



RESEARCH ARTICLE



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ARAVIND ADIGA'S CONTRIBUTION TO INDIAN WRITING IN ENGLISH

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ABSTRACT




The present paper “Aravind Adiga's contribution to Indian writing in English” deals with the analytical study how he deals with hovering multifarious corruption in India, the agony of unprivileged people, the burning issue of the atrocities against the poor. The focus is tried on his art of tackling the complex and urgent subject and bringing the stories to the colours of life which keep the readers find themselves hooked to his lines.

Keywords: *Adolescence, Assassination, Blasphemy, Globalization, Multifarious Corruption, Unprivileged*

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Aravind Adiga was born in Madras (now Chennai) in 1974 to Dr K Madhava Adiga and Usha Adiga, Kann Adiga parents hailing from Mangalore, Karnataka. He grew up in Mangalore and studied at Canara High School, then at St. Aloysius High School where he completed his SSLC in 1990. He secured first rank in the state in SSLC. After immigrating to Sydney, Australia, with his family, he studied at James Ruse Agricultural High School. He studied

English literature at Columbia College, Columbia University in New York, and earned his graduation in 1997. He also studied at Magdalen College, Oxford. Aravind Adiga began his journalistic career as a financial journalist, interning at the *Financial Times*. His review of previous Booker Prize winner Peter Carey's book, *Oscar and Lucinda*, appeared in *The Second Circle*, an online literary review. He was subsequently hired by *Time*, and he remained a



South-Asia correspondent for three years before going freelance. During his freelance period, he wrote *The White Tiger*. He currently lives in Mumbai, India but holds dual Indian and Australian citizenship. He is the fourth India-born author to win the Booker prize, after Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy and Kiran Desai (V. S. Naipaul is of Indian ancestry, but is not India-born). His debut novel, *The White Tiger* won the Man Booker prize for fiction in 2008. Its release was followed by a collection of short stories titled *Between the Assassinations*. His second novel, *The Last Man in the Tower*, was published in 2011. His newest novel, *Selection Day*, was published in 2016.

The main theme of Aravind Adiga's writing is hovering multifarious corruption in India. Aravind Adiga has a finely alert eye and ear. He has been gutsy in tackling a complex and urgent subject. For the first-time Aravind Adiga has created a memorable tale of one bloodthirsty murderer taxi driver's hellish experience in modern India. With close attention to detail, Aravind Adiga brings the story to the colours of life which the readers like the most. The main reason behind anyone who would want to read his books is that they find themselves be hooked as Aravind Adiga asserts in an interview with Book Browse:

I hope, it entertains them and keeps them hooked to the end. I don't read anything because I "have" to: I read what I enjoy reading, and I hope my readers will find this book fun, too.ⁱ

BETWEEN THE ASSASSINATIONS

Between the Assassinations is the second book published by the author though he had written it before *The White Tiger*. It is a collection of stories published by Picador in India in 2008 and in Britain and the United States in 2009. Aravind Adiga writes about various people from Kittur in this book. The author introduces Kittur in the following words:

Kittur is on India's south-western coast, in between Goa and Calicut, and almost equidistant from the two. The Arabian Sea is to its west, and the Kalamangla River to its east. The terrain of the town is hilly; the soil is black and mildly acidic. The monsoons arrive in June,

and besiege the town through September.ⁱⁱ
Aravind Adiga, *Between the Assassinations* 1)

As the title suggests the novel deals with the period between the assassination of Indira Gandhi and Rajeev Gandhi in 1984 and 1991 respectively. Indira Gandhi was brutally killed by her own guards during her tenure as the Prime minister. Rajeev Gandhi fell a prey to a suicide attacker during the election rally. The setting takes place in the small town of Kittur very near to the author's home town of Mangalore. The plot revolves around people from different castes and religions in the country. It was originally modeled on Aravind Adiga's hometown of Mangalore, but was substantially changed to make room for more diverse plots and characters. The book is a collection of small stories. In each story, new set of characters is introduced, though the same places appear again in other stories.

Aravind Adiga writes about the unprivileged people from Kittur with a helpless sympathy for them. There are innocent Pathan Ziauddin, tailor Abbasi, Xerox Ramakrishna, bastard Shankara, assistant Headmaster, D' Mello, assistant editor Gururaj Kamath, beggar Soumya, pauper Jayamma and quack Ratnakara Shetty. All these characters come from the lower strata of the society. They beg, steal, cheat and rob in order to meet their daily minimum needs. Aravind Adiga does not blame these unfortunate beings for their unethical and illegal life style.

