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Sectarianism in Class, Caste, and Corruption: A Critical Study of Aravind Adiga's *Between the Assassinations*

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Abstract: *Between the Assassinations* (2008) by Aravind Adiga is a scorching exploration of sectarianism and class, caste, and corruption in Indian life. Set between the assassinations of Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi, the novel traces the journey of disillusionment to hope within the context of societal breakdown. It graphically depicts the impact of caste discrimination, religious violence, and economic insecurity on people and society, and sectarianism has added to the woes of marginalized individuals. This thematic analysis symbolizes how Adiga's novel catapults endemic corruption, social injustice, and moral breakdown into the forefront, where the spotlight is on people's issues towards extracting dignity and justice amidst society's polarization. It is from these confrontations that this book is able to appreciate Adiga's criticism of India today.

Keywords: Class, Caste, Corruption, Sectarianism, Power, Poverty, Disharmony

INTRODUCTION

The novel *Between the Assassinations* is given as a series of interconnected stories. The events occur in the fictional town of Kittur in Southern India. The novel is divided into thirteen sections that depict different aspects of life in Kittur. The stories, in general, highlight problems that are common in present-day India, including corruption, religious fanaticism, poverty, and the oppression of the poor by the wealthy. Themes of social violence, lawlessness, and social unrest are deeply woven into the fabric of the story, which reflects the broader socio-political struggles of the time.

Throughout the book, the sectarian differences between social classes are starkly portrayed, most prominently the extortion of the poor by the wealthy. Cultural issues, conflicting ideologies, and biased study of history only serve to fuel the animosities. Despite this bleak portrayal, Adiga offers a hope and a dream amidst the anarchy. The novel is an observation of Indian society, from hope to despair, touching the problems of casteism, political violence, and communal strife in the killing of two powerful political leaders.

India's Hindu society has long been plagued by deep-seated social ills, and Adiga's working-class heroes are usually the victims of this order. His characters, though at the periphery, are shown to yearn for dignity and social status, very much in line with the harsh realities of life.

Researcher Anthony Raj suggests that *Between the Assassinations* exposes the power dynamics that allow the elite to dominate and exploit the lower classes. Political, economic, physical, and religious power structures are shown to shape society, illustrating how they perpetuate injustice and inequality. Raj emphasizes the role of ideological power in maintaining these unjust hierarchies.

Similarly, scholar Ranbir Kaur argues that the novel deals with grave issues of national concern such as poverty, hunger, corruption, communal clashes, religious sectarianism, terrorism, child labor, and institutionalized exploitation of marginalized groups along the lines of caste, class, gender, and religion. Kaur notes that Adiga provides a satirical critique of societal vices like hypocrisy, infidelity, greed, and conceit, all of which are facilitated by the decaying social, religious, and political institutions of India. Such vices result in increasing disparities between the haves and have-nots, symbolized by the "Big Bellies" and the "Small Bellies" of Indian society (6).

Sectarianism and Religious Division

The revolution motif occurs for the first time in the short story *Day One: The Railway Station*. Ziauddin, being a racial other, travels to Kittur for a job. He is welcomed at first by a sympathetic stranger who, later on, proves to be a terrorist. The stranger attempts to radicalize Ziauddin by providing him with money to become a counter of trains, with the intent of planning an attack against the Indian army for what he perceives as Muslim suppression by Hindu extremists. Upon the

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stranger's true intent becoming known, Ziauddin rejects the scheme and is once again working as a coolie. This story reinforces the portrayal of frustration and alienation felt by some Muslims against religious extremism or sectarianism.

> *"I'm a Muslim," he said. "The son of a Muslim too."*
>
> *"Exactly. Exactly." The foreigner's thick fingers covered the surface of the teacup. "Now listen: Each time you watch the trains, there will be a little reward for you. Mind-it won't always be five rupees, but it will be something. A Pathan takes care of other Pathans. It's simple work. I am here to do the hard work. You'll-" (Adiga 22).*
>
> *"There are fifty thousand Muslims in this town." The foreigner's voice crackled with irritation. "Every one of them seethes. Every one of them is ready for action. I was only offering this job to you out of pity. Because I see what the Indians have done to you. Otherwise I would have offered the job to any of these other fifty thousand fellows" (Adiga 22).*
>
> *Ziauddin said, "I'm not well. I can't do it tomorrow" (Adiga 22).*
>
> *Ziauddin kicked back his chair and stood up. "Then get one of those fifty thousand fellows to do it" (Adiga 22).*

Ziauddin is also a strong believer in his Pathan heritage despite not adhering to the expectation of being light-skinned. However, he does not accept giving in to the idea that a Muslim has to follow each and every order of another Muslim, whether good or bad. He is a strong believer in personal freedom and the right to make personal decisions. This mindset leads Ziauddin to stray from conventional traditions and norms, marking his individual revolution against societal expectations that downgrade or upgrade one's position into an elevated or degraded plane based on lineage or faith.

