

Theoretical Conceptions in Aravind Adiga's *Between The Assassinations*

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Abstract

Short story had been an ancient art form and even today it has an effectiveness of its own stand. Aravind Adiga's *Between The Assassinations* is a short story collection which is a landmark of Postcolonial formulations along with the inception of Feminism and Marxism. The entire collection is a reflection of the Postcolonial era with the sour consequences of the imperial rule in India. It also exposes the caste-based society and the intercommunal relations of modern India.

Keywords: Postcolonialism, Feminism, Marxism, casteism, intercommunal relations.

Introduction

The ancient form of short story being the anecdote was popular under the Roman Empire. This form was popularized in England in the Eighteenth century by the letters of Sir Roger de Coverley.

Edgar Allan Poe, who is sometimes called the originator of the short story as a specific genre, was at any rate its first critical theorist. He defined what he called the prose tale as a narrative that can be read at one sitting of from one-half hour to two hours, and that is limited to ‘a certain unique or single effect’ to which every detail is subordinate. (Abrams 164)

The Columbia Encyclopedia explains that the length of a short story usually falls between 2000 to 10000 words. H. G. Wells says that, “it should take from fifteen to fifty minutes to read aloud” (Munir 145). According to Hudson, “it must contain one and only one informing idea and this idea must be worked out to its logical conclusion with absolute single aim” (Munir 147). The short story is a term and form which has captured many readers especially children, young mothers, old people, etc. It has achieved the level of admiration among the readers. Though it is a simple term it is not an easy task to become an appreciable storyteller.

But the author Aravind Adiga is a versatile figure who has acquired the name of a good storyteller. He is one among the present writers who has reached great heights in his career. His renowned short story collection, *Between The Assassinations* was published in 2008. He was remarkable for the Man Booker Prize for *The White Tiger*. His other works are *The Sultan’s Battery* (2008), *Smack* (2008), *Last Christmas in Bandra* (2009), *The Elephant* (2009), *Last Man in Tower* (2011) and *Selection Day* (2016).

Between The Assassinations was the second book of Aravind Adiga, which was written before his first book *The White Tiger*; it was published in India in November 2008 and in the US and UK in 2009. This collection included fourteen interlinked short stories involving a period of seven days with the setting of a place named Kittur on India's South-West coast between Goa and Calicut. Kittur is a small nondescript every town. Adiga presented the ordinary lives of the commoners with the consequences of colonialism representing the period between the assassinations of Indira Gandhi in 1984 and her son Rajiv Gandhi in 1991. The Postcolonial era of seven years between these two assassinations had been reflected by Adiga in *Between The Assassinations* involving a seven days period.

Adiga posed himself as a guide to the town, mapping overlapping lives of Kittur's residents. There were characters namely an illiterate Muslim boy Ziauddin, working at the train station found himself tempted by a terrorist but his patriotism safeguards him from this negative concept; then Soumya, a girl desperate for her father's love travelled across the city to buy drugs for him; Jayamma, the lonely servant-maid sent to the homes of the wealthy; "to feed and fatten some-one else's children" (158); a rich spoiled half-caste student decided to explode a bomb in a school; a sexologist had to find a cure for a young boy who had AIDS; a factory owner was forced to choose between buying into underworld economics and blinding his staff or closing up shop; a childless couple took refuge in a rapidly diminishing forest on the outskirts of the town, feeding a group of intimates who visit only to mock at them; and Murali, the loneliest member of the Marxist-Maoist party of India who had fallen in love with the one young woman, in the poorest part of town, whom he could not afford to marry.

This paper is based on three of the short stories from this collection that is the first story of Ziauddin, the tenth story of Jayamma and the fourteenth story of Murali. Being a Postcolonial literary work *Between The Assassinations* included the theories of Postcolonialism, Feminism and Marxism. Postcolonialism is the study of the legacy of the era

of European and sometimes American direct global domination, which ended in the mid-twentieth century. The residual political, socio-economic and psychological effects of the colonial history were felt as an aftermath of colonialism. Postcolonialism examines the manner in which emerging societies grapple with the challenges of self-determination and how they incorporate or reject the western norms and conventions. Postcolonial criticism usually involves the analysis of literary texts produced in countries and cultures that have come under the control of European colonial powers at some point in the history.

