

# The Theme of Quest: A Critical Interpretation of Between the Assassination by Arvind Adiga

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## Abstract

This research paper delves into the period between the assassination of Prime Minister of India, Indira Gandhi and his elder son, Rajiv Gandhi and the theme of quest discussed in the famous novel of Indian novelist Arvind Adiga. The novel clearly suggests the mindlessness of corruption and poverty in Indian society. This study explores how the ideologies nurtured by Indian culture seem meaningless because the people refuse to accept the importance of tolerance, honesty and brotherhood. Moreover, this paper introduces repeated bizarre events that have become an intrinsic part of Indian society in the present scenario. This discusses two short stories “The Bunder” and “Lighthouse Hill” in which through the protagonist of different short stories narrated in the selected novel and their painful recollection, a reader gets a picture of the Indian society even in the present scenario.

**Keywords-** Quest, Mindlessness, Corruption, Poverty, Indian Society, Culture, Brotherhood, Tolerance, Recollection and Intrinsic.

## Introduction

The short story “The Bunder” opens with Abbasi, the owner of the embroidery factory who opens the bottle of Johnny Walker Red Label blended for an official from the State Electricity Board who has come for an inspection of his factory. Abbasi is very well aware of the demand of officials as a gift in order to ensure everything fair and according to the norms:

Abbasi closed his eyes. He reached towards his decks, pulled out a drawer, took out a wad of notes, counted them and placed the money in front of the official. The fat man moistening his finger for each note, counted them one by one; producing a blue rubber band from up pocket of his trousers, he strapped it around the notes twice. (22)

Though Abbasi is portrayed as a person annoyed by corruption and bribes but helplessly acts in a deviant way and offers bribes to every official Who visits his factory including the Electricity man; the water board man; half the income tax department of Kittur; half the exercise department of Kittur; six different officials of the telephone board; a land tax official of Kittur city corporation; 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 Kittur Muslim league (24).

The story of Abbasi points towards a dual role played by a single individual as it is highlighted that on the one hand, he hates corruption, and shuts his factory down for his employees but on the other hand, he offers bribes to every official coming to his factory. The author has explored the mental trauma of Abbasi as he recollects the memory of when he shut down his factory because his conscience did not allow him to stake the eyesight of the women working for him as the work was damaging the eyesight of his employees.

However, the author implies that repentance cannot compensate for the deeds performed by an individual. Abbasi has remorse for his employees but has no other option for the maintenance and preservation of his family other than to run the factory. However, the employees have nothing else to earn other than working in the factory of Abbasi where they will lose their eyesight one day for sure:

No amount of improved lighting would reduce the impact on the retinas. Human eyes were not meant to stare for hours at designs for intricate. Two women had already gone blind; that why he had shut down the factory. When he reopened, all his old workers come back at once. They knew their fate, but there was no other work to be had. ( 34)

“The Bunder” is the story woven around two aspects of some individual personalities where one favours virtues and other vices. The author has portrayed Abbasi more humanely and sensitively. His remorse and sympathy for his employees convince him to shut his factory down yet he reopens the factory knowing very well that his employees are going blind of this embroidery work. It is mentioned:

Thousands, Sitting in tea shops and universities and workplaces every day and every night, were cursing corruption. Yet not one fellow had found a way to slay the demon without giving up the share of the loot of corruption. So why did he- an ordinary businessman given to whiskey and snooker and listening to gossip from thugs- have no to come up with an answer? (35)

Abbasi’s character is shown as very much different from Rama-Krishna, the man known as Xerox. Abbasi becomes a part of corruption as he has enough money to offer bribes but Xerox is a victim who has been arrested twenty-one times for selling illegally photocopied printed books at discounted rates to the students of St Alfonso’s college. He has an eleven-years old daughter, Ritu who helps her father in selling books.

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 an aura. (39)

Ramakrishna is the central character of the next short story narrated in *Between the Assassination* authored by Arvind Adiga. Through the story of Xerox, the author has highlighted the illegal practice of selling photocopied or printed books and the helplessness of a poor man who is compelled to be involved in this illegal activity to nurture his family. This short story conveys the event when Rajiv Gandhi’s government banned Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses* to maintain peace in the country:

Only one time has Xerox really been in trouble with the police. That was when someone called the station and said that Xerox was selling copies of Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* in violation of the laws of the Republic of India. This time when he was brought to the station in handcuffs there were no courtesies, no cups of chai. (39)

*The Satanic Verses* is a fictional novel authored by Salman Rushdie in 1988 in which he used magical realism. This novel is inspired by the life events of the Muslim Prophet Muhammad. Moreover, Rushdie completely relied upon the contemporary circumstances and ethnic race to create his character. This work became the root cause of riots in the country. Rajiv Gandhi's government decided to ban this novel to bring the situation under control.

Moreover, the story of Xerox discusses the miserable lives of poor people. They have no concern about what's happening all around in their country. Their primary concern is only to earn money to have bread for their family. Even, they do not worry about their own lives only to serve their duty towards their family. Through the character of Xerox, the author explores the life of a poor citizen of India who has no concern for political issues:

'Forgive me' Xerox begged. 'I had no idea that this was a banned book, really . . . I'm just the son of a man who took out shit, sir. He waited all day long for the boom box to make a noise. I know my place, sir. I wouldn't dream of challenging you. It was just a mistake, sir. Forgive me, sir.' (40)

Xerox is not a socially evil person but does something that is against the law. He was doing it enthusiastically to earn property but only to earn necessities for his family. He has no concern for whatever happening around him other than to earn bread for the survival of his family. His daughter also assisted him in selling Xerox and photocopied books to the students. He has been arrested several times but he is still engaged in that as he has no other option in a corrupt country.

### **Conclusion:**

This paper projects the harsh reality of Indian society. It is explored in this research that corruption, poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, caste system and child labour are very common in Indian society. These issues are the primary causes of crimes in the society. But the major concern is that no one is making efforts to bring it to an end Everyone is himself or herself is a sufferer of it at some level. These issues are the obstacles to the progress of the country as people cannot use their potential to hit their target because of these social evils. In this way, the social problem at the individual level converts into a social problem at the collective level.

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