



## Between the Assassinations

*Aravind Adiga*

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Welcome to Kittur, India. It's on India's southwestern coast, bounded by the Arabian Sea to the west and the Kalliamma River to the south and east. It's blessed with rich soil and scenic beauty, and it's been around for centuries. Of its 193,432 residents, only 89 declare themselves to be without religion or caste. And if the characters in *Between the Assassinations* are any indication, Kittur is an extraordinary crossroads of the brightest minds and the poorest morals, the up-and-coming and the downtrodden, and the poets and the prophets of an India that modern literature has rarely addressed.

A twelve-year-old boy named Ziauddin, a gofer at a tea shop near the railway station, is enticed into wrongdoing because a fair-skinned stranger treats him with dignity and warmth. George D'Souza, a mosquito-repellent sprayer, elevates himself to gardener and then chauffeur to the lovely, young Mrs. Gomes, and then loses it all when he attempts to be something more. A little girl's first act of love for her father is to beg on the street for money to support his drug habit. A factory owner is forced to choose between buying into underworld economics and blinding his staff or closing up shop. A privileged schoolboy, using his own ties to the Kittur underworld, sets off an explosive in a Jesuit-school classroom in protest against casteism. A childless couple takes refuge in a rapidly diminishing forest on the outskirts of town, feeding a group of "intimates" who visit only to mock them. And the loneliest member of the Marxist-Maoist Party of India falls in love with the one young woman, in the poorest part of town, whom he cannot afford to wed.

*Between the Assassinations* showcases the most beloved aspects of Adiga's writing to brilliant effect: the class struggle rendered personal; the fury of the underdog and the fire of the iconoclast; and the prodigiously ambitious narrative talent that has earned Adiga acclaim around the world and comparisons to Gogol, Ellison, Kipling, and Palahniuk. In the words of *The Guardian* (London), "*Between the Assassinations* shows that Adiga...is one of the most important voices to emerge from India in recent years."

A blinding, brilliant, and brave mosaic of Indian life as it is lived in a place called Kittur, *Between the Assassinations*, with all the humor, sympathy, and unflinching candor of *The White Tiger*, enlarges our understanding of the world we live in today.

## Between the Assassinations Details

Date : Published January 1st 2008 by Picador India

ISBN : 9780330450546

Author : Aravind Adiga

Format : Paperback 281 pages

Genre : Fiction, Cultural, India, Short Stories, Contemporary, Asian Literature, Indian Literature

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# From Reader Review Between the Assassinations for online ebook

## Pechi says

A breathtakingly realistic combination of short stories that conspire together to imprint in your mind the story of Kittur in 80s through the army of characters that populate this allegedly fictional town.

If you wanna read about the real India, this is the book to go to.

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## Laura says

*Between the Assassinations* is really good. It's quite a bit different from Adiga's earlier work *White Tiger*. Though portions of the story are told through first person narration, this book deviates significantly from the formula he very successfully used in the past. The characters in this book never meet. Their only connection is the city in which they live. The novel is told through vignettes which reveal the intricate social and political climates operating in the fictionalized city of Kittur and is organized spatially rather than chronologically. Very good read!

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## Lisa says

I really liked *The White Tiger*, but I'm a bit disappointed in this, a collection of short stories – written before Adiga won the Booker last year, but not published until afterwards. Publishers sometimes do this with prize-winning authors: they resurrect previously rejected work and rush it out into the bookshops while the author's high profile guarantees good sales. I have learned the hard way to be suspicious of books published too soon after a big prize by a first-time author. *Between the Assassinations* came from the library, picked up out of curiosity but with no great expectations.

Read the rest at <http://anzlitlovers.wordpress.com/200...>

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## Jennifer (aka EM) says

Short stories - really good.

Adiga can make you feel and smell and taste the poverty of India, through description and character, and it ain't pretty. But it's real. Or at least it feels real -- I've never been to India, so what do I know?