The reference to the white-skinned Pathan requires that his activities be examined more carefully. The Pathan is counting the trains that are bringing Indian soldiers, who, he says, are coming to oppress Muslims, both in Kittur and in India at large. He is planning a terrorist act against such soldiers in retaliation for the supposed ill-treatment of Muslims. The Pathan, like a number of others during the period, had become an extremist, fueled by the communal violence that tore through Hindu and Muslim communities in India. Such acts of extremism were relatively common, particularly with events like the Babri Mosque demolition in Ayodhya. The Hindus believed that the mosque had been built on the birthplace of Lord Rama, and after decades of contention, the government ultimately ruled in favor of the Hindus.

Babri-Ayodhya riots directed towards Hindus as well as Muslims injured the nation seriously. Riots that trace their roots all the way to 1984 and continued on till 1991 exposed the vulnerability of India to secularism. The expansive Hindu philosophy came to be experimented upon when philosopies like fundamentalism gained dominance, and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) ensured these tensions to be kept ongoing. The BJP initiated campaigns, such as the flag-raising at Muslim Idgah Maidans in Kittur and Hubli, which led to further agitation. They symbolized the growing chasm between Muslims and Hindus and served to mobilize violent rebellions throughout the nation—rebellions that, in a very utilitarian sense, persist to the present day.

Ziauddin and the white-skinned Pathan are representatives of those who are influenced by morally wrong ideas, though Ziauddin later distances himself from the Pathan's violent plans. Ziauddin dismisses the idea of attacking the soldiers and tries to lead a simple life. He suffers personal losses. He was previously fired by Ramanna Shetty, for whom he worked as a waiter, for stealing small things from Shetty's store. This incident is Ziauddin's loss of innocence because he betrayed the trust Shetty had placed in him. Despite his actions, Shetty had been generous by employing Ziauddin, but in that area—and in much of India—Muslims were often discriminated against, and seldom given jobs of significance or trust. Ultimately, Ziauddin's actions shattered Shetty's trust in him, reinforcing the complex social and religious sectarianism of the time. Shetty said,

> *"There is no work here for a Muslim and he has to fight with the one who gives him a job" (Adiga 14).*

So, he was just kicked out from there. While fighting with Shetty, dishonest Zia burst out in a shout and spoke with pride-

> *"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!" (Adiga 13).*
>
> *"I am a Pathan! ... We came here and built the Taj Mahal and the Red Fort in Delhi and so don't you dare treat me like this...." (Adiga 14).*

Adiga attempts to highlight the lack of harmony between Indian groups in general and between Hindus and Muslims in a display of how minorities are constantly being driven to the margins of society. There is a deep sense of insecurity among both groups because Hindus and Muslims never feel safe after any catastrophic event. Adiga thus challenges the underlying reasons behind terrorism and other crimes which are so prevalent among Hindus and Muslims in India.

To that extent in the said views, Aravind Adiga's *Day One: The Railway Station* presents a robust

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criticism of the devastating effect of sectarianism and religious polarisation within society. Sectarianism is observed in Ziauddin's life and the white-skinned Pathan. The Pathan, being full of hatred in his heart and assuming that all Muslims must struggle against real or perceived oppression by Hindus, tries to recruit Ziauddin for a violent plot. But Ziauddin rejects this, showing that simply because he is of one religion, one is not compelled to accept radical views. Denial of this kind is an individual declaration in resistance against sectarian coercion and a seeking of autonomy. Religious schism exists in the discrimination against Muslims like Ziauddin and their inability to work since they happen to be Muslim. Ramanna Shetty's comment about not hiring Ziauddin because of his religion shows the depth to which religious difference permeates daily life and creates an alienation. The story shows how religious conflict and sectarianism can create a culture of suspicion, violence, and social discrimination and push people into being suspended between personal belief and social expectation. Lastly, Adiga implores that there must be greater cooperation and understanding among the different religious communities in an increasingly frequently divided world by them.

Corruption and Moral Decay

In the second story, *Day One (Afternoon): The Bunder*, Adiga takes aim at India's ubiquitous corruption. The story relates the plight of Abbasi, a small-time factory owner of shirts, and his friend Shunil Shetty. They are caught in a corruption network of bribery and deception and become frustrated and disillusioned. Their frustration and disgust are the center of the story and expose the country's widespread moral corruption.

Against the setting of a mythical South Indian town, Kittur, the novel is an allegory of the daily struggle of small textile business entrepreneurs and businessmen and women who are forced to battle corruption at all levels. The experiences are viewed as a microcosm of the larger, very deeply rooted corruption that pervades Indian society. In the struggle, Adiga demonstrates how corruption has become institutionalized in Indian life, influencing what people do and how they live. Abbasi is certain-

> *"Corruption. There was no end to it in this country" (Adiga 27).*

He is to think in that way because he has to bribe different agencies and government departments of which he is too tired to see-

> *"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" (Adiga 27).*

Regarding this, Sunil Shetty who is Abbasi's snooker friend and the owner of a shirt factory, satirizes that India is the champion of widespread corruption. He also asserts that India, with no doubt, will take place in the Olympic Games if they are included-

> *"Black marketing, Counterfeiting and corruption, we are the world champions". If they were included in the Olympic Games, India will always win gold, silver and bronze in those three" (Adiga 28).*

However, the misfortunes of Kittur are obvious everywhere in India and nobody is focusing seriously on them to knock them out. It has been a cancer. Every intellectual person talks of corruption, disapproves of their presence vehemently dreaming of eradicating it soon but none dares to embark on any effective and honest action. They remain steady in the boundaries of their philosophies or they have nothing to do actually. Abbasi's sadly thoughts are found here in the following line-

