

REFLECTION OF INDIAN ECONOMY IN *BETWEEN THE ASSASSINATIONS* (2008) BY ARAVIND ADIGA

Pareshgiri Dhanarajgiri Gauswami

Assistant Teacher, Higher Secondary , Girls High School – Talaja, Dist:Bhavnagar, Gujarat
pareshgauswami@gmail.com

Abstract

The present research paper will deal with the economic aspects of the society of India portrayed in the novel *Between the Assassinations* of Aravind Adiga. The primary topic of social economics is the interaction of social processes and economic activities within a community. Social economics may seek to explain how a certain social group or socioeconomic class acts within a community, including their purchasing habits. A socioeconomic class is a group of people who have similar traits. Social and economic position, degree of education, present occupation, and ethnic origin or ancestry are examples of these qualities. This paper will explore the economics aspects through the views of Aravind Adiga which are highlighted in his novel *Between the Assassinations* (2008). The present paper will also deal with those paper.

Key Words: *Between the Assassinations*, Aravind Adiga, Society, Economics, Indian economy
the general impression, was as great as that of any other province of British India.



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According to Morihei Ueshiba in his *The Art of Peace*, “Economy is the basis of society. When the economy is stable, society develops. The ideal economy combines the spiritual and the material, and the best commodities to trade in are sincerity and love” (11). This well-known quotation helps us to understand the significance of the economy to any civilization. Any society's economics will determine how it develops. Although not the main factor in determining how a society develops, the economy is a necessary foundation for every civilization's growth and success. Economic considerations must be studied when it comes to India's growth. In his books *Between the Assassinations* (2008), Aravind Adiga has examined some of the most important economic concerns.

“Bidis: The Hand-Rolled Cigarettes That Keep More Than Four Million Indians Employed...More than four million Indians make bidi cigarettes for a living, some 90 per cent of them in homes or small workshops” (Lasseter). On page 19 of the text *Between the Assassinations*, the same proof of the Indian economy is presented. Adiga says here, “A significant chunk of Kittur’s economy consists of the manufacture of hand-rolled beedis” (19). India is represented in the present instance by Kittur. It serves as a mirror that reflects both Indian society and Kittur society. "Arriving in Kitture" is the title of the first chapter, and Adiga writes,

Kittur is on India's south-western coast, between Goa and Calicut, and almost equidistant from the two. It is bounded by the Arabian Sea to the west, and by the Kalliamma river to the south and 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. The following three months are dry and cool and are the best time to visit Kittur. Given the town's richness of history and scenic beauty, and diversity of religion, race, and language, a minimum stay of a week is recommended. (1)

Kittur is used here as a metaphor for India. It is a reflection of India even if it is a utopian world. In this book, Kittur provides a clear view of Indian geography, community, culture, economy, politics, society, and religion. The inhabitants of Kittur have a mentality that is similar to the mob mentality of India. Similar to how Lasseter alludes to it, Kittur's economy is a mirror of India's economy.

A few societal ills in India are discussed in *Between the Assassinations*. Corruptness is one of them. In India, corruption is a serious issue. It prevents India from progressing. Between the Assassinations' second chapter focuses a lot on corruption. The second chapter's main character is Abbasi, the proprietor of a business that produces ready-made shirts. He must pay several authorities in order to restart his plant during the period when it is shut down.

The official smiled ironically. Another of those Muslims who drink whisky and mention Allah in every other sentence.

He put the shirt back in its box and tucked it under his arm. 'What made you reopen the factory, then?'

Abbasi bunched his fingers and jabbed them into his mouth. 'A man has to eat, sahib.' (Adiga 23)

One of the best whiskies is supplied by Abbasi, the box of a shirt under the arm of one of the authorities is evidence of a bribe, and Adiga satirically explains bribery and corruption on page 24 of the book:

Corruption. There is no end to it in this country. In the past four months, since he had decided to reopen his shirt factory, he had had to pay off:

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; a land tax official of the Kittur City Corporation; a sanitary inspector from the Karnataka State Health Board; a health inspector from the Karnataka State Sanitation Board; a delegation of the All India Small Factory Workers' Union; delegations of the Kittur Congress party, the Kittur BJP, the Kittur Communist Party, and the Kittur Muslim League. (24)

These are some Kittur-related offices that also serve as representations of Indian offices. Abbasi is a representation of a typical small business owner who battles corruption, one of India's worst ills. He must accept various forms of bribes in order to quickly restart his factory. He must navigate illicit territory even though his firm is legitimate. In Kittur, every single government agency is corrupt. This is the portrayal of India in *Between the Assassinations*. A technique for assessing corruption in more than 100 nations worldwide is the corruption Perception Index. Transparency International specifically addresses it. India was on 84th rank and behind 83 countries in this Index in 2008. In 2019, India is on the 80th rank. Though the transformation in the case of corruption is progressive, it is not that much quicker.

