

Slumdog is a success for the India story: Vikas Swarup

Diplomat-author Vikas Swarup is more than a millionaire now. But all the global adulation and limelight that has stalked 'Slumdog Millionaire', the movie version of his acclaimed novel 'Q and A', hasn't touched him. 'It's a success for India and the story of India,' says the unassuming diplomat.

'It's a success for India and the story of India,' Swarup told IANS in an exclusive telephone interview from London.

'What it shows is that stories from India are finding increasing resonance in the world. There is a huge hunger about to know about India,' Swarup, who is currently India's deputy high commissioner to South Africa, said.

'It's not about Vikas Swarup's success. It's about India's success, India being there,' said the 47-year-old diplomat who first dreamed of this captivating story of a [Mumbai](#) slum kid winning the million-dollar quiz show in Allahabad, the north Indian city, where he was born and brought up.

'The novel strikes a chord with ordinary people because it's about endless possibilities of life - anything is possible. The themes the novel explores like love, friendship and fate, are universal,' he said.

Being a diplomat, Swarup has an inbred talent for projecting India's soft power. It's Hollywood time for India, he says. 'Hopefully, the success of the book will encourage Hollywood to look more closely at stories of India and locations in India,' he said.

Swarup can expect a champagne treatment from his colleagues in the external affairs ministry, who are excited about the success of one of their tribe, when he comes to India later this week.

The soft-spoken author, who is a little overwhelmed by the global buzz his book and the movie version has generated, is not the kind to be swayed by the four Golden Globe awards 'Slumdog Millionaire' won Monday.

'Many people want a piece of me. My mailbox has been flooded with congratulatory messages. I have been deluged with interview calls,' he said while faintly complaining about the toll the spectacular success of 'Slumdog Millionaire' has taken on his private life.

'But I know it fully well deep down success is ephemeral and transient,' he said with a touch of philosophical gravitas.

Swarup, who served as director in then external affairs minister K. Natwar Singh's office before he went to South Africa, is excited about the prospects of a wider readership for his book after its tryst with Hollywood.

'It's been huge. It's still sinking in. Let's not forget the ultimate mass medium in India is movies. The book will now reach more people,' he said.

Riding on the movie's success in these celebrity-stricken times, Swarup said publishers have already renamed the book as 'Slumdog Millionaire'.

'That's because that's a trade practice. After the movie's success, it helps readers to locate the book in bookshops. But that's only for the duration of the movie,' he said.

The movie is, however, no surrogate for the tactile experience of holding a book in your hands and relating to it in the privacy of your imagination.

'The film's shelf life is nothing compared to that of the book's. The book will live long after the movie buzz dies down,' he said. 'Ultimately, literature triumphs,' he declared in an oracle-like tone.

What's his next book about? Another imaginative version of the much-hyped India story? No, no, said the author.

'The next book is not based on India or set in India,' is all he is willing to let in on his next literary venture.

'I have already done two books on India. I want to find new inspiration and new theme,' he said.

The story of Slumdog goes back to Swarup's holiday breaks in his hometown Allahabad many years ago. An avid quizzer since his college days, the hugely popular quiz show presented by Bollywood superstar Amitabh Bachchan fired his literary imagination. He, however, finally managed to write the novel 'Q and A' only in the evenings in London over five years ago when he was posted there as counsellor at the Indian high commission.

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