> *'Corruption,' Abbasi said. 'Corruption. It's like a demon sitting on my brain and eating it with a fork and knife' (Adiga 29).*

> *"Thousands, sitting in tea shops 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" (Adiga 34).*

A few of the blatant examples of corruption are presented in this part of the narrative. The protagonist Abbasi has to face corrupt government officials of the state electricity department who demand bribes of Rs. 500 per item. Otherwise, he would be charged much higher rates for electricity. Though he dislikes it, Abbasi succumbs to the bribes. But in a perverted revenge, he attempts a despicable and immoral act by serving the officials Johnnie Walker Red Label whisky, but laced with filth from his own body. This ugly revenge, while shocking and intensely offensive, demonstrates how enraged and ethically debased Abbasi is, even going against his religious faith as a Muslim. His disdain for the system causes him to go about his actions without regard for right and wrong, taking enjoyment from his act of revenge.

There are also instances of other forms of corruption in Kittur like thuggery, forgery, and counterfeiting. Bottles of Johnnie Walker whisky are filled with duplicate liquor and auctioned off as originals, for example. Car thief Mahmood and his son steal vehicles and resell them to villages in Tamil Nadu. Kamal, a hashish seller, and characters like the Professor, Saif, and two spurious income tax officials are a few other instances of criminality in the town.

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Abbasi, on the other hand, is plagued by such examples of corruption and is struggling to pay his factory workers on time and becomes increasingly dismayed by the desperation and moral bankruptcy that surrounds him. He even considers closing down his factory at times but then decides that giving up is not an option. He knows that, to survive, he will need to yield to the corrupt environment, following the maxim, "When in Rome, do as the Romans do." The decision has a gruesome cost: to thrive, he must become one with the criminals, drug dealers, and thieves that encompass him. The system compels good people like Abbasi to sacrifice their ideals in order to survive in a corrupt world.

Through the life of Abbasi, Adiga satirizes corruption in India, which is everywhere and infiltrates every corner of life, touching the economy and perpetuating social injustice. Bribery has become a right in Kittur, and its citizens have to shell out fortunes for a simple service. The town is portrayed as a nursery for criminals, where decent citizens have nothing but contempt for the all-pervasive lawlessness. As witnessed by Pooja and Kalpna, corruption in India is deep-rooted, from private enterprises to government ministries. Political instability and economic uncertainty are on the rise, and middle-class individuals like Abbasi and Shetty are becoming the direct casualties. Such blatant corruption is a disease that still infests Indian society:

> *"A man has to eat these days, Mr. Abbasi. And prices are rising so fast. Ever since Mrs. Gandhi died, this country began falling apart" (Adiga-25).*

The situation here is that of a game that never ends in which all are running in a race, chasing one another. In this game, rules are non-negotiable and must be followed stringently by all participants at all times. As Adiga would say, "Rules of the game must be followed at all times (Adiga 27)" (Radika Chopra 4).

Lastly, Adiga's presentation of corruption and moral degradation in *Day One (Afternoon): The Bunder* strongly disapproves of the widespread corruption that has made itself a fixture in Indian society. Through the life of Abbasi as an ordinary businessman, the story shows how corruption enters every walk of life, right from government institutions to individual business, trapping individuals in a world where dishonesty and bribery rule. Abbasi, being a man of integrity, is pushed to compromise his values just to survive, and this illustrates how the system coerces even the good into joining the corruption. The story reveals that corruption is not just a one-off issue but a contagious one that infests all sectors of society so that it becomes hard to imagine life without it. As Abbasi wrestles with his situation, so too is his frustration reflective of the feelings of many who are disillusioned with the system yet feel powerless to change it. The corruption within Kittur is reflective of the extent to which moral decay has seeped in and rendered people helpless and trapped. Adiga points to the harsh reality that in a corruption-dominated world, even the finest of intentions are compelled to conform to the corrupt system to survive, and thus demonstrate that this moral decay is not just an individual issue, but a universal one that erodes fairness, justice, and integrity.

Caste Discrimination and Social Hierarchy

In the second story, *Day Two: Lighthouse Hill*, Adiga highlights the crippling poverty and the wrongs it spawns. Ramkrishna, 'Xerox,' a bookseller from the Dalit community, appears as a representative of the poor and downtrodden. Through this character, Adiga unfolds the hidden crimes and follies perpetuated by various sections of society, particularly the poor. For instance, Xerox illegally sells pirated books, such as Satanic Verses, to students on Lighthouse Hill Road. It is a crime that can be punished, and because of this, Xerox has been arrested 21 times. Nevertheless, he continues with his illegal business.

The police frequently beat him and show contempt towards him by regarding him as nothing more than an uncouth, impoverished, and untouchable individual. The police discrimination against him is vicious, with the utterance of the police officer reflecting the deep-rooted prejudice against him due to his social standing as a Dalit. But it shows the miserable cycle of caste oppression and how it affects not only individuals such as Xerox but also their families and communities (Nisar and Charu 605).

