

Macro in Micro: A Panoramic Scenario of the Indian Society: A Study in Aravind Adiga's *Between the Assassinations*

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Abstract – Aravind Adiga's second book *Between the Assassinations* is a collection of thirteen stories where the locale is kittur- an imaginary Malgudi (R K Narayan) type town, a microcosm of whole India. Here, I have made a quick survey of a few stories from the book. They highlight Adiga's deep disgust over at the stinging and stinking evils of rampant communalism, corruption, castism and the inhuman police atrocities meted out to the low caste people. The cruel mindset of the upper caste people who would not tolerate the idea that a scavenger's son should not dare to stand up before them.

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Aravind Adiga is one of the important modern novelists. He got Man Booker Prize for his first novel *The White Tiger*. His second novel is *Between the Assassinations*. It is a collection of thirteen stories where the locale is Kittur- an imaginary Malgudi (R K Narayan) type town- a microcosm of the whole India. Here, he exposes and derides the abject social, economic, and political milieu of the Indian nation, so much smeared with community divide, caste and sub caste ridden structure, and brutal treatment meted out to the dalits and top to bottom rampant corruption. The stories of Ziauddin, Shankara, Abbasi, Ramakrishna heave and gasp with Adiga's anger against the hopeless state of affairs in the country. Like Hamlet, he too makes a cursed cry, "All the state of Denmark is corrupt!"

1. In this paper, I have made an effort to highlight Aravind Adiga's deep and penetrating vision to expose the malaise of the ingrained evil in the Indian society, viz, the issues of caste, creed and corruption which are eating it up from top to bottom.
2. The stories as well highlight Adiga's Dickens' like descriptions and pen-portraits of people and places. For example- Prof. Larsado's problem of pronouncing the sound 'f' etc. He pronounces 'p' for 'f'.
3. From the sample stories, one cannot fail to notice the facility of Adiga's command over English language, its nuances and lucidity of style.

In spite of Globalization and the fast emerging economics in various countries as well as in India, the vast divide between the rich and the poor, the haves and have-nots or between the world of Light and the world of Darkness has not diminished. Rather, it has yawned further. Just beside the skyscrapers, sparkling malls, fast zooming deluxe cars and a life of super-luxury and pomp, there appear mushroom growth of slums, poverty-stricken crowds of gasping men, women and children, towns choked with traffic jams and sheer exploitation of the underdog. The first story of Adiga's book, *Between the Assassinations* deals with the curse of child labour and the antagonism between the two communities, the Hindu and the Muslim that haunt like some curse upon the Indian society despite long years of Independence.

Ziauddin is the protagonist of the story. He is a boy of eleven-twelve years and we observe him in the different roles of a tea- stall helper, at Ramanna Shetty's Ideal Store, a cart boy, a cook at a Muslim restaurant, an informer to a foreign spy and a coolie at Kittur railway station. Ramanna Shetty employs him while none of the Hindu shopkeepers would agree to keep a Muslim servant. Ramanna is impressed with his frank declaration-

I'm a Muslim, sir. We don't do hanky-panky.¹⁵

¹⁵ Adiga Aravind, *Between the Assassinations*, Atlantic Books, 2008, 2009, 2015, p no-3

Ziauddin is the sixth of the eleven children from a farm family, belonging to some state in the North. When there is no work on the farm, his father puts him off a bus for Kittur to fend for himself. Ramanna tells one of his customers, Thimma, a local drunk-

This fellow was left- entirely to his own wits.¹⁶

Thus, Ziauddin's case stands as a common fate of child- workers in India or the other third world countries. They are left out as piglets or curs to roam about city streets, doing small jobs at tea stalls, petty shops, petty middle class homes or the railway platforms.

Ziauddin acts as an informer about the military movement for the stranger. But when he feels that the stranger has been involving him in some anti-national activity, he refuses to work for him, saying-

I'm a Muslim. The son of a Muslim too.¹⁷

Let the seething fifty thousand Muslims of Kittur be ready to work for him but nothing will lure him to help him. He goes back to the railway station, waiting for the trains and passengers. Truly, he is the son of Pathan and his loyalty to the nation is not salable. No amount of monetary reward can buy him. The story is a comment upon the pathetic condition of the child labour, their exploitation and inhuman treatment meted out of them. Further, the clear divide between the Hindu- Muslim communities is highlighted- a bitter truth of the Indian society.

SECOND STORY

Kittur has been presented as a microcosm of any town of South India or India as a whole. Bunder, the Muslim- dominated area of Kittur, is the industrial belt of the town where "dozens of textile sweetshops operate in dingy old buildings up. Corruption is the main issue for the small textile entrepreneurs. Abbasi, a shirt factory proprietor of Bunder is sick of top to bottom corruption. He muses-

Corruption. There is no end to it in this country.¹⁸

He has to bribe various government departments and other agencies-

The electricity man, the water board man; half the income tax department of Kittur; half the excise department of Kittur; six different officials of the telephone board...delegations of the Kittur Congress

party, the Kittur BJP, the Kittur Communist Party and the Kittur Muslim League.¹⁹

Sunil Shetty, Abbasi's snooker friend and a shirt factory owner agrees with him and remarks that-

Black marketing, Counterfeiting and corruption, we are the world champions.²⁰

He further adds-

If they were included in the Olympic Games, India will always win gold, silver and bronze in those three.²¹

The tragedy of Kittur or everywhere in the country is that nobody is seriously determined to knock out the dragon of corruption by its horns. It is a malady that everybody talks of corruption, criticizes it vehemently and dreams of its rout but none dares to tackle it.