Heavy on bodily discharges of all sorts; and each scene (egads!) drips with almost unbearable heat and humidity. The filth is metaphorical too: corruption, physical pain, disease is everywhere; violence looms (although here, unlike in *The White Tiger*, it never erupts). Each character is desperate; they are hanging on to their last hope.

Each story illustrates a unique predicament, unified by the overarching despair and unfairness imposed by

the caste system.

Each story ends with -- I'm sure there's a literary term for this -- a kind of unexpected twist that predicts but doesn't describe a decision or closure. This, plus Adiga's ability to get us to feel empathy for characters who really are hard to look at, hard to feel for because the tendency is to be repulsed by them or to distance ourselves from them considering them "other", really places him among the top tier of his contemporaries writing in similar ways/about similar places (I'm thinking in particular of Rohinton Mistry).

Lots of rich sociological insights and a deep humanism, but Adiga never bangs you over the head with the politics or economics, not even when he's referring very directly to real-world events.

I look forward to his next fiction, whether it's novel or short story form. He seems to work well in both.

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### **Robert says**

Definitely one of the most entertaining and engrossing audiobooks that have livened up my daily commute in the last year. I also loved "The White Tiger" when I read it, but I feel this book provides even more bang-for-the-buck with a relentlessly entertaining series of short stories that work well for someone such as myself looking to digest the material a half-an-hour on the 403 at a time.

Mr. Aravind is a talented storyteller and creator of memorable characters, and the narration by Mr. Nayyar effectively evokes the inner life and desires of a wide range of characters whose personal beliefs and circumstances are often worlds apart even though they inhabit the same small town in the turbulent India of the 1980s.

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### **Anna says**

Thank god this is short stories, so I was able to pause between the resounding slap of each delineated life. We know we're privileged, right? Living in India would be pretty bad, "local color" aside, right? If you're white, sitting in an armchair with a computer in front of you, well - you'll never even get close to understanding it. But perhaps you might try, with a book like this.

This book is angry like a furnace about caste, baksheesh, poverty and poshlost. It's set in the '80s but clearly, not much has changed, bar the arrival of illegal cable. I've been reading another book about the difficulties of being Catholic in '50s Australia - but that kind of discrimination is laughable compared to being a Dalit cycle-cart courier, without the right to sit on a chair without being slapped in the face for it.

This is an earlier book than Adiga's big Booker hit *The White Tiger*, and I'm not going to sneer at its palpable agitation for change, its young man's preaching and relentlessness. I think they work in this context, and the writing is beautiful even when describing the ugly.

But be warned, there's plenty of ugly.

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## Vicky "phenkos" says

Definitely a 5-star read! In this book Adiga skilfully manages to convey a sense of the place and its people not by engaging in sociological analysis or selecting average human types but rather by fixing his gaze on the unusual, the out-of-the-ordinary and the unexpected.

The book is a collection of short stories centred around the Indian town of Kittur. Each story is about a different character, which initially creates a sense of disconnection; however as you read on you realise that the town itself is the canvas on which storylines criss-cross. There's a lot about caste in India and how it affects human relationships, and also about corruption, esp. among state officials. The stories feel slightly unfinished in the sense that it's not entirely clear why the characters act in the way that they do, but I think that's in line with a lot of recent short story writing where conveying a powerful sense about a character and/or place is more important than providing a clear and unambiguous resolution.

The stories themselves are involving and strangely fascinating. There seems to be a connecting thread that runs through the stories: a personal quest for purity that sets the main characters. Cast in an uncaring world, these characters seem to have a will and a mind of their own despite often being the lowliest of the low. I was especially touched by the story about the conductor on the No. 5 bus -- a boy who arrives at Kittur only to be shunned by his uncle, who instead of taking him in, lets him live on the streets and go hungry. Despite the Dickensian element, the story is not sentimental. Out of personal ingenuity the boy rises to the coveted position of conductor on bus No. 5. And then, all of a sudden, he blows everything: he turns against his patron and loses the position of conductor (and at the same time his means of livelihood). This happens without explanation or obvious reason why, possibly out of some secret act of rebellion or malaise of the soul. This pattern is repeated in many of the stories; rather than keep their heads down, lie low, know their place, the characters throw everything they strove for to the winds, as if driven by a strong moral code or a deep sense of integrity which goes against customary morals.

