

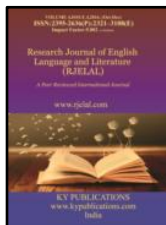


## SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CONFLICT IN ARVIND ADIGA'S *BETWEEN THE ASSASSINATIONS*

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### ABSTRACT

Culture is seeped into all the activities and unite individuals. It is not merely a tool for development, nor a means to an end, but a virtue that is learned, adopted and constantly evolving. Culture and conflict are inextricably linked. When problems surface, between or within cultures, it is often a response to difficulties in dealing with differences. Whether this pertains to racial, religious, political, social, or economic matters difference is often a source of fear and misunderstanding.

Adiga's *Between the Assassinations* depicts power relations of the dominant class over the lower class. He tries to explore the different types of power structures that operate in the society and shows how it influences human life. He focuses the interrelated expressions of power such as political power, economic power, physical force, religious power and ideological power which keep people in unjust and unequal positions. It has been beautifully brought out how truth has been suppressed in today's world through the character of Gururaj, a journalist who is on a mission to discover the truth. Adiga has highlighted how religious fanaticism is exploited by some evil people in our country through the character of Ziauddin. Social relations highlight the caste-system which has split the society into two main groups the Brahmins and the Hoykas with their distinctive language Tulu. Their ill treatment by the Brahmins results in a feeling of rebellion. Thus, *Between the Assassinations* presents a society that cuts across castes, religions, differences of wealth, power and moral or political beliefs and values.

Culture is indeed everywhere. It forms our belief systems, frames perceptions, formulates understandings and guides behaviour. Culture is seeped into all the activities and unite individuals under a common sense of self. It is not merely a tool for development, nor a means to an end, but a virtue that is learned, adopted and constantly evolving. Culture and conflict are inextricably linked. This does not mean cultural differences inevitably produce conflict. When problems surface, between or within cultures, it is often a response to difficulties in dealing with differences. Whether this

pertains to racial, religious, political, social, or economic matters difference is often a source of fear and misunderstanding.

Adiga's *Between the Assassinations* depicts power relations of the dominant class over the lower class but a brilliant exploration of subordinate class' resistance. He tries to explore the different types of power structures that operate in the society and shows how it influences human life. He focuses the interrelated expressions of power such as political power, economic power, physical force, religious power and ideological power which keep

people in unjust and unequal positions. The main purpose of the study is to explore and analyse the power relations in his novels. The novel describes truth as historical because it is relative to discourse and is the product of power. Truth is relative to social and learned discourses because truth is produced by power relations. In the novel, *Between the Assassinations*, Gurkha narrates about an accident to Gururaj, He is the richest man in this town. He cannot be arrested.

The powerful cannot be punished, the government always protects them. In this bureaucratic world, truth is the first casualty as it is discovered by the upright journalist Gururaj Kamath. He is fed up of the bureaucratic corruption, injustice and politics around him. It has beautifully brought out how truth has been suppressed in today's world through the character of Gururaj, a journalist who is on a mission to discover the truth.

Mr. Engineer is involved in an accident but the truth is manipulated with the power of money. Gururaj gets the news from the Gurkha, a local watchman that Mr. Engineer himself hit a man on his way back home, the police reports were changed in favour of Mr. Engineer. The tycoon gets one of the employees in his factory to say that he was driving the car when it happened.

The employee gives the police a sworn affidavit. It has pointed out that how the tycoon with the power of money and influence can manipulate both the police and the judicial system "A man might have been sent to jail for no good reason; a guilty man might be walking free. And all you can say is, let's drop the matter. Gururaj looks at the editor-in-chief with new eyes. The old man has a nimbus around him, of all the things he had learned over the length of his career and could never publish." (BA 125)

The fact of the matter is that the newspaper is owned by a businessman who serves only capitalist interest. "This is the fate of every journalist in this town and in this state and in this country and maybe in this whole world ... It is a false earth I am walking on. An innocent man is behind bars, and a guilty man walks free. Everyone knows that this is so and not one has the courage to change it" (BA 129)

Adiga has highlighted how religious fanaticism is exploited by some evil people in our country through the character of Ziauddin. Ziauddin, a twelve-year-old, sixth of the eleventh children of a poor family works in a tea stall. Working at a tender age, he develops a sense of isolation from the society. Left to fend for himself, he has to struggle for survival like an adult. In the town of Kittur, Muslims are discriminated against and are not part of the mainstream society.