Abbasi sadly thinks-

Thousands, sitting in teashops and universities and workplaces every day and every night were cursing corruption. Yet not one fellow had found a way to slay the demon without giving up his share of the loot of corruption.²²

As the story opens, Abbasi encounters two officials of State Electricity Board that have come to demand their bill- a bribe of Rs.500/- to each of them. Abbasi detests them but he has to make the cussed payment. Out of disgust, he stains his fingers with his anus muck and stirs them in the glasses of Johnnie Walker Red Label whisky, and offers the drink to them.

Cheating, counterfeiting, thuggery and fake officialdom is as well as bane of commercial life of Kittur. Thus, used Johnnie Walker wine bottles are refilled with spurious liquor and sold out as genuine product. Mehmood is a car thief and his sons sell out the stolen cars at a village in Tamil Nadu. Kalam is a hashish smuggler. Saif and "Professor" are cut- throat criminals. Two fake Income Tax officials try to cheat Abbasi.

In this way, Adiga like Hamlet seems to sigh like Hamlet and say- "The whole state of (India) Denmark is corrupt." The masses have to live with it. Abbasi too feels compelled to compromise with this hopeless and disgusting situation. Closing the factory is no solution to the problem. Rather, he realizes that it would turn young men into criminals, smugglers, drug addicts and nuisance to the town.

¹⁶ Ibid p no-4

¹⁷ Adiga Aravind, *Between the Assassinations*, Atlantic Books, 2008, 2009, 2015, p no- 17

¹⁸ Ibid p no-24

¹⁹ Ibid p no-24

²⁰ Adiga Aravind, *Between the Assassinations*, Atlantic Books, 2008, 2009, 2015, p no- 26

²¹ Ibid p no-26

²² Ibid p no-35

Then, nobody bothers about corruption and other social evils.

Adiga here hits hard at the rampant corruption that has dug its tentacles in the very structure of our social and economic system. Bribe is demanded as a right while businessmen or the public have to pay it through their nose. Secondly, *Adiga* exposes how a whole variety of crime is freely committed in Kittur, a microcosm of India. Indeed, the story is a sad comment on the abhorrent rate of crime and corruption that are seen, felt and tolerated all around.

THIRD STORY

The Xerox man's story forms the Day Two (Morning) part of *Adiga's* book, *Between the Assassinations*. It tells the pathetic tale of a poor man who is harassed, harried, tortured and beaten up only because he sells out Xerox copies of certain books. The story narrates those inhuman atrocities meted out to the innocent people who are rightly or wrongly accused of certain offences while the barbaric police break their bones in the police station- lock-ups just for fun.

Ramakrishna, the Xerox man is a sort of jail bird. He is at least twice a year arrested, paraded through the Lighthouse Hill and hauled up into the prison. In the past nine years, he has suffered such police atrocities for twenty one times. He holds his pavement bookstall at Deshpremi Hema Chandra Rao Park. He sells illegally photocopied of the printed books at discounted rates to the students of St. Alphonso College. His eleven year old daughter negotiates the price of such books with the buyers. There are all kinds of books at his pavement stall, from Accounting for Entrance Exam, Advance Obstetrics, The Joy of Sex, Hitlers, Meinkampf, Lee Lacocca or Khalil Gibran's literature.

But, the real trouble starts for him when he is accused of selling Xerox copies of *Salman Rushdie's* book *The Satanic Verses* in violation of the laws of the Republic of India. The administration fears that his adventure might cause a riot among Muslims. D'souza, the bookseller's lawyer mocks at him with the remark-

That fucking untouchable's son, thinking he can photocopy *The Satanic Verses*. What balls? ²³

Soon, Ramakrishna is subjected to brutal and barbaric atrocities by inspector Ramesh and lawyer D'souza. For them, it is just fun. They batter his knee and ankle bones, all the time abusing him,

That fucking son of an untouchable. ²⁴

Inspector Ramesh roars-

²³ Adiga Aravind, *Between the Assassinations*, Atlantic Books, 2008, 2009, 2015, p no- 40

²⁴ Ibid p no- 41

Selling *The Satanic Verses*. He'll sell it under my nose,

will he? ²⁵

And further,

These people think they own India now, Don't they? They want all the jobs, and all the university degrees, all the... ²⁶

Ramakrishna, however, remains undefeated. Next week, he slowly limps on his crutches towards the Deshpremi Hemchandra Rao's Park to restart business of selling Xerox books. Inspector Ramesh passes by him. He tells him-

You can break my legs, but I can't stop selling books. I'm destined to do it. ²⁷

The story hits out at the cruel mindset of the upper caste people who would not tolerate the idea that a scavenger's son, a low caste Dalit should dare to sell books, a job reserved only for them.

