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Abstract: The present paper attempts to explore how Adiga in his second novel Between the Assassinations (2008), depicts the journey of Indian society from aspirations to disillusionment by raising very vital issues of national importance such as caste, class and religious fanaticism through a story of ‘everyman’ of ‘every town’ of the period of transition between the assassinations of Indira and Rajiv Gandhi viz. 1984 to 1991. These issues are deep-rooted in our psyche and are resistant to change. Though exiled by centuries of India’s rigid caste, class and religious pride, thrust into the dismal outskirts of society, Adiga’s characters who are victim of this system somehow feel an immense connectedness to realities, a passion for the subtleties in the world around them, and they long for a dignity which they may never know. The paper is a scathing critique of the individual vices such as hypocrisy, avarice and false pride in one’s social status based on caste, class, religion and wealth which are working together for disintegration of human values and society as a whole.

Keywords: Caste System, Class System, Minority, Communal Disharmony.

Aravind Adiga the author of the novel Between the Assassinations exposes the gritty realities of an India entrenched in transition and turmoil between the years 1984 and 1991 through a series of open-ended short stories. It is the time when Indira Gandhi and his son were assassinated. This novel is set in ‘Kittur’ a fictional town on India’s South-Eastern Coast, in between Goa and Calicut where Adiga introduces the reader to a world of corruption and chaos, of DDT and Hinduism, of limbless beggars and staggering riches—and the characters who must either succumb to or surpass their volatile surroundings. There was communal violence throughout India at this time. In the midst of this erratic and tumultuous time period, the underprivileged masses were overwhelmingly cast out, left to their own devices. As being the products of a culture riddled with conflicting values and a history consumed by judgment and class confinement, these devices weren’t by any means very honorable. Still, even in these bleakest of circumstances, Adiga hints at glimpses of hope, determination, and strength in the human spirit. So, the present paper attempts to explore how Adiga in his second novel Between the Assassinations (2008), depicts the journey of Indian society from aspirations to disillusionment by raising very vital issues of national importance such as caste class and religious fanaticism through a story of ‘everyman’ of ‘every town’ of the period of transition between the assassinations of Indira and Rajiv Gandhi viz. 1984 to 1991

Caste System has been India’s most grave societal evil since centuries ago. Caste discrimination and repression is mostly found to be in practice among the Hindus of India. In India, the caste in which one is born leaves a permanent imprint on the person. These ideas are deep-rooted in our psyche and are resistant to change. There are deep caste-based divisions in India as Arundhati Roy writes:

“Deep at the heart of the horror of what’s going on lies the caste system: this layered, horizontally divided society with no …human – humane- interaction that holds the layers together. So when the bottom half of society simply shears off and falls away, it happens silently. (Roy 2011:6)

Though exiled by centuries of India’s rigid caste system and thrust into the dismal outskirts of society, Adiga’s characters who are victim of this system somehow feel an immense connectedness to realities, a passion for the subtleties in the world around them, and they long for a dignity which they may never know.
While they are doomed to the cyclical nature of the lingering caste system and is discarded and scrutinized by those who are above him, it becomes apparent that Xerox can see the world and feel his surroundings in a way no one else can. Through unrivaled empathy, Xerox are able to rise above the rich in the one way he know how. Ramkrishna, a Dalit bookseller known as 'Xerox' who has been arrested twenty-one times in a nine year span for selling pirated copies of books at discounted rates. He sells the books not only for survival but also for the prestige of the vocation that is why he once told inspector Ramesh, “...I 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” (Aravind Adiga 2008:46). After unknowingly selling copies of a book banned in the Republic of India, The Satanic Verses, Xerox finds himself confined in a torturous prison. The policemen are entertained by Xerox telling smutty tales of some college girls whom he saw wearing jeans in American style. Xerox, being a low caste, narrates the story of what his father did all his life for a living-taking the crap out of the houses of rich landlords which was traditional occupation of people of his caste. His old father would have hang all day long around the black wall of the landlord's house, waiting for the smell of human faces. As soon as he smelled that smell, he has to come close to the house, and wait with bent knees like a wicket keeper waits for the ball in cricket. Then hearing the sound of the boom-box closing, he has to run to the well, pull out the retractable potty through a hole in the wall, empty it into the rose-plants, wipe it clean with his loincloth and insert it back into the wall before the next person will use the toilet. While he sleeps, the police station upper caste inspector, Ramesh, and lawyer, D'Souza, gulp down bottles of Old Monk while grudgingly observing Xerox’s sleeping frame and remarks as:

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…” (p.49)

Within few seconds, both the upper caste men take pleasure in breaking his legs. The policeman and the lawyer took turns: they smashed the bar against Xerox’s legs just at the knee joint, “like the monkey god did on TV,”(p.49). Once out of the hospital and upon his release Xerox openly defies the police and plans to sell only one book banned throughout the Republic of India- The Satanic, he confronts the policeman, grinning, “You can break my legs but I can’t stop selling books. I’m destined to do this, sir” (p.50). For the policeman and the lawyer who torture Xerox is not just a petty thief but a symbol of the oppressed that have begun to assert themselves and challenge the powerful. Dr. Rositta Joseph Valiyamattam states as:

While the obsolete system of reservations and the discontent of the Inspector may well be a prelude to the Mandal agitation of the 1990s, Xerox’s open rebellion shows that the Dalit too will no longer take insults lying down. His act of defiance challenges the Indian State which has failed to establish true equality. Adiga underlines the fact that unless social attitudes change, no amount of quotas will lend dignity to the downtrodden”(Rositta Joseph Valiyamattam 2011:226-229)

The caste, in India, in which one is born, gives him an identity in the society and it may be an identity of pride or humiliation. The caste gives an individual a sense of belonging, even if a lower caste person becomes rich but still he is treated with humiliation rather than nobility. Adiga has captured this through the case of Shankara, who is, a child born from the union of a Brahmin father and a low caste Hoyka woman. Shankara belongs to a lower caste Hoyka community suspects that the teachers must be mocking behind his back. He feels insecurity about his identity and against the caste biased society in which he thinks and experienced humiliation for being half-caste, tries to take revenge by exploding a bomb in his school. He thinks that 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” (Aravind Adiga 2008:59)

As by exploding bomb, he dreams that he would 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 would not dare touch
him. Perhaps, when he would be released, great crowds would wave for him-he would be launched on a political career. As Shankara a union of Brahmin-Hoyka is presently by adiga differently:

Shankara was always treated as someone special among his Hoyka relatives; because he was half Brahmin, and hence so much higher than them in the class seal. Swearing to himself, he kept going up the stairs. Didn’t these Hoykas understand? There was nothing he hated more than their groveling to him, because of his half Brahmin. If they had been contemptuous of him, if they had forced him to crawl into their shops to expiate the sin of being a half-Brahmin, then wouldn’t he have come to see them every day? (p.62).

Social isolation and sense of humiliation in caste-based society makes the boy more violent. He even hates his driver who belongs to an upper caste. 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 premarital sex and caste violation. As Staying away from his father for six years, Shankara has developed a feeling that his father belonged to no caste or race; such people lived for themselves. His mother being Hoyka feels herself inferior in the company of the Brahmin relatives. As she told that:

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 (p.61).

Shankara thinks that it is her own fault if she feels distressed among Brahmin relatives.Repeatedly, he tells his mother to ignore the Brahmin relatives as her “don’t humiliate yourself once more in front of them. If they don’t want us, let us not want them.”(p.61)

Adiga 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. However, his driver who belongs to upper caste, is poor. The old Brahmin who shows sympathy to him cannot afford a car for travelling; however, Shankara has ample wealth (Nikam, 2011: p. 140). Shankara 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?”(Aravind Adiga 2008:69)

Adiga seems to suggest that the caste discrimination has created some groups like Naxalities or other which is the threat itself as Shankara poses a question to the 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”(p.73)

In another story “Valencia: To The First Crossroad” the Hindu cast system is presented in another interesting angle. There is a character Jayamma, who works as a cook, although belonging to Brahmin caste, she has to suffer from the ceaseless misery. Jayamma is one of the eleven children and her father being a floor cannot afford the expenses of his eight daughters. Her father is able to save the gold only for six daughters to be married off. The last three has to stay barren virgin for life. Jayamma Hindu Brahmin woman is made to work from her early years as a maid servant in one family after another, some of them as also their other servants being Hoykas upon whom she looks down and grumbles at her fate. Working at the advocate’s house, she hates another servant-girl Shaila for belonging to lower caste. She refuses to share a room with Shaila in the servant's quarters even though she prefers to stay in the room of seven feet by seven feet with a little space in between the shrine and the rice bags, just enough to curl up and go to sleep at night. She believes in karma and wiped her forehead, and went on to ask “ what had she done in a previous life- had she been a murderess, an adulterous, a child devourer, a person who was rude to holy men and sages to have been fated to come here, to the advocate's house, and live next to a lower caste?” (p.160).The upper caste depravity was in such a limit that they think that only they are meant for to read and write as it is when the advocate teaches Shaila to read and write, Jayamma feels that he is violating the rules of caste system: “Were the lower castes meant to read and write?” (p.165)

Aravind Adiga exposes another vital issue like communal disharmony which causes hatred among different communities. Since from post-independence of India, it has been seen that whenever there causes untoward,
minorities always suffered and subjugated. There is galaxy of characters represent each section of our society. Among them, Ziauddin, a Muslim boy, twelve year old sixth of the eleventh children of a farm labouring family, works in a tea stall through which adiga highlights how the Muslims are discriminated, and are not considered the part of the mainstream society. Zia working in an age in which he should reap the joy of innocent childhood, he develops a sense of isolation from the society. He has left entirely to his own wits and has to struggle for survival like an adult. In the town of Kittur, Muslims are marginalized from the mainstream social discourse. None of the Hindu shopkeepers near the railway station hire a Muslim worker but Ramanna Shetty employs Ziauddin due to his innocence, as it is clear that Muslims are being marginalized when Ramanna Shetty placed a hand on Zia’s head put his words to the Thimma “which, i can tell u , aren’t much, even for a Muslim!”(p.5). After a stay for four months with his parents, the boy comes back completely transformed, losing his innocence. He develops a sense of pride in his religion and takes a keen interest in knowing his ancestral roots. However, the honest boy changes as a thief stealing small things which leads to his removal from work after another. While fighting, he always asserts his identity as a Pathan, slapping his chest, “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!”(p.8) The religious pride and a sense of separation spreads poison in the mind of the little fellow because of Muslims feel insecure after the tragic events of riots.