Alternatively, it can refer to the analysis of text written about colonized places by writers hailing from the colonizing culture. The essay *Postcolonial Criticism* (1992) by Homi K. Bhabha reflected how certain cultures represent other cultures, thereby extending their political and social domination in the modern world order.

Postcolonial studies, a type of cultural studies, refer more broadly to the study of cultural groups, practices and discourses including but not limited to literary discourse in the colonized world. The term Postcolonial is usually used to refer to the study of the works written at any point after colonization first occurred in a given country. Sometimes this term is also used for the analysis of texts and other cultural discourses that emerged after the end of the colonial period. Among feminist critics, the postcolonial perspective had inspired an attempt to recover whole cultures of women where the ignored or marginalized women who speak not only from colonized places but also from the colonizing places to which many of them fled.

Postcolonial criticism has been influenced by Marxist thought, by the work of Michel Foucault whose theories about the power of discourses have influenced New Historicism and by deconstruction, has challenged not only hierarchical, binary oppositions such as West or East and North or South but also the notions of superiority with the first term of each opposition.

Adiga's sense of India's pluralistic tradition, his frank portrayal of the realities in India and his deep desire to see the regeneration of India is infected in the views of eminent writers. The term 'Assassination' means the murder of a political or religious leader. The assassination of an important leader almost always changes the course of a nation's destiny. Adiga has neatly segmented his stories into seven days of narration in Kittur in *Between The Assassinations*, representative of the seven years of life that elapses between the assassinations of Indira Gandhi in 1984 and Rajiv Gandhi in 1991. This comes in contrast to *The White Tiger*, which was written in epistolary form.

The first story of Ziauddin, a coolie, is the story of a little boy who rises above his poverty and the insults of the majority community, to turn down the attractive offer of becoming a terrorist. This story intensifies the effects of imperialism in the aftermath of Indian Independence where secularism is under threat and the indoctrination of impressionable minds. 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 communists, whipped up religious passions and sentiments to a new frenzy and the secular fabric of the nation seemed to be in real danger. There was a slackening of the nation's long vigil against communal forces.

Adiga projects the intense longingness of an older generation to find security in caste and of an educated young generation to be free of this repulsive creation of their ancestors. It is made clear that, on the eve of the twenty first century, no religion in India is free from this system. The frustration and discontentment that ripened in that in that period have resulted today in Naxalism and Terrorism. In the above mentioned work, Shankar's act of exploding a bomb sounds so familiar to the age of terror.

Through the Postcolonial lens, Feminism also grabs its place in Adiga's *Between The Assassinations*. Feminism means the advocacy of woman's rights on the grounds of political, social and economic equality to men. Historian and activist Cheris Kramarae once famously remarked that "Feminism is the radical notion that women are human beings" ("Quotes About Feminism"). The word 'Feminism' had been used during the mid-nineteenth century as a synonym for 'Femininity'. It was first used to describe a political movement in 1894, when a British newspaper warned of feminists who had begun to achieve power in the French legislature. Feminist criticism means a criticism proposing equal rights for women in political, economic, social, psychological, personal and aesthetic senses. On the thematic level, the feminist reader should identify the female characters and their concerns; the reader must reject stereotypes and examine woman as a theme in literary works.

Feminism is a collection of movements and ideologies aimed at defining, establishing and defending equal political, economic and social rights for women. This includes seeking to establish equal opportunities for women in education and employment. A feminist is an advocate or supporter of the rights and equality of women. Elaine Showalter described the development of Feminist Theory as having three phases. The first phase was 'Feminist Critique' in which the feminist reader examines the ideologies behind literary phenomena. The second was 'Gyno Criticism' in which the woman is the producer of textual meaning. The last phase was 'Gender Theory' in which the ideological inscription and the literary effects of the sex or gender system were explored.

With reference to the above, the tenth story in *Between The Assassinations* serves the purpose. It consisted of the servants like Jayamma and Shaila, where Jayamma was a Brahmin cook. This story showcased the subtle yet formidable barriers that separate master and servant, rich and poor. Adiga explored the psychology of the master-servant relationship revealing how poverty becomes a great leveller. To unite people of all castes and creeds,

Adiga had shown the concept of servant-maid through the relationship between Jayamma and Shaila. Through the term 'servant', a Brahmin and a lower caste girl become equal. He also insisted on Feminism by presenting Jayamma's oppression and her feelings in the story. Jayamma wanted to show her superiority in front of Shaila and others. She always used to fight with Shaila because she needs to impose her seniority in that house. Jayamma's character revealed how individuals hopelessly get trapped in an absurd caste system that curbs the full flowering of the human beings. In fact, caste itself is a colonial construct. It was the British who solidified the caste system by introducing caste-based census. Imperialists asserted that caste-rivalry was an essential part of the Indian identity and thus justifies colonial rule.