Figure 3.1 is a screenshot of a webpage from Transparency International's official website that justifies the facts shown above. This image depicts India's current ranking but does not explain the prior rankings. Previous reports are freely accessible on the official website. Furthermore, this concept is linked to the Economics of Corruption.

Corruption is mentioned several times in the novel, however there is another side of the Indian economy mentioned in the same chapter, and that is jeopardising one's life in order to earn a livelihood. Many workers are employed in hazardous professions that endanger their lives. Such workers put their own lives in peril in order to earn a living. They must undertake such a feat in order to survive. Every day, millions of accidents occur in India as a result of this



Figure 3.1 (screenshot of CPI) India)

serious issue. On October 23, 2016, The Economic Times published a report from Alang shipyard that, “At Alang shipbreaking yard, worker safety remains a dusty dream” (Goyal). This report also includes “In 2014, 13 workers died in accidents in Alang shipyards” (Goyal). This is only one example of the deplorable working conditions of many Indians. All Indian employment is not related with hazardous labour. It cannot, however, be ignored because the Indian economy is intertwined with such perilous occupations. This chapter also addresses the

same topic. Local women who embroider shirts in Abbasi's factory are forced to labour underground. Furthermore, the labour is hazardous to their eyes, and they will almost certainly lose their sight if they continue with the stitching. They are aware of the harsh reality, yet they are powerless since they must work for a living.

The optometrist had been clear about that; the kind of detailed stitchwork needed for the shirts scarred the women's retinas. He had used his fingers to show Abbasi how thick the scars were. No amount of improved lighting would reduce the impact on the retinas. Human eyes were not meant to stare for hours at designs this intricate. Two women had already gone blind; that was why he had shut down the factory. When he reopened, all his old workers came back at once. They knew their fate; but there was no other work to be had. (Adiga 34)

The same matter was discussed as PIL in the High Court of Gujarat which is reported in *The Economic Times* "Gujarat: High Court seeks Centre's reply to PIL on labourers' safety at Alang" The report also claims that,

Thousands of labourers live in slums close to Alang ship-breaking yard, with little or no sanitation facility. Workers die or sustain severe injuries owing to explosions, fire, falling steel plates, gas leakage, inadequate safety measures or due to suffocation ("Gujarat: High")

This petition was submitted for the employees of Alang, but no similar plea was filed for the workers of Kittur in the novel. Through Adiga's eyes, this is the brutal reality of Indian labourers.

Any country has a black market and replica items. When it is mentioned in the context of India, it is close to 20% to 30% in practically all areas. According to a study by The Economic Times, where this problem is examined extensively with all trustworthy evidence, "daily use products such as food, beverages, medicine, auto parts, beauty products, and software. Almost a third of each of these categories is plagued with fakes, giving market leaders — always soft targets for counterfeiters — sleepless nights" (Bhatt).

According to FICCI CASCADE (Committee Against Smuggling and Counterfeiting Activities Destroying the Economy) report released in 2015, the country lost about Rs 6,000 crore to the illicit market of FMCG personal items. According to the study, 31.6 percent of the FMCG personal goods industry is a grey market. The packaged products industry has a rate of 21.7%. This means that roughly one-fifth of all packaged foods you buy may be tainted, posing a serious risk to your health and safety. According to a Nielsen and ACMA investigation, counterfeit vehicle components are responsible for 20% of traffic accidents in India (Automotive Component Manufacturing Association Of India). The automobile aftermarket is worth Rs 40,000 crore, according to the same study. The immeasurable cost of human life is one of the losses to the government exchequer (Rs 2,700 crore per year).

According to Zaheer Khan, chairman of the EIPR (Enforcers of Intellectual Property Rights), an anti-piracy wing that specialises in raids to expose illicit rackets, India is one of the top marketplaces for drug counterfeiting. Every day, Khan and his team carry out two to three raids around the country. They uncovered life-saving drugs being made in a cement mixer in one of them. The level of hygiene was appalling. The drug included 100 times the recommended quantity of salt, which was later revealed. According to Khan, such incidents are widespread in newborn items as well.

