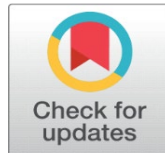
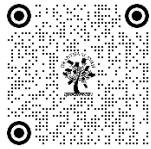


# EXPLORING CONTEMPORARY INDIAN SOCIETY: THEMES AND NARRATIVES IN ARVIND ADIGA'S "BETWEEN THE ASSASSINATIONS"

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## DOI

[10.29121/shodhkosh.v5.i5.2024.2681](https://doi.org/10.29121/shodhkosh.v5.i5.2024.2681)

**Funding:** This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

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## ABSTRACT

This research paper examines the collection of interconnected stories titled "Between the Assassinations" by Arvind Adiga, published in 2008. The paper explores the various themes and narratives presented in the novel, which provides a snapshot of life in the fictional town of Kittur on India's southwestern coast. The study delves into the captivating portrayal of contemporary India, focusing on themes such as caste discrimination, religious tensions, and the impact of urbanization on small towns. Through a comprehensive analysis of the novel, this research aims to shed light on the social, political, and cultural complexities depicted by Adiga, highlighting the struggles, dreams, and aspirations of diverse characters from different walks of life.

**Keywords:** Arvind Adiga, Between the Assassinations, Contemporary India, Caste Discrimination, Religious Tensions, Urbanization

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### A. Background of Arvind Adiga and "Between the Assassinations"

Arvind Adiga, an acclaimed Indian author known for his incisive social commentary, wrote "Between the Assassinations" as a follow-up to his Man Booker Prize-winning novel, "The White Tiger." Adiga's works often explore the intricacies of contemporary Indian society, making him a significant figure in modern Indian literature. "Between the Assassinations" is set in the fictional town of Kittur in South India and serves as a microcosm of the larger Indian society, addressing "the themes of caste and religion" and urbanization (Chakane, 2015).

### B. Significance of Studying Contemporary Indian Society

The study of contemporary Indian society is of paramount importance in today's globalized world. India, as one of the world's most populous and diverse countries, is experiencing rapid economic growth and undergoing significant political and social transformations. Understanding the intricacies of Indian society, including issues such as caste discrimination, religious tensions, and urbanization, provides valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities faced by a nation at the crossroads of tradition and modernity. Arvind Adiga's "Between the Assassinations" offers a lens through which we can explore these themes and narratives, shedding light on the complex tapestry of contemporary India. This research

seeks to uncover the deeper meanings and implications of Adiga's work within the broader context of contemporary Indian society.

## **2. PORTRAYAL OF CONTEMPORARY INDIA IN "BETWEEN THE ASSASSINATIONS"**

### **A. Setting and Timeframe**

"Between the Assassinations" is set in the fictional town of Kittur, located in southern India. This serves as the backdrop for the entire narrative. Kittur is not just a setting but a microcosm that represents the larger Indian society. Adiga's choice of a small town allows him to closely examine the "different walks of life to picturize the dynamics of society" including the social, political, and cultural dynamics at play in a typical Indian town during a specific timeframe (Khan, and Geeta). The timeframe of the novel is between the assassination of Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in 1984 and the assassination of her son, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, in 1991. This temporal context is significant as it mirrors a period of political instability and change in India. It allows Adiga to explore how these national-level events affect the lives of ordinary people in Kittur.

### **B. Diverse Characters and Perspectives**

"Between the Assassinations" is structured as a collection of connected short stories, with each story presenting a different set of characters and their experiences. These characters come from various backgrounds, ethnicities, and social classes, offering a diverse range of perspectives on contemporary Indian society. The diversity of characters and their interconnected stories enable Adiga to paint a comprehensive portrait of Kittur and, by extension, contemporary India. Readers are exposed to the struggles, aspirations, and conflicts faced by people from different walks of life, providing a holistic view of society.

### **C. Social Realism in Adiga's Narrative**

Adiga employs the literary technique of social realism in his narrative. Social realism is a literary approach that seeks to depict the everyday lives of ordinary people, often highlighting social issues and inequalities. Adiga's stories are grounded in the reality of Kittur, portraying the harsh truths of contemporary Indian society. The stories in the novel explore into various "the theme of poverty, corruption, caste and religion" including social issues, such as ethnic strife, corruption, poverty, caste discrimination, and religious tensions (Kaur, et. al. 2014, p. 5.). Adiga's writing is unflinchingly honest, portraying the complexities and challenges faced by his characters without romanticizing or idealizing their situations. By adopting a social realist approach, Adiga provides readers with a raw and unfiltered look at the multifaceted nature of contemporary India. Through his storytelling, he aims to provoke reflection and critical examination of the societal norms and injustices that persist in the country. "Between the Assassinations" offers a vivid portrayal of contemporary India through its setting, timeframe, diverse characters, and the use of social realism. This narrative approach allows Arvind Adiga to explore and critique various aspects of Indian society, making the novel a compelling reflection of the challenges and complexities of life in modern India.