Pathan Ziauddin worked in a small shop of Ramanna Shetty because he had nobody else to go to. Though Muslim by birth, he was not spoiled by fanatic Muslims in the beginning. But soon people planted the idea that he came from brave fighters' race in Afghanistan. He lost his cool and began to talk madly. Another person about whom Aravind Adiga writes is the tailor Abbasi. Poor fellow had to bribe people from income tax department, sales tax department, electricity board and Municipal Corporation just to run his small business.

Ramakrishna was called Xerox Ramakrishna because he indulged in Xeroxing and selling of popular books at cheap rates at Deshpriya Hema chandra Rao Park. He was arrested twenty one times for breaking copy right rule because nobody



considered it a serious crime, but it could not last long. Police caught him selling Xerox copies of *Satanic Verses*. It was an act of blasphemy on the part of the fellow as it amounted to hurt the religious feelings of Muslims in India.

There is a story of Shankara, who was born of an illegal sexual contact between an outcaste Hoyaka woman and a high caste Brahmin boy. Nobody bothered to treat him as a respectable human being. Ultimately he exploded a low intensity bomb in school to attract the attention of the society. Wherever Shankara went, children abused him and grown-ups rejected his existence. He had to pay heavy penalty for the mistake someone else had made. The story attacks the religious institutes like church, temple and political institutions like parliament and ministry.

We come across assistant Headmaster D' Mello who was victimized by the Christian school management. He was targeted for bad incidents in school. He died of a massive heart attack, ironically on a Martyr's day. We meet a beggar woman Soumya who begged to rickshawallahs, car owners and bus passengers not for her sake but for the sake of her father. She bought smack with whatever money she collected through begging. Yet he trashed her. This is an account of a woman who sacrificed all her life for her father.

Brahmin Jayamma is the central character of the next story. Jayamma who was the ninth of the eleven children of her parents, was hired to look after the family of a lawyer. Though she was pretty senior, the lawyer never respected her due to her grumbling nature.

A close look at the stories in this book brings to our notice Aravind Adiga's concern for the derelict section of the society. He has all the sympathy for the underdogs of the society. According to him, underprivileged people misbehave out of compulsion and not out of fashion. He sometimes justifies the untoward behaviour of such character.

The Title of the book has historical significance as it points to the time of assassination of Mrs. Indira Gandhi on 31 October 1984 and the assassination of Rajeev Gandhi on 21 May 1991.

Kittur is the miniature India. Though the events and characters in these stories come from Kittur, they are representative in nature and character. Social and political atmosphere during the seven years has been marked by upheavals. The outcastes, the villagers and poverty stricken multitude had been waiting for their salvation. But nothing was done for their uplift. Their patience ended. The only way left open to them was to beg, steal, rob and break barriers. Aravind Adiga presents the picture of all such people in this book.

LAST MAN IN TOWER

Last Man in Tower is the second novel by Aravind Adiga published in 2011. The novel takes up a burning issue of the mafia builders in cosmopolitan city like Mumbai. Globalization of the land has opened up the floodgates of opportunities in India. It also has given rise to corrupt practices by the people with money and muscle. It tells the story of a struggle of a retired schoolteacher named Yogesh A. Murthy, who is affectionately known as Masterji.

This novel is set in a small cooperative housing society in Mumbai which is generally occupied by the middle class people. The occupants support each other in their crises and hardships. A strong bond exists between them. The situation takes a tragic turn when a builder approaches them with a lucrative offer. A prominent builder offers to buy out the entire apartment block. All of the occupants agree, except for Masterji. This creates tension for the builder and the other residents. The years of hard built trust and friendship go a waste in a span of few days. The novel portrays the mindset of the volatile middle class and their dreams. Masterji is the only person to resist the offer. His attempts to convince the people are explained in details in the novel.

Five storied housing society building was inhabited by middle class people from different walks of life. Timber merchant, Surresh Nappal, hardware specialist, Abichandani, estate broker, Ramesh Ajawani, retired school teacher Yogesh A. Murthy, chemist George Lobo, insurance agent Narayan Swami, shopkeeper Sandip Ganguly lived together happily, as if they belonged to one family. But the amiable and peaceful life of all the residents came to



an end when the real estate developer Dharmen Shah spread his tentacles on them.

Aravind Adiga skillfully portrays the human nature in this novel. Cooperation, affection, tolerance, compassion, hatred, treachery all find their representation in the novel. Aravind Adiga uses the word "pucca" initially not only to describe the construction of the housing complex but also to suggest the nature of residents' relationship. But people collapse in the face of money, pressure and rowdiness.