These years witnessed the anti-Sikh and Babri-Ayodhya riots that shook the very soul of a nation. Though riots had been occurring ever since Partition, 1984-1991 was the time during which religious fundamentalists, especially Hindu communalists, whipped up religious passions and sentiments to a new frenzy and the secular fabric of the nation seemed to be in real danger. We see a slackening of the nation’s long vigil against communal forces. Infact during the 1990s the BJP had launched a campaign to hoist the national flag at Idgah Maidan in Kittur, near Hubli.(Dr.Rositta Joseph Valiyamattam 2011:226-229)

A feeling of insecurity makes him hate the Hindus with whom he had spent happy moments of life. It is clear that he has been brain washed by some religious extremists as they have developed this by impact of these tragic events which cause this sense communalism and sense of insecurity that makes the young boy hate the others. He shouts when he is beaten by Ramanna “I am a Pathan! … We came here and built the Taj Mahal and the Red Fort in Delhi and so don’t you dare treate me like this....”(Aravid Adiga 2008:9 ).In turn, Ramanna put his words towards the ring of customers “there is no work here for a Muslim and he has to fight with the one who gives him a job”(p.9).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, and the stranger's expensive cloths, handsome face and the scent make him take a pride in his acquaintance as he feels “this man is a countryman of mine” (p.15). 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 but Zia 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 novelist through Zia's story tries to highlight the problems of minorities and probe into the causes behind terrorism.

One may be born poor, even if a poor man works hard and wants to rise up in life it does not mean that he will be accepted by the upper class society as an equal. but he does everything to rise upwards. George, the mosquito-man who spreads the pesticides tries to win the heart of a rich lady Mrs.Gomes but realizes that he will always be treated as a poor. As a he realizes and put his words to friends, “you know what the biggest difference is, between being rich and being like us? The rich can make mistakes again and again. We make only one mistake, and that's it for us” (p.186). His friend Vijay with a sigh that is half rebellion and half acceptance the fact says, “the rich own the whole world”(p.185). The aspiration of poor people are not only to get money but to struggle for respect and social status even though they have lower job as once George is annoyed by rich woman’s tone who he thinks his princes. She frowned, “how much do you want to do this? (p.190 ).He says nothing but thought, “how the rich think they can buy us like cattle!(p.190).It is clear when he conversates with his friends at construction site when he shows his psyche or feelings against riches and says , “the rich abuse us ,man. It’s always here, take twenty rupees, kiss my feet. Get into the gutter. Clean my shit. It’s always like that” (p.194).Gradually, George wins her confidence and becomes part-time gardener, and then driver. He manages to bring his sister, Maria, in Mrs. Gomes house as a cook. He perceives
that Mrs. Gomes is different from other rich people and successively she senses that he is slowly trying to take over her household. The cook who is dismissed from her job to make way for George’s sister Maria says: “I know what you are trying to do with her! I told her you’ll destroy her name and reputation! But she’s fallen under your spell” (p.205). George hopes Maria can get married soon as she has a status as a cook in a rich woman’s house. Due to bitterness, poverty and shame he had put off the thought of his marriage so long but “the regret still gnawed at him, created by his contact with this rich woman, that he could have done so much more with his life” (p.206-207). He develops the thought to be treated with nobility and dignity by her. But his delusion soon shattered when he is asked by her to spread the pesticides in the gutter in the same manner as in the past. He is offended to know that she still treats him like a servant. He understands, “Oh, these rich people are the same … We’re just trash to them. They’ll just use us and throw us out. A rich woman can never see a poor man as a man. Just as a servant” (p.208). Mrs. Gomes knows that her reputation is at stake, she removes him and his sister from the work.

In the novel *Between the Assassinations* Adiga has very finely narrated the stories of ‘everyman’ in an ‘every town’ in a local flavor which gives an universal appeal to the realistic treatment of the characters. It is rightly said; Adiga invites reader's attention towards the disparities between the poor and the rich, communal disharmony, corruption, violence and hypocrisy” (Nikam & Nikam 2012:145). He raises the voices of subaltern who are eager to change their fate and destiny. Adiga deeply presents the pathetic condition of underdogs as well as what compels them to commit crimes, to rob people, to kill people, and to force the people to choose a wrong path. The novel is a muffled voice of protest and has vocalized them creatively so that people of the entire world may know that ‘all is not right in the world’. By projecting myriad pictures of society and people of India, Adiga displays his full-range of imagination, impressive and genuine concern for those who are victims of caste, class, communal disharmony and poverty.

WORKS CITED