## **3. CASTE DISCRIMINATION IN CONTEMPORARY INDIA**

### **A. The Role of Caste in Indian Society**

In India, the caste system is a deeply ingrained social hierarchy that categorizes individuals into specific groups based on birth. Each caste is associated with particular occupations, social roles, and privileges. The caste system has historically been a dominant and influential aspect of Indian society, impacting various aspects of life, including marriage, education, and employment in which "marriage is a very difficult task" (Devi, and Suganthi. p. 17.). The caste system is often characterized by discrimination and inequality, with higher-caste individuals enjoying privileges and advantages while lower-caste individuals face systemic disadvantages and discrimination. Within this context, it's essential to understand the role of caste in Indian society to appreciate how it shapes the lives and experiences of individuals in "Between the Assassinations."

### **B. Illustrations of Caste Discrimination in the Novel**

"Between the Assassinations" provides multiple illustrations of caste discrimination through its interconnected stories. One example is the story of Shankara, a young boy who is part Brahmin and part Hoyka. His mixed-caste identity makes him an outsider in both castes, and he resorts to violence (building and detonating a bomb) as a desperate attempt to gain some measure of control and revenge against the discrimination he faces. The novel also likely presents other

instances of caste discrimination “a 5,000-year-old caste system that still operates in our country” (Kaur, and Agarwal. 2014 p. 4.). These instances serve as vivid examples of the social injustices and hierarchies that persist in contemporary India.

### **C. Impact on Characters and Society**

Caste discrimination in the novel has profound impacts on both individual characters and the broader society of Kittur. For individual characters, it often leads to feelings of exclusion, frustration, and even desperation. Shankara's story, for instance, showcases the emotional and psychological toll that caste discrimination can take on an individual. At the societal level, the perpetuation of caste-based discrimination “depicted the inequalities between the rich and the poor of the country, the unequal social structure that is prevalent and nonsensical superstitious beliefs” contributes to social divisions and inequality (Gaud). It can hinder social mobility, limit opportunities, and perpetuate a cycle of disadvantage for lower-caste individuals. By portraying the impact of caste discrimination on characters and society, Adiga highlights the deeply entrenched social issues that continue to affect contemporary India. These illustrations serve as a powerful commentary on the need for social reform and change. "Between the Assassinations" explores the theme of caste discrimination in contemporary India by depicting the role of caste in Indian society, providing vivid illustrations of discrimination in the lives of its characters, and portraying the profound impact of caste-based discrimination on individuals and society as a whole. This theme is a central element of the novel, shedding light on the enduring challenges related to caste in modern India.

## **4. RELIGIOUS TENSIONS IN CONTEMPORARY INDIA**

### **A. Religious Diversity and Tensions in India**

India is known for its rich religious diversity, with Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, Buddhism, and other religions coexisting within the same society. However, this diversity often gives rise to religious tensions, as various religious communities have different beliefs, practices, and cultural norms. Religious tensions in India can manifest in various ways, including conflicts, discrimination, and social divisions. These tensions are not only influenced by “religion in different situations” but also by historical events, political factors, and social dynamics (Raj, 2022).

### **B. Religious Conflicts in the Novel**

In "Between the Assassinations," Arvind Adiga explores religious tensions through the interconnected stories set in Kittur. While the text doesn't explicitly mention religious conflicts in every story, it touches upon themes and incidents that reflect the religious diversity and tensions in contemporary India. One example is the first story, where a Muslim boy named Ziauddin arrives in Kittur. His ethnicity makes him an outsider, highlighting the ethnic and religious divisions that can lead to strife and misunderstandings. It's important to note that Adiga's approach to religious tensions is often subtle, using the experiences and interactions of his characters to indirectly address these issues.

### **C. Effects on Character Relationships and Communities**

Religious tensions can have significant effects on character relationships and communities in the novel. When religious tensions arise, they can strain interpersonal relationships, leading to mistrust and conflict among characters from different religious backgrounds. These tensions can also affect the cohesion of communities. In a diverse society like India, where people of different religions often live side by side, religious tensions can disrupt communal harmony and lead to social fragmentation. Adiga likely portrays how these tensions impact the lives of his characters, their choices, and their sense of belonging within the community. These effects provide insights into the challenges of coexistence in a religiously diverse society. "Between the Assassinations" delves into the theme of religious tensions in contemporary India by acknowledging the religious diversity and tensions in the country, subtly portraying religious conflicts in the lives of its characters, and exploring the effects of these tensions on character relationships and communities. Adiga's approach offers a nuanced view of how religious diversity and tensions shape the social fabric of modern India.

## **5. URBANIZATION AND ITS IMPACT ON SMALL TOWNS**

### **A. The Process of Urbanization in India**

Urbanization refers to the transformation of rural areas into urban centers, typically marked by population migration from rural to urban areas, the growth of cities, and the expansion of urban infrastructure. In India, “social institutions, alienation, extent of urbanization” have been a significant phenomenon driven by factors such as industrialization,

economic opportunities in cities, and improved infrastructure (Kumar, 2014). It often results in the development of small towns into larger urban areas. The process of urbanization in India has both positive and negative consequences, impacting various aspects of society, including the economy, culture, and social dynamics.