> *"That fucking son of an untouchable. See him snoring.'*
>
> *'His father took out crap- this fellow thinks he's going to dump crap on us!'*
>
> *Selling The Satanic Verses. He'll sell it under my nose, will he?'*
>
> *These people think they own India now. Don't they?*
>
> *They want all the jobs and all the degrees at university, and all the…" (Adiga 39).*

While replying to a question, he boldly expresses his intentions that he is selling these books because his father would also sell books like this and make his living.

> *"You can break my legs, but I can't stop selling books. I'm destined to do this" (Adiga 39).*
>
> *"Just love books: I love making them, holding them and telling them.*
>
> *My father took out crap for a living, sir: he couldn't even read or write. He'd be so proud if he could see that I made my living from books" (Adiga 37).*

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The word "Untouchable" foregrounds the intense caste-based discrimination in Indian society, exposing the rampant racism that continues to afflict the lower-caste individuals to date. The topic is acutely relevant today in India, especially after the recent Citizenship Amendment Bill (CAB) and National Register of Citizens (NRC) controversy. These legislations, imposed on Muslims, Sikhs, and other minorities, mostly, have outraged people across the spectrum. Such actions are being resisted by nearly 70% of the population of India, and political leaders of various states are rising up against them. The ruling party, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), is not appearing to mind such matters a lot, and hence there has been a rise in states of emergencies and the loss of hundreds of lives.

The BJP's stance is to deport illegal immigrants from Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Afghanistan who have come into India after 1971 unless citizenship can be established. The policy is a radical form of religious racism, which is taking root across the country. Critics allege that the BJP government's irrational focus on Hindu caste politics has led to the torture and abuse of religious minorities. Though CAB and NRC are viewed by some as unavoidable steps towards making India a secular nation, others view them as tactical tools of discrimination against Muslims. Both are highly controversial issues, and whatever is absolutely right should be carried out in the supreme interest of the people.

In fact, Adiga's realistic account of social discrimination and stratification on the grounds of caste in Day Two: Lighthouse Hill forcefully establishes the age-old tragedy of people like Ramkrishna, or Xerox, a Dalit book seller, who is being exploited on the grounds of his caste. No matter his love for reading and effort to make a living, Xerox is always ill-treated and neglected by society and the police merely because he is a lower caste person. This indicates how deep-rooted caste discrimination has become, to the point of excluding the lower castes from access and rendering them less than equal. What happened to Xerox, whose relentless bashing and arrest, is testament to the fact that the caste system is still operating in individuals' lives and even the legal and social system too. It is clear that these are not just issues of the past but an elephantine issue even in the current era, where people like Xerox have to undergo discrimination on a daily basis and make it all the more challenging for them to live their lives with dignity or progress in life. It is long in explaining the inability of institutions and society to stem the tide of caste discrimination and does go a long way in establishing much has to be traveled to attain an equal society and one that is equitable for all regardless of their caste.

Religious Violence and Mob Mentality

The third story, *Day Two Afternoon: St. Alfonso's Boys' High School and Junior College*, informs us about Hindu extremism based on the exploitation of the caste system in India—a truth that prevails even today. The main character Shankara, who is Brahmin and also lower-caste Hoyka, is a social outcast. His father was a Brahmin, but his mother was a Hoyka, making him half-caste. He becomes bitter as social convention and tradition egregiously neglect him due to his half-caste background.

Shankara bombs his chemistry class in a vengeful strike. This act of terrorism, for Shankara, is his way of rewriting 5,000 years of caste injustice. His double-caste situation vexes him, and he considers adopting Christianity because he believes there is no Sectarianism or caste discrimination in the Christian faith—although he is aware of racial conflicts between black and white individuals. In the Indian caste system, a poor man who has acquired riches is still demeaned and denied nobility.

Shankara's rebellion against the caste system, sparked by the school's apathy, transforms his frustration into unrelenting fury. The explosion of the bomb is a metaphor for his bomb-like rage, and Adiga explores his possible thought process for such a radical action-

> *"I have burst a bomb to end the five-thousand-year-old caste system that still operates in our country. I have burst a bomb to show that no man should be judged, as I have been, merely by the accident of his birth" (Adiga 45).*

Adiga says about Shankara that he was like a rotten apple in school. Shankara is in trouble that also started nine years ago-

> *"Shankara had always been one of the rotten apples at school. Since the age of eight or nine, he had been in trouble" (Adiga 47).*

Before detonating the bomb, Shankara harbored dreams of gaining power and respect. He believed that the people from his lower-caste Hoyka would rally behind him, that even in jail, he would be treated with consideration. He imagined the police would be too fearful to mistreat him, that he would be released quickly, and upon his release, crowds would gather in his support. In his mind, this act would elevate him to political leadership, and he would no longer face the disrespect tied to his lower caste status.

But Shankara's radicalism is the result of intense alienation from social practices that not only exclude him but split his own caste as well. Although he is half-caste, his Brahmin status cannot save him from discrimination because other individuals equate poverty, not wealth. His fury at racism for caste grows, and, in desperation, he curses his mother by shouting at her that they must leave behind their own Brahmin relatives who spurn them. His sense of despair and loneliness awakens

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his fury, driving him to the extreme measure of detonating the bomb.