Overall, I'm finding that I'm learning a lot about contemporary India, a country that's rising fast to become one of the world's superpowers. Very much looking forward to reading Adiga's award-winning *The White Tiger*.

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## Karthik Parthasarathy says

I didn't have a clue of what I would get from the book and even now, I am not sure if what I got is what I should have got. I have read Aravind's earlier book "The white Tiger" which had won him the Booker Prize. I had liked the book then and so the author was familiar. Also, the title had hinted at some sort of murder and possibly a whodunit type of story. I couldn't have been more wrong.

This book is all about an imaginary town by the name Kittur nestled on the coast, South of Goa and North of Calicut. It is almost like every other town with its quirkiness the traditions and the diversity that is so identifiable to any Indian town. The stage is set in the 80s, right between the Assassinations of Indira Gandhi and her son, Rajiv Gandhi. The book gives a vivid description of the town and the lives of the people in the town and manages to hand hold you in getting to know them.

The book contains a myriad of characters. You get to see people of all walks of life. From a disciplinarian assistant head master to an alienated but affluent schoolboy, from a middle aged communist to an "I can sell

whatever I can get and make you buy it" kind of conman salesman, from the children of a construction worker to a delivery man for a furniture retail firm, from a Brahmin housemaid who is still single at 55 to an idealistic journalist who is married to his profession, from an Islamic terrorist to an Islam boy who would not see through him and not take up the work he is given by the terrorist, from a rich housewife who lives a life of solitude to her employee who tries to find a way to her heart and in turn to her money, the book has it all and manages to bring the Indian world of the 80s to life. All religions, all classes of castes, rich and poor, everyone finds a mention in this canvas.

What made this book work for me was the way the characters were etched without being judgemental and by retaining their uniqueness. Some of it was stereotypical but when you are trying to portray a different era, you would have to stereotype a few things. There were lots of moments of poignancy and places where adding anything more would have made it redundant and hence reduced the beauty of the moment. This book has been structured as chapters with each chapter picking up a particular location in Kittur as backdrop and the characters would play their part in that backdrop. This book could have easily been called "The short story collections of Aravind Adiga" as there were no direct and obvious connections between characters from one chapter to another. There might be hidden connections which might jump out on a second reading but nothing appeared to me in the first reading. The ending sequence for some of the chapters are brilliant and the others are ordinary, however the one theme that can be seen right through is the air of melancholy surrounding most of the characters and there are not much characters in this book that spreads an air of joy. Maybe that is how the life in a small town would have been in the 80s. May be not. But this town has been depicted like that. That said, there are a lot of places where the wicked humor and dark humor has worked out well. There were moments where I laughed, sympathized, empathized, got angry, got frustrated, felt sad but there was never a moment through the book where I felt bored. The author had managed to bring the town of Kittur to life and take me on a walk through the various locations in the town, meet the people and get to live with them.

Overall, I would definitely recommend this book. You can take a walk for a few miles in the book and continue the journey provided you like it. If you do not, you always have the option of jumping back to reality.

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## **Philip says**

Aravind Adiga's *White Tiger* won the Booker Prize and was notable for its intriguing form. I thought it would be a hard act to follow. It would need a great writer to be able to make a repeat match of both originality and style with engaging content. So on beginning *Between The Assassinations* I was prepared to be disappointed. I need not have worried because Aravind Adiga's 2010 novel is perhaps a greater success than the earlier prize winner.

The novel does not have a linear plot, nor does it feature any resolution to satisfy the kind of reader that needs a story. But it does have its stories, several of them. *Between The Assassinations* is in fact a set of short stories, albeit related, rather than a novel. But the beauty of the form is that the book sets these different and indeed divergent tales in a single place, a fictitious town called Kittur.