Dharmen Shah passes an offer to all the dwellers:

*"It been noted that the tow Societies consist of apartments, both one-bedroom and two-bedroom, ranging in size from 450square feet to 950 square feet, and of an average size of 790 square feet; also that the prevailing rate in Vakola is of the range of 8,000 to 12,000 a square foot, which may even be lower in the case of a building of the age and condition of Vishram Society, a generous offer is made to all owners at the uniform rate of 19,000 a square foot."*ⁱⁱⁱ (Aravind Adiga *Last Man in Tower* 79)

People who had never seen thousands of rupees in their life, succumbed to the proposal. Though some of them suspected the offer and smelt a rat in entire transaction, gradually fell prey to it. The developer Shah used all his tricks to persuade Masterji to accept the proposal. He used all his weight in government to threaten Masterji out of the building. But nothing seemed to work. Ultimately the news appeared in Mumbai Sun:

"Mr Yogesh Murthy, a retired teacher at the famous St Catherine's School in the neighborhood, allegedly committed suicide last night from the rooftop of 'Vishram' Society in Vakola, Santa Cruz (E)... While there is no suspicion of foul play in the matter, the Santa Cruz police said they are not ruling out any possibility at this stage. An investigation is underway." (Aravind Adiga *Last Man in Tower* 395)

As it happens in many cases his death would be left unwept. Mr. Shah may build a room to memorize him.

The novel is divided in nine 'Books' and dates from 11 May to 23 December of the same calendar year. Each Book takes the novel one step ahead in cruelty. Shah gave to understand the residents that his proposal was meant for the social cause, eradication of slum and swamp. Gradually his evil plans came to the fore. He bought people, purchased politicians, managed officers and paid goons. He never gave up. If one plan failed, he would be ready with another more dangerous plan.

"At once Ibrahim Kudwa lifted the hammer he had brought from the Secretary's office, lunged forward, and hit Masterji on the crown of his head who, more from surprise than anything else, fell back into his chair with such force that it toppled over and his head landed hard on the floor. Masterji lay there like that, unable to move, though he saw things with clarity." (Aravind Adiga *Last Man in Tower* 388)

The novel demonstrates that one man cannot fight against the entire corrupt system. Those who sympathized with Masterji in the beginning called him mad afterwards. Those who saluted his valor in private, criticized him in public. There was nobody to stand by him in his hour of difficulty. He remained the last man in tower.

In spite of its length, the novel seems mere documentation of events in the life of Mumbai people. If we read newspapers like Times of India and Indian Express, we come across dozens of cases like this. Globalization brought money to India. Politicians, builders, policy makers and executives grouped together with a single purpose of making money. They exploit poor labour; victimize weak ones under the pseudo name of nation building. Dharmen Shah painted rosy picture of making Mumbai Shanghai before the people of Vishram Cooperative housing society. In reality, the hidden agenda was to make money.

Aravind Adiga presented stark reality of modern India without passing value judgment in *The White Tiger* as well as *Last Man in Tower*. He does not punish wrong doers. On the contrary they are victorious. Balram became international businessman by butchering Ashok. Shah became multi-millionaire



by throwing people out of their residences. Aravind Adiga lets criminals go scot-free only to show what happens in the real life situation as the novels paint the true picture of modern India.

SELECTION DAY

Like its predecessors, Aravind Adiga's third novel *Selection Day*, is a moving, worrying and fascinating story of ambition and its discontents in contemporary urban India. *Selection Day* in many ways is a very different novel but it tilts to the territory of Aravind Adiga's Booker winner debut, *The White Tiger*. Like Balram Halwai, the Kumars, the father and two sons at the heart of *Selection Day*, are driven by liberalisation's most seductive promise – social mobility. The novel, as the title suggests is about the event when judges choose Mumbai's next cricket stars.

Selection Day presents the story of the Kumars, a family living in Mumbai, India. Its main character is Manjunath "Manju" Kumar, the younger of two brothers. His brother Radha is about one year older, and their father, Mohandas "Mohan" Kumar, has been training them as cricket players from a very young age. The vehicle of their aspirations is cricket; more specifically, batting. Mohan's ambitions seem to fly fast like the ball when it flies for a six. Having been moved by his son Radha's ability to hit a cricket ball Mohan Kumar minds to move his family from rural Karnataka to Mumbai. The Kumars are very poor, and they moved to Mumbai from a village in Western Ghats. Not long after moving to Mumbai, Mohan's wife (Manju and Radha's mother) left the family and went off on her own. The family was dipped in sorrow, but Mohan soon decided to focus his energies on training his sons to be professional cricket players with the hope that they may be raised out of poverty. Mohan prays to the Hindu deity Subramanya, asking for Radha and Manju to become *the number one and number two batsmen in the world*^v (Aravind Adiga, *Selection Day*) respectively. When the boys are in their early teens, they attract the attention of a man called Tommy Sir, who is a talent scout for the Mumbai Cricket association. He helps negotiate a sponsorship deal for them with a wealthy man named Anand Mehta the U.S.-returned son of a rich stockbroker. Mehta agrees to support