Adiga portrays the devastative psychological impact of caste bigotry in the existence of Shankara, in whom rejection by society sows despair and cruel retribution. It is indicative of the extremely deeply rooted casteism that rules in India and that continues to outcast individuals marooned among social classes until death. He talked to her-

> *"Mother, ignore our Brahmin relatives. Don't continually humiliate yourself in front of them. If they don't want us, let us not want them" (Adiga 46).*

Shankara's anger and his brutal act reveal the dangerous consequences of mob psychology in the setting of caste discrimination. His hope that the lower castes, especially his own group, will rally behind him is driven by the belief that a rebellion against the present social hierarchy in large numbers is the only way out of their subjugation. By detonating the bomb, Shankara aims to spark a broader movement, such that others similarly feeling oppressed and alienated come to join him. Group action, driven by shared grievances and a call for revenge, recalls the urges of mob psychology, in which frustrated and desperate individuals are goaded to the extreme actions they would not willingly take.

Adiga tries to establish that one who is besotted in the caste system, cannot free himself as a happy man and thus, that person becomes a mutineer. In fact, Shankara is wealthy enough but he is not given the status of a rich man because of the lack of being real as a Brahmin. His driver, however, is a Brahmin and has a good reputation in his higher caste, though poor. He is mentioned here when Shankara pretends to ask a question to a professor-

> *"What do we do about the caste system, sir? How do we get rid of it? (75) Professor replies, "one solution is what the Naxalites have done, just to blow up the upper castes entirely" (Adiga 53).*

Mob behavior is also evident here in the way the professor responds to the Naxalites—revolutionaries who have used violence in trying to transform society. The professor's statement that "blowing up the upper castes altogether" is a solution shows the idea that when people are made to feel threatened as belonging to a group, they are prone to use violent means. This sense of revenge on the collective level is therefore an argument for radical action, in which the complaint of the individual is amplified and supported by the complaints alleged to have been suffered by the larger group.

In Shankara's case, his personal rebellion against the caste system is an invitation to collective rebellion. His violent act is not a mere explosion of personal anguish but an attempt to awaken others to rebellion and protest against the established order. This mob mentality theory explains how extremist behavior, under the conditions of mob hatred and pursuit of justice, gets out of control and causes more social unrest and violence.

Through this excursion into mob psychology, Adiga paints the vicious circle of violence and anger based on a caste system that divides and isolates individuals. Shankara's actions are not merely personal rebellion but also the explosive potential of group violence when a society's divisions are too deep to be bridged by peaceful means.

The Decline of Traditional Morality and Influence of Westernization

In Day Two (Evening): Lighthouse Hill (The Foot of the Hill), Aravind Adiga introduces Mr. D'Mello, a strict and disciplined assistant headmaster, as a person who holds on to stringent and orthodox values of morality. He represents the period when India was strict about its orthodox conception of morality, politics, and national identity. D'Mello's aspiration is to sow these old values in his students at St. Alfonso's School, where he wishes them to practice discipline and follow the ideologies that accompany the values he cherishes. But when he realizes that his beloved student, Girish, is involved in the business of pornography, D'Mello is hit by a profound shock that leads to his premature death due to a heart attack. This tragedy is a reflection of the disintegration of ideals for which D'Mello spent his entire life. His death is a culmination, not only in his individual case, but also for the school as a whole, and for that broader society trapped in the change it is undergoing in terms of Western norms.

Adiga uses this observation to condemn the erosion of moral values in Indian society, as Western influences are eroding traditional values. D'Mello's failure to keep his students in line and his emphasis on traditional values are a stark contrast to the new trend of freedom and individuality that Girish, and society in general, is embracing. Adiga discusses the change in attitude among the generations and how that results in devaluation of moral values, particularly in the context of a post-colonial nation that is trying to reconcile with modernization.

Respect given to a generation back, like for a person as revered as Mahatma Gandhi, is being traded for more recent, mainly disturbing trends, according to the perception of D'Mello. His failure to screen out the corruption of a young mind like Girish's represents the larger failure of the old disposition to hold for a fast-changing world. This is the breakdown of the traditional world, washed away by the tide of modernization and ready to destroy the traditional social forms.

Briefly, Aravind Adiga explains how Indian values are declining due to the influence of the West.

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D'Mello is one such traditionalist who has extremely strong convictions regarding the traditional moral values that were practiced in India before the influence of the West in India. D'Mello is an assistant headmaster and tries to inculcate discipline among his students and uphold such values. But when he finds out that his favorite student, Girish, is into pornography, he is shocked, and this leads to his sudden death from a heart attack. This event represents the replacement of traditional moral values with new influences, especially Western influences. D'Mello's shock at Girish's actions shows the conflict between the values of the older generation and the new freedom and individualism being embraced by the young. The traditional generation can no longer uphold its values in a society that is quickly transforming due to Western cultural influence. Adiga uses the setting to illustrate how traditional values, like respect for elders like Mahatma Gandhi, are being replaced by modern Westernized values. The younger generation, like Girish, is influenced by individual freedom and new social norms that are in conflict with the older, traditional mindset. This kind of change shows the conflict between holding on to the past and embracing the modern.

Overall, Adiga laments the cause of Western culture for the erosion of traditional Indian values, especially among the young. Mr. D'Mello's shock and death represent the failure of old traditions to cope with the fast-changing world because of Western influence.