### **B. Transformation of Small Towns in the Novel**

In "Between the Assassinations," Arvind Adiga portrays the transformation of the small town of Kittur against the backdrop of urbanization. While the novel is set in Kittur, it offers glimpses into how urbanization affects this once-small town. The text likely explores how urbanization brings changes such as the expansion of the town, the influx of new residents, and the development of infrastructure. It may also touch upon the clash between traditional rural life and the emerging urban lifestyle. Adiga's narrative may showcase the impact of urbanization on the physical, cultural, and social aspects of Kittur, highlighting the complexities of this transformation.

### **C. Economic and Social Consequences**

Urbanization often carries economic and social consequences, which can be both positive and negative. In the context of the novel, these consequences may manifest in various ways. Economically, urbanization can lead to increased economic opportunities, the growth of industries, and improved standards of living for some residents. However, it can also result in income inequality, as some individuals benefit more from urbanization than others. Socially, urbanization can bring about changes in traditional social structures and norms. It can lead to the blending of diverse cultures and the emergence of new social dynamics. Adiga explores how the characters in the novel navigate the "changes brought in by economic liberalization and globalization," these economic and social changes brought about by urbanization, shedding light on the challenges and opportunities it presents (Chinnam, p.25.). "Between the Assassinations" explores into the theme of urbanization and its impact on small towns by examining the process of urbanization in India, portraying the transformation of Kittur as a small town, and exploring the economic and social consequences of this transformation. Adiga's narrative provides insights into the evolving nature of Indian towns as they grapple with the forces of urbanization.

## **6. THEMES OF STRUGGLES, DREAMS, AND ASPIRATIONS**

### **A. Characters' Struggles in Pursuit of a Better Life**

Throughout "Between the Assassinations," the characters face numerous challenges and struggles as they strive for a better life. These struggles can encompass a range of issues, including poverty, discrimination, corruption, and societal pressures. The characters' struggles may be driven by their aspirations to improve their economic and social conditions. They often find themselves in difficult situations and must make choices that reflect their desires for a brighter future. Adiga's narrative likely explores how characters navigate these challenges, depicting their resilience, determination, and the sacrifices they make to pursue their dreams and aspirations mainly the "journey of Indian society of aspirations" (Nikam, 2011. p. 3).

### **B. Dreams and Aspirations Amidst Societal Challenges**

The characters in the novel are not devoid of dreams and aspirations, even in the face of societal challenges. Their dreams may vary widely, from achieving financial stability and success to seeking social justice or personal fulfillment. Despite the obstacles presented in the stories, the characters' dreams and aspirations serve as powerful motivators. These dreams often provide them with a sense of purpose and hope, driving them to overcome adversity. Adiga may portray the characters' dreams as a reflection of the aspirations of many individuals in contemporary India, showcasing the universal human desire for a better life.

### **C. Resilience and Hope in Contemporary India**

The theme of resilience and hope shines through the narratives in "Between the Assassinations." Despite the harsh realities and challenges faced by the characters, they exhibit resilience in their pursuit of a brighter future. The characters' stories likely demonstrate that even in the midst of societal issues such as corruption, discrimination, and poverty, there is a prevailing sense of hope. This hope fuels their determination to overcome adversity and achieve their goals. Adiga's exploration of resilience and hope in contemporary India may reflect the enduring spirit of individuals who continue to strive for a better life, even when faced with formidable obstacles. "Between the Assassinations" explores into the themes of struggles, dreams, and aspirations by depicting the characters' challenges and their relentless

pursuit of a better life. Despite the societal issues they encounter, the characters exhibit resilience and maintain hope, reflecting the enduring spirit of individuals in contemporary India.

## 7. CONCLUSION

The conclusion of "Between the Assassinations" by Aravind Adiga serves as a reflection on the overarching themes and narratives woven throughout the novel. Published in 2008, this collection of interconnected short stories paints a vivid picture of the town of Kittur in southern India during the period between the assassinations of Prime Ministers Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi (1984-1991). The stories are structured like chapters in a guidebook, offering readers a comprehensive exploration of Kittur's multifaceted society. In these stories, Adiga delves into the complexities of contemporary Indian society, addressing issues such as ethnic strife, corruption, poverty, the caste system, societal corruption, urbanization, and the struggles faced by ordinary individuals. Each story offers a glimpse into the lives of various characters who grapple with these challenges, portraying their hopes, dreams, aspirations, and struggles. These narratives are interwoven, creating a larger tapestry that reflects the diverse viewpoints and cultures present in India. Aravind Adiga's contribution to the discourse on contemporary India lies in his ability to give voice to marginalized and often overlooked segments of society. Through his writing, he sheds light on the harsh realities faced by individuals from different walks of life, highlighting their resilience and capacity to hope even in the face of adversity. The collection serves as a mirror reflecting the multifaceted nature of contemporary India, making readers contemplate the intricacies of this diverse and dynamic society. "Between the Assassinations" is not just a collection of stories but a profound exploration of the intricacies of contemporary Indian society. It offers a thought-provoking commentary on the challenges and aspirations of its people, and through its unique narrative structure, it captures the patchwork of viewpoints and cultures that make up the rich tapestry of India. Aravind Adiga's work in this novel contributes significantly to our understanding of modern India and the human experiences that shape it.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

None

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