It's on India's west coast, south of Goa and north of Cochin. Kittur presents the expected mix of religion, caste and class that uniquely yet never definitively illustrate Indian society. And by means of stories that highlight cultural, linguistic and social similarities and differences, Aravind Adiga paints a compelling and utterly vivid picture of life in the town. The observation that this amalgam both influences and in some ways determines these experiences is what makes *Between The Assassinations* a novel rather than a set of stories.

It is the place and its culture that is the main character.

The title gives the setting in time. The book's material thus spans the years between the assassinations of the two Ghandis, Indira and Rajiv. So it is the 1980s, and politics, business, marriage, love, loyalty, development, change and corruption all figure. Aravind Adiga's juxtaposition of themes to be found in Kittur town and society thus leads us through times of questioning, rapid change and wealth creation. The book's major success is that this conducted tour of recent history never once leads the reader where the reader does not willingly want to go. The stories are vivid, the personal relationships intriguing, the settings both informative and challenging.

Between The Assassinations is a remarkable achievement. The author has succeeded in writing a thoroughly serious novel with strong intellectual threads via a set of related stories that can each be enjoyed at face value, just as stories, if that is what the reader wants. Writing rarely gets as sophisticated as this or indeed as enjoyable, since humour, often rather barbed, is always close to the surface. Between The Assassinations is a wonderful achievement.

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### **Nancy Oakes says**

The title of "Between the Assassinations" refers to the seven-year period between 1984 -- when Indira Gandhi was assassinated -- and 1991 when her son Rajiv was also killed. Set in India, the book captures a cross-spectrum view of life in a town called Kittur, where the characters include a drug addict's children who have to beg to keep up their father's habit; a 29 year old furniture delivery man who realizes that this is his life; a servant to a wealthy man who has no control over her own life; factory owners and workers; a student who explodes a bomb at his school in protest of caste distinction; a boy whose one ambition is to become a bus conductor, along with many more. The book is set up so that each story fits into a fake guidebook for tourists who might wish to visit Kittur.

Between the Assassinations looks at class and caste, poverty, corruption, politics, moral bankruptcy, and the overpowering awareness by many that change is not coming around any too soon. It is a sad but touching book, one that haunts you for a while after you've finished it.

The tourist guidebook setting works well -- the reader sees the city of Kittur as it could and should be, but once you get into the individual stories, the reader gets into the reality and hopelessness of the situation of many of the people who live there. Some of the stories work very well, but there are some that kind of wind down and just get strange so that you're left on your own to figure out what's just happened and why. This is definitely a book demanding reader participation.

The reader is left to decide whether or not there is hope for the characters in this book, and for India overall. Some of the characters realize that their situation is untenable and have hope for the future, while some (such as the servant, Jayamma) hope that the next life in the cycle of reincarnation will be better. Some know that this is it, and that they are locked in to their lives due to their station in life. Some struggle with their demons while trying to maintain the basic element of humanity and morality in their lives. In the meantime, life goes on, at least until someone comes up with a solution.

Bleak, yes, but very realistic in tone. Adiga's writing is excellent. I would recommend this book for people who do not mind a) having to put some thought and time into these stories and b) reading a book that leaves no room for warm and fuzzy feelings anywhere. Not all literature has to have a happy ending, because, well,



in life sometimes there is no such thing.

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### **Mark says**

After loving White Tiger I was quite excited to read this one but it is a let down on so many levels.

The format is annoying - it is neither a novel nor an anthology of stories -more a collection of episodes related by setting. The writing is inferior to White Tiger and only after reading did I find out that this was a rejected work that went unpublished until his Booker prize win.

Disjointed, episodic tale of an Indian town....some of the episodes are interesting others...particularly the last two are just dull.