Be it alcoholic or non-alcoholic, the death toll due to fake products in both categories is alarming. "About a decade ago, when returnable glass bottles used to be the primary package for the beverage industry, it was grappling with the manufacture and sale of spurious products. It's relatively easy to fill and seal fake beverages in glass bottles," says Arvind Varma, secretary general of IBA (Indian Beverage Association). With consumer preference shifting to PET packs (they are now 65% of the market), the issue is more of counterfeit rather than spurious products, he adds. (Bhatt)

Between the Assassinations' chapter "Day One Afternoon: THE BUNDER" depicts such a black-market and bogus product market in India. A business with the sign "WE CHANGE PAKISTANI MONEY AND CURRENCY" (Adiga 27) in Kittur's bunder district operates without a licence or authority, giving the impression of a black market. Mehmood, a mafia sort of guy, offers Johnnie Walker whisky at a black-market price that is difficult to get in many Indian wine shops. The chapter later discloses that the product in the bottle is a duplicate. The Johnnie Walker label is genuine, however the whisky within is cheap Indian whisky. Bunder's collage depicts a large black market. Any foreign alcoholic beverage can be found there, but only with original labelling and duplicate items. The unpleasant fact of India's economy is that a small fraction of its GDP is dependent on this market.

The third chapter of *Between the Assassinations* "Day Two (Morning): LIGHTHOUSE HILL" talks about classes of society. Adiga points out the division of Indian society through their economic classes through sarcasm. He writes in the introduction of the chapter that, After a lunch of prawn curry and rice at the Bunder, you may want to visit the Lighthouse Hill and its vicinity. The famous lighthouse, built by the Portuguese and renovated by the British, no longer in use. An old guard in a blue uniform sits at the foot of the lighthouse. If visitors are poorly dressed, or speak to him in Tulu or Kannada, he will say: "Can't you see it's closed? If visitors are well-dressed or speak English, he will say: "Welcome. He will take them into the lighthouse and up the spiral staircase to the top, which affords a spectacular view of the Arabian Sea. In recent years, the Corporation has begun running a reading room inside the lighthouse, the collection includes Father Basil d'Essa, S.J. Short History of Kittur. The Deshpremi Hemachandra Rao Park around the lighthouse is named in honour of the freedom-fighter who hung a Congress tricolour from the lighthouse during British rule.(Adiga 36)

The guard's attitude of persons from varied economic backgrounds is yet another ground reality in India. Locals who are not dressed appropriately are not welcomed by the guard, and the location is closed to them. On the other hand, well-dressed English-speaking guests are cordially greeted and appropriately directed by him. This demonstrates the distinction between the high and lower classes, as well as the treatment they get.

Piracy is once again a significant portfolio for the Indian economy. "Indian Government is focusing on this serious issue and planning to bring more provisions under laws against the piracy in academia, with punishment like deregistration, warning, fines" (Begum and Sharma 262). Though it is a bad component of the economy, it exists in India and a certain segment of the population is dependent on it. In the novel, the above-mentioned chapter shows the same incident.

The books are photocopied, or sometimes printed, at an old printing press in Salt Market Village. Xerox loves being around the machinery. He strokes the photocopier; he adores the machine, the way it flashes like lightning as it works, the way it whirrs and hums. He cannot read English, but he knows that English words have power, and that English books have aura. He looks at the image of Adolf Hitler on the cover of *Mein Kampf* and he feels his power. He looks at the face of Kahlil Gibran, poetic and mysterious, and he feels the mystery and poetry. He looks at the face of Lee Iacocca, relaxed with his hands behind his head, and he feels relaxed. That's why he once told Inspector Ramesh: 'I have no wish to make any trouble for you or for the publishers, sir; I just love books: I love making them, holding them, and selling them. My father took out shit for a living, sir: he couldn't even read or write. He'd be so proud if he could see that I make my living from books.' (Adiga 39)

This description conveys the ferocity of piracy. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that India's pirate market is thriving.

Thus, *Between the Assassinations* explores a miniature monetary report on Indian economics. It inspects small economic problems which are exists in the book as well as in India. Aravind Adiga tries to target such issues. This paper thus highlights those issues and ignites to solve them.

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