Conclusion

A binding, brilliant and brave mosaic descriptions of Indian life as it was lived in a place called Kittur in *Between The Assassinations*, was with all the humour, sympathy and unflinching candour of *The White Tiger*. *Between The Assassinations* had emphasised the most beloved aspects of Aravind Adiga's writings to brilliant effect and enlarges our understanding of the world we live in today. Indian Feminists have been critical of the class character of Nationalism in the colonial period and of the Postcolonial Indian state. Some Indian feminists are responding with anger or anguish at the perceived failure of the women's movement in taking a more forthright position against state repression.

Women especially, Indian women face a lot of struggles in getting married due to the crisis of dowry. Adiga tried his level best to educate his fellowmen based on this dowry practice by creating a character called Jayamma who was forced to be a servant due to the lack of financial ability to settle down her nuptial by paying the dowry. Even education has enlightened minds, dowry has been considered as a traditional practice and as an act of pride

to the bridegroom's family, in getting a heavy dowry from the bride's family. In ancient times, dowry was a pride to the bride's family and now it becomes a grief to them. A dowry may be an incentive which served as a form of protection for the wife against the possibility of ill treatment by her husband and his family. The expected value of the dowry has risen in some cultures in recent decades. This phenomenon has led to a sharp increase in 'Dowry Deaths' since the 1980s. Statistics in India proved that 90% of such murdered brides were educated, 30% were graduates and 20% were woman who worked outside the home and contributed to the family financially. Dowry killings have been described by woman's rights groups as a problem that is typically among the emergent urban middle class, who aspire to greater material prosperity and the dowry that comes with a wife is viewed as a means of obtaining money and customer goods.

On the grounds of Communism, the character of Murali, his dedication to politics, his loss of liveliness as well as his revelation of his loss was being analysed through *Between The Assassinations*. Communism had its basement on Marxism. Marxism is the movement founded by Karl Marx and Engels which fought for the self-emancipation of the working class, subjecting all forms of dominations on the bourgeoisie, its institutions, its ideology, to theoretical and practical critique. Under Marxism outdated class structures were supposed to be overthrown with force instead of being replaced through patient modification. It held that as capitalism has succeeded feudalism it too will be removed by a dictatorship of the workers or proletariat called Socialism, followed quickly and inevitably by a classless society which governs itself without a governing class or structure. Developed in the nineteenth century, jointly by two lifelong German friends living in London Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels it formed the foundation of communism.

Edmund Wilson is a rare example of a modern critic who has the respect and admiration of academic critics. He is considered as the greatest American critic of his generation. In his work, he attacks the belief that is advocated by some critics that 'good literature can be made from ideological formulas'. For this, he replies that, Marxism by itself can tell us nothing whatever about the goodness or badness of a work of art. A man may be an excellent Marxist, but if he lacks imagination and taste he will be unable to make the choice between a good and an inferior book both of which was ideologically unacceptable.

As per the words of Wilson, Adiga exclaimed that Marxist ideologies seemed to be a waste for the people of the Postcolonial era, who were already plundered by the British and had nothing to secure them, where these ideologies were assumed set of ethics to safeguard the working class people. To impose this point, Adiga mentioned the character of a fifty five year old bachelor, Murali, in the fourteenth story of this collection. He is a communist who explains the finer points of Marx's dialectical materialism and difference between the various communist factions in India to an illiterate woman who has just lost her husband all the while lustfully eyeing her nubile daughter. After having spent his whole life for communism, he felt the lack of liveliness and intended to marry Sulochana in vain.

Adiga designed *Between The Assassinations* as a cross section of characters which makes Kittur a colourful city. Veins of satire and humour flow through all of his stories, hence making the book good for reading. Thus this book stresses on the futilities of the Postcolonial period involving some of the theoretical conceptions; it also showers rays of hope for the people of various castes and creeds to repress the obstacles of life and to make them bloom like the healthy plants of India.

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