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Ethnocentrism in Aravind Adiga's *Between the Assassinations*

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ABSTRACT: This study examines Aravind Adiga's *Between the Assassinations* with an emphasis on the interpretation of ethnocentrism. The narratives occur in the make-believe South Indian town of Kittur, during the politically unstable decennium between the assassinations of Indira Gandhi's (1984) and Rajiv Gandhi's (1991). The writer takes the reader on a thorough journey through the social interactions of India's rural area through these works. In this paper, the concept of ethnocentrism is described as the main theme in the collection of stories by considering thematic analysis and intensive reading. Ethnocentrism is defined as the practice of communities and individuals evaluating others based on their own culture, language, class, religion, or region, which they believe to be superior. These characteristics are displayed by the characters in *Between the Assassinations* as instances of linguistic prejudice, religious othering, class-based contemptuousness, cultural superiority, and internalized colonial hierarchies. These outlooks not only centralize the moral optics that justify exploitation, but they also sustain social exclusion and violence. The discussion of Adiga's corrective strategies, such as satire, irony, and narrative focalization, which permit the reader to see through and disprove ethnocentric assumptions, comes at end of the paper.

KEYWORDS: Ethnocentrism, Indian Culture, Identity Crisis, Class, Caste, Religion, Bureaucracy

I. INTRODUCTION

The work of Aravind Adiga '*Between the Assassinations*', serves as a judge and narrator of the common life in a small Indian town. On the one hand, it could be interpreted as a collection of related stories with relegation and the immorality of the protagonists' actions as the central theme. On the other hand, it also provides insight into the notion that people who live in close proximity to one another protect cultural boundaries. The main aim of ethnocentrism, i.e. the belief of being the most superior and the important ones among the members of one's cultural group alone, constitutes a key to comprehension of the book because it highlights the social practices that justify violence, exclusion, and discrimination in the name of the norm. The concept of ethnocentrism is ingrained in the behavior of characters and the functioning of various organizations throughout the work. This can result in social hierarchies that are both local (town versus villager, Brahmin versus non-Brahmin) and, on the one hand, global (postcolonial modernity vs. native tradition).

Secondly, it highlights a number of prevalent ethnocentrisms that were present in the collection, such as caste and class prejudices, linguistic and regional chauvinism, religious intolerance, and the preference for the countryside over the city in urban modernity. In addition, it provides in-depth images of the events that influenced Adiga to intermingle both structural and personal bias in his stories. The paper concludes by acknowledging additional potential hypotheses in this area while examining how Adiga's storytelling techniques both reveal and challenge the biased ethnocentric presumptions.

Ethnocentrism: Conceptual Framework

In social theory, ethnocentrism has two distinct personalities: it is an organizing principle and a cognitive bias. It causes people to view other cultures through the lens of their own norms and values, which is a cognitive bias. As a socially guiding principle, it supports the various types of exclusion that derive from the drawing of the lines between those who belong and those who are deserving. In postcolonial situations, ethnocentrism often has various facets of local hierarchies like caste, class, and region that coexist with the prestige of the colonial cultures and languages. The consequence is a composite hierarchy where metropolitan manners, English fluency, and being close to urban modernity are symbols of being superior.

The study explores the concept of ethnocentrism represented in five interconnected modalities: 1. linguistic elitism, wherein English or standardized language forms are prioritized over local dialects; 2. class-based ethical judgment; (3) community or caste based exclusion; (4) religious out casting; and (5) the perseverance of colonizer attitudes within the



colonized populations. The different lifestyles intersect not only to deepen the sufferings of the people but also to give the narrators the means to present inequality as a cultural phenomenon different from that which comes from structural injustice.

II. METHODOLOGY

This present study takes up a thorough investigation and content analysis. Thematic extracts were selected for illustrations. The purpose is to identify recurring themes of ethnocentric thinking in the texts, rather than to provide a comprehensive listing of all occurrences. The focus moves from the narrators' perspective, the choice of language, and the sections of the text where the characters' thoughts on the considered issue are explicitly expressed. Besides, the research also investigates how the sarcastic nature and ethical ambivalence of Adiga's writing operate as disruptions to the reader's response.

Kittur as a Manifestation of Ethnocentrism

The fictional city of Kittur serves as a manifestation of national and local forms of ethnocentrism through its characters. Initially, It appears to be a typical suburban area; however, underlying factors such as taste, language, religion, and class hierarchies notably shape social dynamics. The different institutions of town such as the school, local press, marketplace, and police station, are places where cultural values are not only performed but also controlled. The narrative often restates the town's tendency to judge individuals based on their alignment with cosmopolitan standards as a most important criterion. Those who speak English fluently, are educated in the Western manner, and keep the connection with the urban centers are the ones who are usually the object of admiration or envy.