Not recommended

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### **Aarti says**

I really enjoyed this collection of stories set in a fictional southern Indian town, Kittur. The stories are mostly bleak and morose. Adiga's characters face life with the fatalistic belief that nothing will ever change for them. They are stuck in a cycle that they know they will never escape. Some are angry, some are resigned, and some (very few) are hopeful in tone. But the main character, throughout all the stories, is India, in all her guts and glory. While I enjoyed some stories in this collection more than others, they all moved me in some way. The characters are vivid, true and wonderfully three-dimensional for the forty or so pages they are given.

And the language is so lush- Kittur, India really comes to life- the sights and sounds, the tastes and smells. Some of the sentences just struck a chord. For example, "She lay in the storage room, seeking comfort in the fumes of the DDT and the sight of the Baby Krishna's silver buttocks." Or, "The centerpiece of his body was a massive potbelly, a hard knot of flesh pregnant with a dozen cardiac arrests." It was so much fun to read a whole book full of sentences like these. Adiga creates characters you can cheer for, and writes in such a beautiful manner that you will want this one for your keeper shelves. Highly recommended!

Also, if you like this book, I'd highly recommend In Other Rooms, Other Wonders, by Daniyal Mueenuddin. It is set in Pakistan in the 1970s and is also excellent.

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### **Mary Mahoney says**

BETWEEN THE ASSASSINATIONS spans the years between the assassinations of Indira Gandhi in 1984 and her son, Rajiv

Gandhi, in 1991. Mrs. Ghandi was assassinated by her Sikh body guards; 7 years later her son Rajiv was assassinated by Tamil separatist rebels. Mrs. Ghandi's second son, Sanjay, avoided political death, dying in an aviation accident in 1980. The family tragedy had nearly Shakespearean proportions.

Kittur, the imaginary city where the action of *BETWEEN THE ASSASSINATIONS* takes place, is in far south west India, south of Goa on the Arabian coast. Kittur has a travelogue as a sort of backdrop. But instead of where you must go to understand the town, the stories make sure you meet the right people so that you understand India in the 1980's--and often the India no one really wants to meet.

Kittur is designed well for stories. Each sector is home to a particular religion and usually also a caste. Note that the minority religions of India (there are many, but some prominent ones are Christianity, Islam, Jainism, Zoroastrianism and Sikhism) claim not to observe caste differences, but sometimes they appear to observe something very close to it.

Adiga develops the setting of each story by telling us who lives in each sector and a bit of history. Some places have a self-explanatory context, such as The Cathedral of Our Lady of Valencia and The Sultan's Battery. Other areas, such as the Bajpe Forest, require explanation: the Forest is home to Kittur's most prominent Brahmins.

Tenuous and hopeless are the two most common categories for people in the town. Middle class families hold on to their jobs frantically. Others hold on to their piece of pavement, a place to sleep that costs them a fee they must pay to the slum lord. A young boy brought to be a bridegroom in an arranged marriage is found to have an incurable venereal disease; he has his whole life ahead of him but it will be short without functioning kidneys. A Communist party member in his mid-fifties applies for income for the widow of a man who committed suicide due to the pressures of a moneylender who was charging him 36% interest per month. The Communist party member pays the widow her first installment, then tries to set up a match between himself and the widow's daughter over 30 years younger. The widow and daughter reject the match, so the Communist worker turns the widow's new information over to the moneylender and withholds the second payment. The Brahmin forest is cut down to make way for a huge sports complex that will feature Sikh wrestling.

A strength of this book worth mentioning is that Adiga develops one main character per story. His secondary characters are believable as well, but the main characters carry the tale.

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## **Santhosh says**

Er, Indian noir?

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## **Shane says**

I understand why Aravind Adiga continues to live in Mumbai; he is sitting on an endless mine of literary material that would keep him writing into a ripe old age. Although never advertized as such, this is a collection of short stories connected only by locale, the city of Kittur, a microcosm of Mother India with it all its fables and foibles.