Socioeconomic Struggles and Corruption

Aravind Adiga's analysis of the intersection of socioeconomic status and corruption is given very vividly in the stories *Day Three (Morning): Market and Maiden* and *Day Four: Umbrella Street*. In *Day Three (Morning)*, the narrative is about a boy called Keshava, In Day Three (Morning): Market and Maiden, Aravind Adiga presents Keshava and Vittal, two orphan brothers rejected by their aunt Kamala and uncle Thimma after a drought rendered them incapable of taking care of them. The brothers reach Kittur, hoping to take shelter with their cousin Janardhana, but find it difficult to find him because of the town's caste-based identity system. Their arrival makes them witness the corruption in Kittur, as an auto-rickshaw driver charges them exorbitantly without taking them anywhere.

On *Day Three (Morning): Market and Maiden*, Aravind Adiga presents us with the dilemma of two brothers, Keshava and Vittal, both orphaned and cast out by their aunt Kamala and their uncle Thimma after a drought rendered them unable to provide for them. In asking for shelter at Kittur, they struggle to locate their relation Janardhana because, in Kittur, one is named by caste, not by the use of any simple name: "Which Janardhana—Shetty, Rai, or Padiwal? (48).They find themselves immediately put through their paces regarding corruption when an auto-rickshaw driver cheats them by overcharging them although he takes them nowhere.".

Janardhana, a drunk laborer, offers a cynical lesson: "That's how it is in the city: you can do anything you want, as long as no one finds out'" (50). He will not, however, give them shelter, and they are left on the streets. Keshava is sent to seek employment in a barber shop, where the barber is friendly, but the barber's wife refuses to welcome him into her home on the grounds of caste: "He is the Shopkeeper's boy, he can get food himself. And he is a Hoyka, you want him eating with us"? (51).

The brothers squabble over food and shelter, experiencing the stark economic divide in Kittur—whereas the market stands for India's success, the pavement exposes its harsh poverty. "Even the cow that ate the garbage seemed so much larger in the market than they were back home" (52). They find shelter in an alley controlled by a powerful man named Brother, and he collects for sleeping there. When Keshava defends Vittal by standing up to Brother, Brother is surprised: "A Hoyka who is brave? That's not common. Your caste is full of cowards, that's been Brother's experience in Kittur" (53). This bravery earns Keshava a job with Brother's transport company, much to the contrary advice of Vittal and the barber.

Prasath states- "As Keshava moves up from bus cleaner to conductor, Adiga brings out in heightened form the rooted religious and caste divisions in India. The very transport system divides into Hindu and Christian buses, and Keshava assumes an increasingly militant bent, determined to climb higher up the ranks. Under the aegis of a Hoyka political leader who stands alongside Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, Keshava looks forward to lifting the prestige of his caste and overthrowing" (163):

> *"He is a Hoyka sits next to the Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and gives him advice! And so the entire world can see that the Hoykas are trustworthy and reliable, despite the falsehoods that the Bunts and other upper castes spread about us!" (56).*

But his own wants ultimately lead to his ruin. As Brother's best friend, Keshava begins to relish the benefits but then betrays his own brother Vittal for spurning his friendship with Brother. His wants go as far as to reach their tragic conclusion when an accident incapacitates him and Brother spurns him. The same system that once honored him now lowers him to a beggar's level, echoing the betrayal once caused to Vittal: "The first Hoyka bus conductor in our company! He's a pride to his people! " (58). Even Vittal rejects him: "You see what is happening to the family structure in our country? Brother casting brothers out on the street! undefined" (57).

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Adiga reproaches the darker side of politics in which the leaders of the caste do not seek justice but power. Instead of abolishing the caste system, they reinforce it by demanding domination over superior castes:

> *"There will be a Hoyka temple. No matter what the Brahmins say; no matter what the rich say; there will be a Hoyka temple in this town. With Hoyka Priests. And Hoyka gods. And Hoyka goddesses. And Hoyka doors, and Hoyka bells, and even Hoyka doormats and doorknobs! And why? Because we are ninety percent of this town! We have our rights here!" (56).*

Corruption also extends to the younger generation, as seen in Shabia, a spoiled boy who bribes Keshava with a five-rupee note to ignore his indiscipline on the bus. Lastly, Adiga suggests that corruption is inherent in Kittur's very being, tracing its name to historical myths and distortions:

> *"The word 'Kittur' is a corruption either of 'Kri Uru', 'Small Town,' or of 'kittanmai's Uru'—kittamma being a goddess specializing in repelling smallpox whose temple stood near today's train station" (62).*

In fact, in Aravind Adiga's fiction, people suffer because of caste divisions, which are similar to sectarianism. Keshava's life shows how the divisions lead to injustice and corruption. Though he tries to improve himself, his caste and the way society is divided into it holds him back and leads to betrayal. The tales show the way caste and sectarianism split humanity and render the world worse for all. Day Three (Morning): Market and Maiden and Day Four: Umbrella Street, Adiga exposes the problems of caste, inequality, and corruption of India. The two abandoned brothers Keshava and Vittal's life exposes the way in which caste and social class dictate their destiny. When they fight for their survival, they are trapped in a corrupt society with betrayal surrounding them. Adiga illustrates how ambition makes individuals give up their ethics and how the caste system still injures other people. The novel illustrates that actual change must take place in order to shatter these oppressive systems and form a more equal society.