On the contrary, if people lack these traits they will be mocked or considered as less progressive. The hierarchy of appearance goes beyond just controlling people's access to jobs, respect, and social mobility. Thus, ethnocentrism in Kittur manifests in both symbolic and material forms.

III. ETHNOCENTRISM IN THE STORIES

Linguistic exclusiveness and Language as Status

In Adiga's universe, a person's social worth is largely determined by their language. Characters who emulate metropolitan mannerisms or speak English fluently receive different social responses than those who use local dialects. One of the indicators of moral and intellectual superiority is the ability to perform language well. The collection frequently demonstrates how a person's ability to speak a language becomes a license to enter society and is in some way accepted as legitimate, while a lack of language skills becomes a source of disdain.

Adiga illustrates the prevalence of lexical snobbery in the language as well as the idea that linguistic hierarchies are essential for social mobility and legal judgment. People who are not fluent in English find their voices ignored in situations where employers or law enforcement rely on evidence or communications conducted in English or in official registers. As a result, language is a component of cultural capital that represents the social stratification pattern.

Moralism Based on Class

Ethnocentrism in Kittur is significantly stratified by class. The middle and upper classes in the town claim that they are the primary agents of civility and progress. They critique the poor not only for their material conditions but also for perceived cultural deficiencies attributed to them. Condemnations of the culture and behavior of impoverished individuals obscure the structural causes of poverty, transforming social disparities into moral deficiencies.

This moralism is illustrated by the animosity expressed by shopkeepers, school teachers, and minor bureaucrats towards individuals, whom they perceive as 'others' in their own community. The impoverished are frequently depicted using similar figurative devices that frame their suffering as a natural condition, with any goodwill extended to them often characterized as patronizing rather than transformative. Thus, ethnocentrism works as a moral language which validates the unequal treatment of people.

Religious and Communal Othering

Firstly, in *Between the Assassinations*, religious diversity is consistently disregarded to provoke social exclusion and violence. Among others, communal suspicion and the fear of 'contamination' by the 'other' are the most prevalent motifs. One of these concerns of communal identity runs through the plots of Adiga's narrative: gossip, rumors, and moralizing discourses which portray minority communities as vulnerable to being incorrect or dangerous.



These stories illustrate the direct (open animosity, mistrust) and indirect (exclusion from social networks, unfair treatment by officials) forms of communal hostility. However, Adiga raises the possibility that local power dynamics and the struggle for resource control, rather than religious discrepancy, are what sustain communal conflicts. Therefore, religion becomes a symbol of status struggle when ethnocentrism combines religious identity with social competition.

Caste and Ritual Hierarchies

Although caste is not a major theme in *Between the Assassinations*, caste-based differences nevertheless have an impact on the characters' day-to-day lives. The characters' social interactions appear to clearly embody the ideas of ritual purity, social distance, and occupational stigma. The way that the 'untouchability' of some bodies or occupations, despite being absent, clearly affects the characters' treatment and perception in this case is an example of ethnocentrism.

Adiga frequently highlights the dehumanization that members of lower castes experience, including both overt forms of discrimination and subtle microaggressions that occur on a daily basis. Such occurrences reveal how caste-based and closely tied to one's own group coexistence (caste-inflected ethnocentrism) people naturally perceive social stratification as a normal occurrence happening under the guise of cultural custom.

Colonial Remnants and Ambitious Copying

In this collection, the desire for metropolitan, primarily Anglophone, examples is a common manifestation of postcolonial ethnocentrism. The preference for English-language instruction, British etiquette, and Western consumer goods are all remnants of colonialism. This kind of aspiration is conflicting; it can be a means of advancing, but it can also be used to renew the claim that strength is most in line with colonial standards.

Local characters can sometimes become so popular that they can eliminate local disdain, but their imitation also recreates dislocation and shows that local identities are less valuable. According to Adiga's skillful portrayal, the ethnocentric attitude of the transfer of belief from local superiority to foreign models as the new standards is one of the traits of coloniality processed within.

IV. INSTANCES OF ETHNOCENTRIC ENCOUNTER

The Marketplace and the change of Taste

Adiga frequently recounts stories about intergenerational conflict. The town's old people, who prefer traditional life style and regional cuisine, are viewed with disdain by young people who are more likely to follow city trends and tastes. The marketplace becomes a place where the conflict between opposing values is fought not with words but with symbols; here taste serves as a gauge of cultural value. Since it suggests a universal hierarchy of taste with metropolitan styles at the top, the younger generation's contempt for the older one is an example of their ethnocentrism.

