public discourse. It is evidenced in Moberg’s analysis of labour exploitation: “When wage differentials...hegemony becomes a fait accompli”.<sup>31</sup> Couch’s framework is used by Altheide which clarifies this structure of hegemony. She argues that media consequences differ when embedded in economic versus state structures in which the former prioritizes elite people’s agendas.<sup>32</sup> Altheide asserts that media logic continuously maintains hierarchies by aligning with institutional power.<sup>33</sup> Thus, these perspectives frame the media as a tool for reinforcing ideologies of the dominant, whether through economic elites or state actors. It shows the need to challenge monopolistic control to democratize public discourse.

The novel criticizes institutionalized hierarchies by contrasting the glorification of a Hindu nationalist SSS rally depicted as “stirring,” “orderly,” and “patriotic” despite mobilizing “twenty thousand men” with the demonization of Muslim protests. It is clearly evidenced that media and bureaucratic powers give privilege and priority to the dominant groups. This bias is mirrored in Raya Dunayevska’s analysis of reliance of capitalist production on “the hierarchic structure of control over social labour” as its “despotic plan.”<sup>34</sup> Palmer argues that “capitalist managerial strategies and labour fragmentation are strengthening class dominance”,<sup>35</sup> similar to the media narratives that normalize socio-political hierarchies. Stephen Marglin’s work, cited by Palmer, also emphasizes that systemic control, whether it is through capitalist labour divisions or selective valorization of protests, works for the interests of the elite people by framing inequality as an inevitable part of society. Thus, the novel investigates institutional power, whether economic or cultural, maintains hegemony through structural and discursive violence.

Justice is portrayed as a battlefield between bureaucratic decay and human dignity against the turbulent backdrop of postcolonial India’s fragile democracy.

The pointed question “Who cares about due process anymore?”<sup>36</sup> exposes the suppression of procedural fairness in the disguise of political urgency. Institutional protective measures are merely confined to the books as they are inaccessible to the vulnerable people. As Guha notes, authorities suspended legal protections by substituting fair trials with fast-track trials.<sup>37</sup> This culture of “instant justice” is worsening

<sup>27</sup> Sinha, *Death in the Deccan*, p. 67.

<sup>28</sup> Arnold, “Capitalism, Class Conflict, and Domination,” pp. 13–14.

<sup>29</sup> Arnold, “Capitalism, Class Conflict, and Domination,” pp. 19–20.

<sup>30</sup> Sinha, *Death in the Deccan*, p. 89.

<sup>31</sup> Moberg, Mark. *Myths of Ethnicity and Nation: Immigration, Work, and Identity in the Belize Banana Industry*. University of Tennessee Press, 1990, p. 205

<sup>32</sup> qtd. in Altheide, David L. “Media Logic, Social Control, and Fear,” *Communication Theory*, vol. 23, no. 2, 2013, p. 224.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Dunayevska, Raya, qtd. in Palmer, *Marxism and Historical Practice*, I: 203.

<sup>35</sup> Palmer, *Marxism and Historical Practice*, I: 203.

<sup>36</sup> Sinha, *Death in the Deccan*, p. 120.

<sup>37</sup> Guha, Ramachandra. *India After Gandhi: The History of the World’s Largest Democracy*. HarperCollins, 2017, p. 785.

the level of class and caste hierarchies. The poor and lower castes have been suffering most under this extra-legal order. Courtrooms turn into stages for performative power rather than equitable adjudication in favour of truth. Due process is not merely neglected but actively dismantled by the dominant people. Justice proclaimed in statutes is sacrificed to political expedience to a great extent. The narrative points out the human cost of this systemic violence maintained by the capitalists and politicians. It compels readers to brood over and confront the gap between legal promise and contradictory reality. Law itself becomes a weapon against the marginalized people in these ambivalent circumstances.

Aditya Sinha highlights that the labour rights are deliberately sidelined by the stark political indifference through the financial marginalization of a dissenting press, as evidenced in the quote: “The government owed about ₹30 crore for advertisements. [...] The chief minister and his son made it a point [...] to give a full-page ad on the front page of every newspaper in town except ours”.<sup>38</sup> This calculated exclusion shows the manipulation of public funds to silence criticism and undermine the journalistic spirit that has the power to challenge dominant power structures. By withholding financial support, the state effectively punishes a media outlet for maintaining editorial freedom of speech. This move not only throttles free expression but also threatens the livelihood of those working as employees within that institution. As P. Sainath observes, “The denial of resources to dissenting voices is not just an act of censorship, but a systematic devaluation of the labour and purpose of journalism itself.”<sup>39</sup> The selective allocation of government advertisements becomes a tactic of economic suppression of the media. It is a reflection of a broader erosion of labour rights where state mechanisms are used not to protect but to control and intimidate public opinion. It reinforces the instability of workers who dare to challenge the status quo.