And so Adiga takes us on a seven-day tour of Kittur, unearthing its myriad denizens and their bizarre situations: from low castes to Brahmins, violent school teachers to anarchist students, Muslims, Hindus, Christians, bicycle wallahs, crime kingpins, immigrants from the countryside sleeping on the streets, and child beggars. The situations are graphic and unsanitary: a coolie sticking a cow dung-laced finger in anger

into a prostitute's mouth while she services another customer, the factory owner showing his contempt for a corrupt tax collector by mixing him Red Label Scotch stirred with his own shitty finger; after awhile the shock-factor becomes predictable and pales. The tour is supposed to mirror events taking place in the seven years between the assassinations of Mrs Indira Gandhi and her son Rajiv, although I saw very little parallel.

The messages however, are very strong: communism is being trumped by capitalism, caste lines shall not be crossed even though they are blurring in a changing India, getting married apparently stabilizes a man, a childless woman is a disgrace to her family, and those in the lower depths like our bicycle wallah will die from exhaustion before they reach the age of 40. Fraud is everywhere and circular – everyone is being screwed by everyone else – Adiga claims India to be the world champion in black marketing, counterfeiting and corruption. A few brave ones— the journalist who tries to write one article a day with the truth and goes mad in the attempt, and the Maupassant wannabe who creates characters who do not want but falls for a young woman and succumbs to desire—try to stem the tide and are consumed in India's relentless march to become a global economic powerhouse.

I found the writing style clumsy in certain stories and colloquial – these stories were probably written over a long period of time as the author evolved into his current Booker-winning stature.

Living among tycoons and terrorists can be a source for interesting fiction, but I wonder what Adiga's point is. Is it to shock us with insights into this subterranean culture that westerners would find titillating and escapist as the vampire genre or Chuck Palahniuk? Or is it to warn us that as India globalizes, and the world normalizes to the lowest common denominator, the underbelly of a rampant capitalist country, such as Kittur, could one day be our reality as well? Viewed from the latter perspective, this book takes on a cautionary and chilling aspect and is worth the read.

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## ❄️? Propertea Of Frostea ❄️? Bitter SnoBerry ❄️ says

Between the Assassinations  
- Aravind Adiga

From a well praised author of the book *The White Tiger*, comes *Between the Assassinations*. At first glance, the book is luring, it seems to prompt secrecy and mysteries...but instead has a deeper theme - Corruption! The stories in this book are set in Kittur, Karnataka(never heard of it before). I thought this book would be light and entertaining like *Tamasha* in Bandargaon(a delightful read) by Navneet Jagannathan but if truth be told, I put this book at least wanted read.

For me, a book should be loyal in words its speaks, delicate in plot, inspiring though characters and gripping nevertheless. This book failed before my views, with words so low and cheap; literally made me throw it away! The plot? I felt like seeing all these corrupted tales through the eyes of a sinned ghost who knows all terms, wandering Kittur. Characters are the worst, they have no morals nor dignity. Pseudonymous Bosch was right in saying, "Being an author is being a dictator" but here, this power has been misused.

I would have given up on the book, it was NOT gripping...I just finished it for the sake of never-leaving-a-book-uncompleted, it was walking through a tunnel full of corruption, without an end or conclusion.

The book seemed to talk about all the three major religions of India through resentful eyes, I didn't like that. Like saying a Pathan was not to be meddled with. Humoring the idol of baby Krishna, and portraying Christ in an unruly way...It tells a tales of a banned book..I do wonder why this book is NOT BANNED?

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## **Bjorn says**

I haven't read Adiga's Booker-winning debut novel *The White Tiger* (yet, I should add). However, I've recently read at least two Indian novels - Farahad Zama's *The Marriage Bureau for Rich People* and Vikas Swarup's *Q&A* - that try to present the issues facing modern India for a Western audience. There's a lot of talk about the conflict between the old caste society and new "modern" values, clashes between different religions, the supposed but not all-encompassing rise from third-world poverty to a major economic power, etc, but in both cases they end up as simple fluff. Let's all just get along, and if you're lucky you'll win a lot of money and move out of the shack and be happy, and hey, here's a dance number in saris.