The marginalization of the Muslims extends to employment opportunities as well the shopkeepers near the railway station never hire a Muslim worker but Ramanna Shetty employs Ziauddin due to his innocence. After a stay for four months with his parents, the boy returns completely transformed, losing his innocence. He develops a sense of pride in his religion and yearns to know his ancestral roots. The honest boy metamorphoses into a thief stealing small things. This leads to his removal from one work after another. While fighting, he always affirms his identity as a Pathan, slapping his chest, Heshouts, "From the land of the Pathans, Far off the north, where there are mountains full of snow! I'm not a Hindu! I don't do hanky panky!" Iama Pathan... We came here and built the Taj Mahal and the Red Fort in Delhi." (BA1)

The religious pride and a sense of separation spread poison in the mind of the young boy. A feeling of insecurity and mistrust makes him hate the Hindus with whom he has spent many happy moments of life. He has been brain washed by some religious extremists and this makes the young boy hate the others. Ziauddin's quest for identity increases when he comes in contact with a north Indian Muslim, Pathan with whom he develops a sense of belonging. The stranger's expensive clothes, handsome face and his perfume makes him take a pride in his acquaintance. He feels "This man is a countryman of mine" (BA15).

The stranger tempts Ziauddin to count the number of trains with Indian soldiers which leads to some terrorist activity. Appealing to his Muslim Pathan identity, the stranger tries to get the work done. Ziauddin realizes that he is being used by the self-centered terrorist and escapes from his clutches and leads a normal life as a coolie at the

railway station. The novel through Ziauddin's story tries to probe into the causes behind terrorism and how innocent people are used as pawns by the real perpetrators of terrorism.

Next Adiga, has captured cast system through the case of Shankara, a child born from the union of a Brahmin father and a low caste Hoyka woman. He is not secure about his identity and tries to take revenge against the caste biased society by exploding a bomb in his school. He thinks he has "burst a bomb to end the 5,000 year-old caste system that still operates in our country. I have burst a bomb to show that a man should not be judged, as I have been merely by the accident of his birth" (BA 59).

Shankara is under the false impression that his teachers at the school must be mocking him behind his back. Exploding a crude bomb in his school is his way of hitting back at the caste discrimination he faces. After the bomb explosion, he dreams that he will be treated in a different way in jail, as a martyr of some kind. The Hoyka self-advancement committee would take out marches for him and the police will not dare touch him. When he is released, great crowds would wave for him-he would be launched on a political career. Shankara is always treated as someone special among his Hoyka relatives as he is a half-Brahmin and hence much higher than them in the caste scale.

He is also rich and hence much higher than them in the class scale. His father, a

Brahmin plastic surgeon in the Gulf has married his Hoyka mother to the dismay of Brahmins. Shankara, as a result gets a very problematic identity in the society- neither a Brahmin nor a Hoyka. He will always remain a bastard. He feels that he has the worst of both the castes in his blood. The anxiety and fear of the Brahmin and the propensity to act without thinking of the Hoyka. Social disconnect and his ignorance makes the boy more violent. The Brahmin relatives see him as the product of a daring adventure on the part of his father and consider him as a mixture of started feeling that his father belonged to no caste or race. Such people lived for themselves. His mother feels herself inferior in the company of the Brahmin relatives. "She did not want to meet the

Brahmin woman alone. Her sole claim to acceptance, to respectability, was the production of a male child, an heir and if he wasn't in the house, then she had nothing to show. She was just a Hoyka trespassing into a Brahmin's household" (BA 61).