Caste Discrimination and Gender Inequality

Adiga's probing of the caste system and intersection with gender is especially powerful in the stories *Day Five: Valencia (To the First Crossroad) and Day Five (Evening): Cathedral of Our Lady of Valencia. The story, Day Five: Valencia (To the First Crossroad*), revolves around Jayamma, a graying woman who has worked as a cook for various households over the years. She never received her salary paid to her personally and was always treated like a servant. The story begins with Jayamma ready to leave her current employer, the advocate, and his family. She recalls that the salary was never paid to her personally, which was a common practice in her life.

Jayamma reflects on her life before she departs. She had worked in so many houses, but her life had not gotten any better; she remained unmarried, childless, and poor. She couldn't understand how all the others around her had developed in life, yet she remained the same. Her body had grown old, and her eyes and knees were weak. "Nothing will ever change for me till I die" (103), she thought sadly.

But her mood swings when she sees a blue rubber ball half-hidden behind a hibiscus bush at the back garden. She thinks it may have been left behind because it was pierced. She picks it up and listens to the escaping air as she squeezes it, deciding that it would be just as good. She goes to Karthik, the boy she was taking care of, and requests if she can have the ball for her small nephew, Brijju, who loves cricket but cannot afford to purchase a ball. Karthik swats her away without even lifting his head from his game, and when she does not let go, he refuses. "No," he tells her.

Jayamma, in resentment and frustration, indulges in a violent daydream where she attacks Karthik, the boy whom she had fed and taken care of, considering him a fat, pampered boy. "She had a vision of chasing this fat little boy with a meat cleaver (103)," she fantasizes, but shudders and snaps out of it. Despite her outrage, she bids him farewell: "You are an orphan child, and a Brahmin. I don't wish to think evil of you. Farewell, brother." (103).

Jayamma leaves the house with a suitcase, catching a final glimpse of the ball in the garden. As she reaches the gate, she is overcome by mixed feelings: her eyes are "full of the tears of the righteous" (104). She is resigned and melancholic, with the sun teasing her from the trees. When she turns to leave, Rosie, a Christian woman from the family, comes out and tells her in a clear message to take the ball. "Take the ball, you Brahmin fool!" (104), she seems to say.

Jayamma, as she rides in a bus to Salt Market Village, is overwhelmed with ambivalent feelings. She is guilty of stealing the ball, but she cannot help herself. She had stolen it. She sits next to a holy woman and cannot hear the woman's stories about Varanasi and the great temples. Her mind is filled with the ball tucked away in her sari. What the gods will do to her for this sin, she asks herself. She goes round her head in dizzy dreams, even thinks of being returned back as a Christian in the next life, even fancies that possibility in dazed fascination.

The story ends with Jayamma sleeping, overcome by such thoughts, and the bus continuing to shake on the bumpy road, bringing her home with the ball she had pilfered from under her head jammed into her stomach. She is a complicated character, beset by her

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remorse, ire, and odd relief, knowing she would be punished in the hereafter for what she had done.

Jayamma's life shows us how gender prejudice, caste, and religious divide confine humans in poverty. She has once been a Brahmin and had been working as a domestic laborer for more than four decades, looking after children from another family, not getting married, not giving birth, and not accumulating wealth. However, no one actually loves her. This is revealed when Karthik, the son she raised, refuses her a deflated ball for her nephew. The refusal makes her realize how small she is to the family she served. She steals the ball in desperation, but conscience gets the better of her lest she suffer in her next life. She concludes that she will be reincarnated as a lower animal, maybe a cockroach or a worm. And then, much to her surprise, she imagines if she sins enough, she will be reincarnated a Christian and will no longer be bound by the oppressive caste system. She is overjoyed at this fantasy, showing just how much she desires not to be trapped by the unjust laws that have ruled her life. This notion provides her a peculiar feeling of freedom, describing how religious difference leads to discrimination. Religious cleavages harden social hierarchies and lower castes and minorities view conversion as liberty. Jayamma's temporary euphoria in viewing another religion demonstrates the manner in which oppressive structures drive individuals towards religious cleavages, and religion is a weapon of oppression as well as a vehicle for liberation.

Also, In *Day Five (Evening): Cathedral of Our Lady of Valencia*, both gender inequality and caste discrimination are readily evident, especially upon reflection on George's encounter with Madam and his feelings about his position in society.

The first hint of caste discrimination is seen when George is annoyed with Madam for giving him commands that he believes are beneath his pride. He taunts, "A rich woman can never look at a poor man as a man. Just like a servant (114)." This is suggestive of how he feels lower due to his social class and that the wealthy, like Madam, will never be able to see him as an equal but only as someone who would do their bidding.

Madam's treatment of George also shows gender inequality. George not only discriminates against his lower caste but also the fact that he is a man in a inferior position to a rich woman. The way she orders him, "You work for me! You do what I say! (114)." shows how she thinks of him as inferior—both as a servant and a man. There is no consideration of his humanity; he is considered nothing more than a person to carry out her commands.

As the story goes on, sectarianism creeps in as George finds himself caught between his role as a servant and the complex social structures around him. Madam, as one of the wealthy and powerful, has no desire to be nice or courteous to George. When George tries to apologize for himself after his drunken return to the house, Madam's cold welcome to him—"Get out"—is a clear demonstration of the distance she has placed between herself and George. Even when he tries to explain and apologize, he is still looked down upon with disdain (115).