Not so in *Between The Assassinations*, a collection of 14 loosely connected short stories set in (a fictionalised version of) the city of Kittur. The assassinations referred to are the ones of Indira and Rajiv Gandhi in 1984 and 1991, and even though the book is divided into seven days, they're not necessarily presented in order. Adiga doesn't offer solutions or easy ways out; at best, he offers a black sense of humour. We get to meet 14 people from all walks of life, from beggars to rich industrialists - and when I say 14, I mean millions; because in setting every story in the same city, having the characters cross each others' paths, the fleeting but always present references to the larger world outside, we're never allowed to forget that they all make up a part of a much larger puzzle. That's just one of the rather delicious dark ironies in this; everyone knowing their place is part of their failure in escaping it.

Obviously, some stories stand out more than others. Some are darkly funny (the wealthy low-caste school boy who thinks he's supposed to become a terrorist; the journalist who tries to tell the truth about corruption), others desperately grim (the bicycle kuli who realises his body is giving up at 30, and that every day he wastes more calories than he can buy with the money he earns), and some just depressingly realistic. Adiga sticks to a very limited third-person narration, taking us into the head of each protagonist (not that many of them are in a position to do much protagonisin'), having each story tell one character's truth only to move on to a different one with no clear moral.

And then there's the frame story: Adiga prefaces every section of the book as well as every story with a short, supposedly objective description of part of the city: here's the shopping district; here's the various churches, temples and mosques; here's the park; here's the adult cinema. There are fact sheets about population and chronology. And then he undercuts the tourist brochure-like descriptions of buildings and architecture with the lives of the people there, everything that keeps them there, the invisible but real patterns that make sure things don't change too much. "The untouchables are 90% of this town," say politicians trying to curry favour with them, while a fact sheet elsewhere in the book points out that they're nowhere near that many. Every story here can be read on its own; yet together, they start questioning each other, mistrusting each other, undercutting and trying to gain advantage over each other. Some fail. Some succeed, only to still find themselves trapped in a book with cheerful Indian colours on the jacket. And it begins, and ends, with people getting killed.

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## **Aravind says**

It did not seem that this was a collection of stories, not a single novel, when I bought this book. The book contains, in the form of short stories, glimpses of the lives, predominantly sad, of ordinary citizens living in

an ordinary south indian coastal town, in the seven-year period between the assassinations of Indira Gandhi and her son Rajiv Gandhi. The best thing about this book is the way Adiga paints the town and the people and everything else; the reader can actually see, smell and feel the life in the town of Kittur. Apart from that, most of the stories do not have any fixed conclusions, the reader is left to make his own. The stories are disturbing in their showcase of poverty, exploitation and corruption. In all, it is a painful set of stories, made readable by the author's skill in bringing the town to life through written words.

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## Joshua Buhs says

So ridiculously rich--but it burns the fat right out of you, it's so damn fierce.

This is Adiga's second book. And while his first won the prestigious Man Booker prize, I think reviewers did not really serve it well. I mean, *White Tiger*, and *Between the Assassinations*, both are rooted in the history and sociology of contemporary India--and this rootedness is important--too often *White Tiger* was reduced to just a report on Indian current affairs. Even when reviewers noted the literary elements, they were read purely in the service of evaluating his stance on modern India: what do rivers and oceans say about his interpretation of Indian culture. Good reviewers would never think to reduce a book on some part of America, by a white American, to pure social studies essay. It's a novel, after all.