Shankara thinks that it is her own fault if she feels distressed in the Brahmin relative's presence. Repeatedly he tells his mother to ignore the Brahmin relatives. Through the dilemma of Shankara raises a question whether caste or class is worst in society. Shankara though rich is not given recognition by the upper caste. Although he is the son of a Brahmin, he is never considered a Brahmin. His driver who belongs to upper caste is poor. The old Brahmin who shows sympathy to him cannot afford a car for travelling. But Shankara has ample wealth. He contemplates, "He is of a caste higher than me, but he is poor. What does this mean, caste? Is it just said to yourself? Caste is a fiction, would it vanish like smoke; if you said, 'I am free', would you realize you had always been free?" (BA 69)

The people belong to three of the major religions of India Hinduism, Islam and Christianity. The range of their social status is also wide from the rich, filling their leisure with reading porn, to the poor who are not sure about their next meal and a small daughter of one of whom has to beg all day to get enough money to buy the daily dose of smack for her father. The professions of the people too are varied land owners, teachers, bank officials, fake physicians, money-lenders, servants, etc. The relations of all these people to their different situations are interestingly varied.

Religion is one of the factors that pervade the Indian life. Towards communal relations Adiga's attitude is firmly modern, favoring peace and harmony. Though he does not portray extremist Hindus or Muslims, he has a fling at those Muslims who drink and go on referring to Allah. He does refer to communal riots which are reported by a section of the press with a bias. It is truthful reporting that can identify real culprits and thus prevent the recurrence of such riots. Such a correct picture of a riot is presented by a brave and truthful journalist Gururaj to whom a Muslim thankfully says, "If more

people did what you do, there won't be any more riots in the town" (BA 117)

Communal riots are also sometimes used as a cover by land-sharks to grab what they want real estate transaction masquerading as a riot. Another evil deeply entrenched is that of corruption upon portraying the pathetic fate of complete blindness imposed upon several poor old women made to stitch minute and complicated designs in semi-darkness. The merchant Abbasi flourishes on fine a spun cloth of corruption bribing. Sometimes threatening the government officers, especially of Income Tax Department. He is supported by his friends, mostly muslims, outwardly condemning corruption who are themselves property-sharks making millions under the veil of communal riots or lending money at the killing rate of 3% compounded every month, making the lives of the poor needy borrowers miserable, leading some of them to suicide.

In such a situation, people can depend on only two institutions for remedy the judiciary and the Press. He has made no reference to the first, though the cancer of corruption has also allegedly entered. In such a situation, people can depend only on the Fourth Estate, the Press, for checking corruption and also for preventing communal riots. But the press too for its very survival depends on money which it can get only from rich companies, other private parties and its owners. It has sometimes in its own interest to misrepresent the truth like that of the traffic accidents, in which the driver takes the blame of the master riots etc.

An honest journalist, Gururaj in the story is dismissed for telling the truth and is made literally to eat his copy of the paper by a young and ambitious journalist. A sick physician like the press can hardly cure the deep-rooted and widespread malady of corruption. Only a token upholder of the truth is successful on a minor matter that of selling copies of Salman Rushdie's banned novel, *The Satanic Verses*. This only emphasizes that the problem of the corrupt press remains.

Social relations highlight the caste-system which has split the society into two main groups the Brahmins and the Hoykas with their distinctive language Tulu. Their ill treatment by the Brahmins

results in a feeling of rebellion expressed in the story, our school by the bursting of a bomb in a classroom by Shankara who is considered a monstrosity because of his being a half-Brahmin and half-Hoyka. He is rejected by both.

*Between the Assassinations* presents a society that cuts across castes, religions, differences of wealth, power and moral or political beliefs and values. It is capable of being the seed-bed of many novels of light and darkness which is present explicitly in a few of its stories.

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