the Kumars financially in exchange for a percentage of Radha and Manju's future cricket earnings if they become professionals. For Rs. 5,000 a month, and a one-time loan, Mehta purchases the right to one-third of the boys' earnings for life. There Mohan Kumar eventually also finds unfulfilling work as a chutney-seller. His only cherished aim, however, is turning his sons into the two best batsmen in the world. He studies, and develops theories – alternately ingenious and eccentric – on every aspect of the mental, technical, and physical education of cricketers.

Much more than just a cricket book, *Selection Day* is one of the finest novels written about the game, combining smart judgements with accounts of individual innings marked by a modest lyricism. Aravind Adiga may be the first novelist to truly capture the post-1983 phenomenon of cricket as a kind of energy for social mobility. Cricket writing, both in fiction and otherwise, is often charged or marred by sentimentality; *Selection Day* is an unromantic book, because to love the game is a luxury denied to those like the Kumar brothers, who play it not out of choice but necessity.

Aravind Adiga has often been compared, most notably with *The White Tiger* and *Last Man in Tower*, to Charles Dickens, but *Selection Day* is evocative of a very different Victorian novelist: Thomas Hardy. The plot's forward movement is deterministic, its characters incarcerated for life by their circumstances. This is most true of the book's dramatic centrepiece, the passionate, homo-erotic friendship between Manju and his wealthy teammate Javed Ansari. Every development in this relationship is telegraphed, there is never any doubt of its tragic resolution; yet it loses none of its emotional force. There are *three principal dangers on their path to glory: premature shaving, pornography, and car driving*. Mohan's ambitions are shattered when he catches Radha with a girl in the house. There also occurs a physical dispute between Mohan and his sons, resultant Mohan finds himself in hospital with a broken leg. Also, Manju secretly wishes to be a forensic scientist, and he forms a friendship with Javed Ansari, who encourages Manju's non-cricket interests.



Selection Day is written at an angle to conventional realism; beyond any illusion the reader takes a glimpse of the literary world not through the eyes of the characters but through the author's eyes; so what on the nose emerges most powerfully, as with Hardy, is the author's own personality: the force of his humanity and his social and political vision.

In the end, Manju is selected to play cricket professionally, and Radha is not. Later Manju is hired as a talent scout for the Mumbai Cricket Association. Being unemployed Radha is likely receiving financial support from Manju. Neither Radha nor Manju keep in close contact with their father. By this time, Javed has become a swindle man and a failing actor, and Tommy Sir has died of a stroke not long after Manju's selection day. But Aravind Adiga's story is not about the path to glory in cricket as much as it is about the paths closed off by it. Manju is held like a pendulum hanging between the labyrinthine financial and psychological entrapments of both youth-league cricket and society at large.

To Aravind Adiga success in sport is the most temporary state and never is without a personal cost. Cricket in India has a checkered history. Cricket is money in India. Cricket is, of course, a wonderful way of writing about shattered dreams – both personal and national. As such, it isn't necessary to know the game to appreciate this finely told, often moving and intelligent novel. Cricket here represents what is loved in India, and yet is being corrupted by the changes within the nation. As Tommy Sir, the cricket coach who yearns to discover the next Bradman or Sobers, remarks: *How did this thing, our shield and chivalry, our Roncesvalles and Excalibur, go over to the other side, and become part of the great nastiness?* That Tommy Sir himself is part of the great nastiness, introducing the teenage brothers and their father to a man who bankrolls them during their adolescence in return for a cut of all future sponsorship deals, only makes the question more poignant.

But the great meanness of cricket isn't only to do with money and corruption. Aravind Adiga's novel takes in class, religion and sexuality – all issues that disrupt the dream of a sport that cares for nothing but talent and temperament. Aravind Adiga

as a novelist has grown in lofty art to talk about all matters through his characters and their compelling stories. Each sentence sputter and glisten like a match with life. Aravind Adiga plunges in his characters' inner voices with peculiar accuracy to kindle the thoughts, fascinations, signs, and icons with his laser-like views.

i

https://www.bookbrowse.com/author_interviews/full/index.cfm/author_number/1552/

author/aravind-Aravind Adiga #interview

ii Aravind Adiga *Between the Assassinations* (Atlantic Books, 2010) 01.

iii Aravind Adiga *Last Man in Tower* (New Delhi: Atlantic Books, 2011)79.

iv Aravind Adiga *Selection Day* (Noida: Harper Collins, 2016)