Through the emptiness of style without structural resources, Adiga's storytelling subtly astounds the reader with how little such hatred is conveyed in the narrative. The author is able to dismantle the young characters because their pretenses hide the fact that they are not strong and stable but rather economically unstable.

Bureaucracy and Language Barriers

Another story describes a poor petitioner's ineffective interactions with local authorities. The situation is emphasized by the contrasting languages used by the petitioner and the clerk, specifically the petitioner's broken vernacular and the clerk's polished bureaucratic language. The clerk's impatience and the petitioner's embarrassment demonstrate the procedural functioning of linguistic elitism: language proficiency filters access to justice and welfare. Here, ethnocentrism encompasses both the institutionalized gatekeeping and an attitude.

Adiga creates an experience of the petitioner's exclusion that allows the reader to feel the petitioner's suffering. By placing the reader in the shoes of the marginalized voice, focalization in the text challenges the normative position of the clerk.

Religious Suspicion, Rumor, and Gossip

The third instance illustrates how rumors are used to discriminate and exclude a minority family from their focus. Quiet conversations and hints from neighbors gradually lead to family separation, not because of confirmed wrongdoing but rather because of ingrained fears in the community. Adiga's writing demonstrates how moral judgments are formed from small-town rumors, which is an example of how communal ethnocentrism operates.



The reason the neighbors' suspicions are not taken as fact but are instead treated as experts who care more about the moral cohesion of their group than the veracity of the accusations is because the story is not close to their moralizing but rather is an objective observer of the circumstances.

Narrative Techniques: Irony, Satire, and Focalization

The primary means by which ethnocentrism is demonstrated and critiqued is through Adiga's narrative style. The most common strategies are as follows.

Irony and satire: Adiga parodies the ethnocentric pretenses through exaggerated characters' self-importance and exposing the discrepancy between their words and their reality.

Focalization: Adiga reveals how the logics of ethnocentrism have been ingrained in the various strata of society and how they appear from various vantage points by shifting the narrators' points of view between various social positions, such as shopkeepers, bureaucrats, and dispossessed laborers.

Ambiguity in morality: Adiga chooses not to conclude his work in a didactic manner. He depicts social connections with less certainty, leaving the reader irresolute and able to judge them, as opposed to showing a clear path from social criticism to moral improvement. These subtle differences of uncertainty dominate the mind and prompt it to question and they wonder what resistance and ethical solidarity could be if ethnocentrism was not only dominant but also deeply rooted in the system?

Inference: Violence, Ethnocentrism, and Opportunities for Unity

Ethnocentrism serves as both a theoretical perspective and a useful equipment for excluding other people in *Between the Assassinations*.

It then brings to life nearly every facet of daily existence, from petty humiliations of characters to legal injustices and, even, in rare cases, physical violence. Ethnocentrism allows those in positions of social power to believe that they are assisting rather than taking advantage of others by normalizing a hierarchy of cultural values.

However, there is another element in Adiga's writing that stays with the reader throughout: the resistance. Instead of directing a play of dominance or discrimination, the characters and their actions set up circumstances that allow the novel's microsystem to resist the sociopolitical power. In addition to demonstrating the victims' moral involvement with ethnocentrism, which encourages readers to acknowledge the human costs of cultural pride, the stories also suggest that they are unlikely to produce more comprehensive solutions to dilemma of antagonists.

V. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Aravind Adiga's *Between the Assassinations* illustrates ethnocentrism as a concept that operates at several levels and permeates the social fabric of rural India. The narratives reveal a number of mechanisms that accept social inequality by claiming cultural superiority, including caste hierarchies, linguistic elitism, class moralism, communal suspicion, and internalized colonial ambitions. Ethnocentric arguments are a major target of Adiga's satire. His rhetorical techniques, particularly the use of satire and shifting perspectives, not only reveal but also challenge such beliefs, prompting the readers to consider the ethical implications of their everyday prejudices.

The collection may not provide radical solutions but acts as a moral agent by exposing common exclusionary practices. One could also view *Between the Assassinations* from an ethnocentric standpoint, revealing the complex yet genuine human connections persisting beyond cultural barriers, alongside the deeply rooted injustices of local life.

Adiga's writings continue to be a great resource for scholars and individuals with an interest in politics and culture who wish to examine how the arrogance of officials and common hatred not only maintain the oppressive system but also how to identify the small but inescapable acts of recognition that lead to a shift in certain hierarchies.

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