Aditya Sinha’s depiction of bureaucratic manipulations in *Death in the Deccan* emphasizes a calculated political indifference to labour rights, where the state’s economic power is used not as a tool of governance but as a weapon of vengeance against the people or organizations against them. The deliberate withholding of ₹30 crore in advertisement payments by the government and the exclusion of *Deccan Times* (DT) from state-sponsored advertising are the best examples of petty favouritism. It is an indication of a strategic silencing of dissenting journalistic voices.<sup>40</sup> This economic exclusion not only destabilizes the financial feasibility of an independent media house but also endangers the livelihoods of its workers by exposing the weaknesses of labour under politicized bureaucratic control. As per noted by Robin Jeffrey, who writes in *India’s Newspaper Revolution*, state patronage via advertisement becomes “a subtle means of enforcing compliance or punishing opposition.”<sup>41</sup> It is resulted in the conversion of what should be ‘routine administrative functions’ into instruments of ‘political discipline’. The government’s policy of selective disbursement of public funds functions as a form of soft censorship which undermines both press freedom and labour security. It exposes that indifference to labour rights is not separable from authoritarian tendencies in democratic nations like India.

## Conclusion

The present research critically analyses and exposes systemic inequities through its stark depiction of class struggle and bureaucratic deterioration through Aditya Sinha’s *Death in the Deccan*. It illustrates about the cycles of oppression and marginalization perpetuated by institutional incompetence. The novel is a

<sup>38</sup> Sinha, *Death in the Deccan*, p. 70.

<sup>39</sup> Sainath, P. *Everybody Loves a Good Drought: Stories from India's Poorest Districts*. Penguin Books, 2000. p.113.

<sup>40</sup> Sinha, *Death in the Deccan*, p. 70.

<sup>41</sup> Jeffrey, Robin. *India’s Newspaper Revolution: Capitalism, Politics and the Indian-Language Press, 1977–1999*. Oxford UP, 2000. P. 43.



socio-political critique that emphasizes the adverse effects of structural negligence on human beings and challenges the readers to question the moral failures of the government. It is not merely confined to the literature. It appeals to scholarly exploration of interconnected themes like caste, gender, and neoliberalism. In this way, Sinha's novel is both a mirror to societal issues and a catalyst for reimagining equitable systems based on the welfare of the marginalized people. The study reaffirms the capacity of fiction to inspire accountability, empathy, and transformative change in social, cultural, political, judicial and cultural spheres.

### Works Cited

1. Allison, Graham T., and Morton H. Halperin. "Bureaucratic Politics: A Paradigm and Some Policy Implications." *World Politics*, vol. 24, no. S1, 1972, pp. 40–79. JSTOR, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2010559>.
2. Altheide, David L. "Media Logic, Social Control, and Fear." *Communication Theory*, vol. 23, no. 2, 2013, pp. 223–238. <https://doi.org/10.1111/comt.12017>.
3. Arnold, Samuel. "Capitalism, Class Conflict, and Domination." *Socialism and Democracy*, 2016, pp. 1–20.
4. Goodman, James, and Ariel Salleh. "The 'Green Economy': Class Hegemony and Counter-Hegemony." *Globalizations*, vol. 10, no. 3, 2013, pp. 411–424. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14747731.2013.787770>.
5. Guha, Ramachandra. *India After Gandhi: The History of the World's Largest Democracy*. HarperCollins, 2017.
6. Jeffrey, Robin. *India's Newspaper Revolution: Capitalism, Politics and the Indian-Language Press, 1977–1999*. Oxford UP, 2000.
7. Marglin, Stephen A. "What Do Bosses Do? The Origins and Functions of Hierarchy in Capitalist Production." *Review of Radical Political Economics*, vol. 6, no. 2, 1974, pp. 60–112.
8. Marx, Karl, and Friedrich Engels. *The Communist Manifesto*. Penguin Classics, 2002.
9. Moberg, Mark. *Myths of Ethnicity and Nation: Immigration, Work, and Identity in the Belize Banana Industry*. University of Tennessee Press, 1990.
10. Palmer, Bryan D. *Marxism and Historical Practice*. Vol. I, Brill, 1995.
11. Sainath, P. *Everybody Loves a Good Drought: Stories from India's Poorest Districts*. Penguin Books, 2000.
12. Sen, Anupama. *Postcolonial Shadows: Class and Power in Indian Fiction*. Oxford UP, 2018.
13. Sharma, Ritu. *Bureaucracy and Inequality in Modern Literature*. HarperCollins, 2015.
14. Sinha, Aditya. *Death in the Deccan*. Westland Publications, 2023.
15. Weercking, Helena. *Weber's Bureaucracy in the 21st Century*. Cambridge UP, 2020.