Then there was Tony D'Souza's ridiculously bad review of *White Tiger* in the *Washington Post*. (I looked it up because it was referred to on the back of this book.) I don't know if D'Souza just had no control of his language, if his universe of references were so limited, or if he was penning some kind of quiet evisceration--but the review was horrible. It completely missed the significance of a central event, wished the book could be more Orwellian--not sure what that meant--but, worse, could only think to compare it to *Pahlanuk*--because the main character took the time to spell out his philosophical views--and the *Nanny Diaries* (!) because it exposed the hypocrisy of the characters. Let me say that again, with extra exclamation points: the gee-dee *Nanny Diaries*!!!!

If one is inclined to mis-read Adiga, this book will again provide plenty of grist for that wonky mill. Adiga covers some of the same ground--(mostly) contemporary India, plenty of hypocrisy and exploitation. So, go ahead, dismiss this as a college essay on India, a land of contrasts, if you want. But then you're missing so much. Not just the complexity of Adiga's view of the world, but that this is a genuinely great work of literature. It may even be more approachable--for a reader--than *White Tiger*.

*Between the Assassinations* is set in an invented southern India city in the years 1984-1991: that is, between the assassinations of the Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and (her son) Rajiv Gandhi. The book is divided into seven days, with chapters devoted to the morning or evening of the days, and each section introduced by a paragraph or so that reads as if it is from a travel book. (There are also a couple of interpolated chapters that are completely from this presumed book.) The chapters, too, are coupled to specific places within the city. The days, though, are not literal days--what happens in each chapter can take a day or days or weeks. They are years: seven years, seven days. So this isn't just a novel, it's a story of genesis, the Biblical seven days.

Almost none of the characters recur from one chapter to another. Rather, the connections between the different stories are more subtle, but still charged--maybe even more charged for the occult connections. Thus, one chapter mentions the Catholic School for boys, and the next is set within it. One chapter mentions DDT, and the next is about the man who sprays for mosquitos. Surnames, though, do reappear, repeatedly, giving a sense of a network of people, distantly related, perhaps, but still related.

I get the sense that Adiga might be settling some personal scores. One name that shows up three times is D'Souza. I suspect that one instance of this may be a reference to the conservative author Dinesh D'Souza. In this case, Daryl D'Souza is a horrible hypocrite. In another, I think he's taking aim at ole Tony: Miguel D'Souza is a solicitous shit who cannot recognize the power of literature and ends up, drunkenly, beating a man who does, breaking his legs, but underestimating him. In a book as vast as this one, there are probably other inside references like this, I just don't recognize them.

Because make no mistake, in the 320+ pages of this novel--or collection of related stories--there is a huge cast of characters, scores, if not a hundred. What is so remarkable about the book is that each chapter could be expanded to be a whole book. Adiga is that good. His voice only changes a few times, one story to the next, but he is in so much control of his stories, can suggest enormities in a few paragraphs, packs insights into paragraphs. He jumps from cast to cast, religion to religion, social level to social level, and is never less than empathetic. The book opens with the tale of a Muslim Adam (He's dust-covered, just as Adam is made from dust) and ends with a frustrated writer who wants to tell naturalistic tales of the people, but ends up exploiting them, an acknowledgment of his own position. In between are stories alternately infuriating and heartbreaking, with graces of humor and love, even genuine courage, though these are not the dominant behaviors.

There's something Dickensian here, in the vastness and consideration of class, but without the exaggeration; there's something of García Márquez here, especially *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, what with the writing of a modern genesis, but without the magical realism. Adiga is an old-fashioned naturalist--an increasingly rare species in this era of the MFA novelist and the fetishization of quirk--but such an excellent practitioner it feels new, fresh, important.

Really, really excellent.

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### **Ravi Menon says**

Better than *White Tiger*. I was born in Calicut, north of which this book is based. Some of the tensions and by plays are very familiar and resonate painfully.

Brilliant book, makes small town Southern India come alive in a fashion that hasn't been seen in 'Indian literature in English' for a long time.

I'm using my words carefully here, there are several brilliant portrayals of Small town India in regional writing in India in several languages - malayalam, tamil, kannada and so on. Several good translations as well. However to a person from outside India, this is a brilliant tour de force.

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