FOURTH STORY

Day Two (Afternoon): St. Alfonso's Boys' High School and Junior College

It goes to *Adiga's* credit that he has hit upon the Caste-ridden and caste conscious society of our country that treats the low-caste people with contempt and callousness. The fourth story narrates the anger and resentment of Shankara, a Hoyka-dalit who has been an object of social humiliation everywhere. Lasrado, the Chemistry professor at St Alphonso Boys' High School and Junior College rebukes him for smoking and he is punished to kneel outside the Chemistry class for the rest of that day. He feels that the teacher has treated him with such insult only because he is a low- caste Hoyka.

He says to himself-

...he is doing this to me because I am a Hoyka. If I were a Christian or a Bunt, he would never have humiliated me like this. ²⁸

His mind is now filled with vengeance and he cannot find rest until he hits him back.

He has hurt me, I will hurt him back. ²⁹

²⁵ Ibid p no-41

²⁶ Ibid p no- 41

²⁷ Ibid p no- 42

²⁸ Adiga Aravind, *Between the Assassinations*, Atlantic Books, 2008, 2009, 2015, p no- 55

²⁹ Ibid p no- 55

And he plants a crude bomb in his class only to frighten and shake him up. This is a sort of wild justice meted out to the school, its teachers and authorities.

Shankara is the son of a Brahmin father, Shankara Prasad Kinni and a Hoyka mother. His father has been living in the middle-east, sending enough money to his wife and son to live lavishly. However, Shankara is unhappy. He avoids his Brahmin relatives whereas; the Hoykas treat him as their superior. Thus, he refuses to stay home and meet his 'bua'(Urmila aunty). He knows that his Hoyka mother has just one cause of some respectability in his father's family and that is the production of a male child, an heir. If that had not been, perhaps she would have been treated as a trespasser in a Brahmin family. It hurts him to see that the Brahmin view him-

as a buccaneering adventure on the part of his father.³⁰

And a queer fruit of moral corruption-

Mix one part premarital sex and one part caste violation in a black pot, and what do you get? This cute little Satan; Shankara.³¹

If embarrasses Shankara much when he finds himself treated as someone special owing to his double inheritance. His Hoyka relatives give him extraordinary respect because he is half Brahmin-having the blood of a superior upper class in his veins. There is-

Nothing he hated more than their groveling to him, because of his half- Brahmin-ness.³²

Shankara also hates the hypocrisy of the Brahmins. By virtue of their higher position in the caste ridden Hindu society, they claimed a sort of right upon the young women of the lower castes. Shankara knows that his father has another Hoyka girl as his mistress.

Extremely unhappy with the web of the caste system and his 'in between position', Shankara thinks of Daryl D'Souza, his favorite professor. He had first seen him at a political rally, the Hoyka Pride and Self Expression Day Rally at Nehru Maidan. He notices how the three times elected MP is trading curses upon the Brahmins for insulting the Hoykas not allowing them entry into the temple.

Shankara is deeply impressed. But soon his illusion breaks down when he comes to know how the whole rally has been arranged by bribing the crowd through beer and rum bottles. Professor D'Souza later tells

him that the M.P. belongs to Kollaba caste-one of the seven sub-castes of the Hoykas. He also explains to Shankara that the Kollabas are at the top among the Hoyka subcastes and they are the richest ones. The M.P. was simply playing the caste card to get re-elected to the Parliament and then amass wealth through big bribes.

In this way, *Aravind Adiga* has exposed and criticized the complicated caste structure of the Hindu society. Shankara feels ashamed to be a Hindu. He curses his Hindu ancestors to devise such a repulsive caste system. He would desire to blow up the entire upper caste system.

Shankara feels a kind of kinship with Prof Lasrado who has been an object of joke and laughter for his mispronunciation of the sound 'f'. He would scold his students-

You puckers!.... Are you lapping at me? Are you lapping because I cannot say the letter "ep"³³!

Similarly his being a bastard of Brahmins- Hoyka caste, agitates and irritates him. He feels that he has inherited the worst qualities of both the castes.

Thus, *Aravind Adiga* has a piercing eye upon the complex and senseless rigid caste and sub caste system in the Hindu community. It causes a deep chasm in the personality of millions of Shankara in their country.

REFERENCES

All the references are taken from Adiga Aravind, *Between the Assassinations*, Atlantic Books, 2008, 2009, 2015, p no-3,p no-4, p no-17,p no-24,p no-24, p no-26,p no-26, p no-35,p no-40,p no-41, p no-41, p no-41, p no-42, p no-55, p no-55, p no-53, p no-53, p no-53, p no-70

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³⁰ Adiga Aravind, *Between the Assassinations*, Atlantic Books, 2008, 2009, 2015, p no-53

³¹ Ibid p no-53

³² Ibid p no-53

³³ Adiga Aravind, *Between the Assassinations*, Atlantic Books, 2008, 2009, 2015, p no-70