This battle between their gender and class identities is revealed as Madam expels both George and Maria out of sympathy. "Maria will have to go too (115)," she tells them, and she does not care about the welfare of Maria. This proves that the poor, male or female, can be discarded so far as the upper class is concerned. Even if it is a Christian environment, Madam seems to be of the opinion that compassion or equality is not required, which shows the deep-rooted sectarianism in society. When George pleads with her to spare Maria, informing her, "Madam, you're Christian like us, and I'm begging you—in the name of Christian charity, please leave Maria out of this (116)," Madam is unmoved, replying harshly, "She can sleep in the church, I suppose (116)."

The way Madam receives George's plea, leaving Maria to be an afterthought, also demonstrates the convergence of caste discrimination and gender inequality. As a woman, Maria continues to be treated with the same demeaning attitude as George, being told that she can rest in the church without regard to her dignity or her own self-denial in leaving behind her village.

Therefore, the story reflects deep gender inequality and caste discrimination in a sectarian setup in which the poor men and women are regarded as lower and replaceable. Madam's cold responses and behavior towards George and Maria reflect the deep social cleavages in their lives.

Moral Ambiguity and the Corruption of Ideals

In *Day Seven: Salt Market Village*, the main character Murali is subject to a painful metamorphosis. He starts off as a blissful and optimistic person, hoping that he can change the world for the better with his philosophy of communism and Marxism. As he grows older, though, he starts to lose faith in them, hoping that they have never led to any kind of transformation. Murali reflects upon his life, declaring: "everything around him seemed dingy and dark and unbearable…the old pots and pans, the filthy spoons, the dirty old tub out of which he scooped sugar for the tea." It is a reflection of the way Murali feels that his life is dull and unimportant today, and therefore has second thoughts about the utility of his work in the past.

Murali knows that all his efforts towards a brighter tomorrow have been in vain. He begins to feel cheated. He quotes, "You've been fooled, everything in the room said to him. You've wasted your life (141)." It

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shows his disillusionment. Murali also feels regret for having been guided by ideals that failed to result in any real change. He remembers what a friend had told him once about his "talent" being squandered on the wrong cause, "His 'talen"—as that Mysore editor had said. All of that, he thought as he brought the tea out into the reception area, wasted in the service of Comrade Thimma (141)." His disillusionment grows as he laments the point of his sacrifices.

When Murali himself gets more and more disillusioned, he also begins to think of the world in a cynical way. According to him, the younger generation, instead of fighting for ideals, is worried about money and personal success alone. He thinks: "Perhaps if they had all turned bastards, the young men of his own time, the nation would be such as America is today! (141)" This shows his frustration with the lack of real change and his implication that the younger generation's focus on money was the cause of this failing.

Murali also encounters a moneylender and observes how immoral and exploitative the system is. Instead of being incensed, he is amazed at the shrewdness of the moneylender's business: "sheer genius of exploitation in India." This suggests that Murali has grown more accepting of the immoral means of the world, no longer holding on to the ideals of fairness and equality he once fought for.

The advent of materialism, as is seen in the village youth, also leads Murali to feel that the world has lost its values. He describes them as "driving brand-new Suzuki cars playing pop music from the West; they were licking raspberry ice-cream cones with red tongues and sporting shiny metal watches (141)." This description shows that the younger generation cares more about money and status than any ideals of equality or justice.

Finally, Murali decides to leave the Communist Party, an act that marks his complete loss of belief in the principles that had otherwise dominated his existence: "He knew, as he did it, that he was abandoning finally his membership in the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Maoist) (141)." This act represents the final relinquishment of the principles which he once believed in, and it signifies that he has lost hope of changing the system through politics or ideology.

In this manner, the narrative, *Day Seven: Salt Market Village*, illustrates how the ideals of Murali were tainted by the realities of life. He transforms from an idealistic dreamer to a regretful man. His path demonstrates how sectarianism and the desire for material prosperity can leech away one's morals and ideals and leave him with emptiness.

CONCLUSION

Aravind Adiga gives us a stark picture of a desolate existence of nationals of a war-torn country in *Between the Assassinations*. Adiga reprises the story of several characters against whom religion, class, and caste problems are a confrontational force. With respect to their travels, nationals are stuck in their minds wondering about how bad things about corruption and dividing are but encountered in India. For example, Murali has his own crisis of disillusionment with the world around him, and Abbasi and Jayamma struggle to make ends meet in their lives. Through them, Adiga shows how expectations of justice and improvement are perpetually shattered by unjust social structures and unethical actions.

By interlacing the life of different individuals, Adiga helps us to understand how people's lives and choices are influenced by the caste system, their financial situation, and religious faith. He informs us how all these issues are not only individualistic but accumulated to the broader society as well. Even if people do their best to isolate themselves from problems, they always get trapped once again in the very same discriminative systems. The novel describes a bleak vision of a world in which it is difficult to be good and in which justice is within reach. Ultimately, *Between the Assassinations* causes us to think about how deeply these fault lines have been inscribed and how challenging it is to effect meaningful change. It causes us to think about other means of constructing a more just and equitable society.

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