

# **Aravind Adiga's *Last Man in Tower*: A Replica of Contemporary Indian Society**

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Aravind Adiga is one of the contemporary Indian writers who focus on the contemporary socio-political situations in Indian society. All of his novels are focused on the themes such as corruption, caste conflict, dowry system, conflict between rich and poor, poverty and unemployment. After he worked as a journalist, he started to write novels which include: *The White Tiger* (2008), *Last Man in Tower* (2011) and *The Selection Day* (2016). He got Man Booker Prize award for the novel *The White Tiger*. *Between the Assassinations* is a collection of twelve short stories published in 2009. The story is the period between assassinations of Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi.

*Last Man in Tower* is a story of Masterji who is a retired school teacher. He is living in an apartment in Vakola, a slum area in Mumbai. Life of Masterji is full of sufferings and troubles. He resembles the middle class man who lives in the modern city. The title suggests that he is the last man in the society who is full of courage and stands against the powerful man, Dharmen Shah. He is the business man who decides to tear down the old building and build a luxury apartment there. The conflict begins when the visitor comes there to note down about the slums, especially Vishram Society. Adiga gives a brief description of the society to make the readers understand the whole picture of the slum. There are two towers in the society: Tower A and Tower B. These two societies are enclosed within the same compound wall. A banyan tree grows through the compound wall next to the booth. Tower B, which is erected in the late 1970s, stands in the south-east corner of the original plot: it is the most desirable building to purchase or rent. Tower A stands in the centre of the compound. Vishram society is built on 14 November 1959, the birthday of former Prime Minister, Pandit Jawarharlal Nehru. The building is originally meant for Roman Catholics, Hindus are admitted in late 1960s and Muslims in 1980s. The society faces two problems. The first one is that it doesn't receive a 24 hour supply of water. Water flows in the taps

twice a day. Second problem is ‘noise pollution’ because of flights which fly over the building. There are other middle class buildings are come up now, but best of these, local real estate brokers say, is Vishram society.

*Last Man in Tower* begins with an unknown visitor to Vishram society. He makes a trouble among the members of the society. Later, they find that the visitor is sent by the property developer to visits the apartment. The plan of Shah is to replace the old building with a new luxury apartment. As one of the oldest building in the area, Shah chooses the Vishram Society for his project. So he offers money to every member of the society in order to accept the offer. The members start to discuss the offer that is announced by the property developer. Firstly, Tower B accepts the offer. But Masterji does not accept the offer because of his friend, who is blind. As a blind, he cannot survive in the new house. Finally every member of the society accepted the offer. The notice about the new apartment and deadline are given in the notice board. Still Masterji has not accepted the offer. So Shah uses various ways to make him accept the offer. Then, he started to threaten Masterji. In order to finalise the issue, the members of the society murder Masterji and make it as suicide. Finally, the novel ends with the departing of the members to their new houses. The novel clearly shows how people become money minded and moral values are lost. It is clear that people are ready to do anything for money in this modern world.

Adiga talks about various kinds of conflicts in the novel. The conflict is both internal and external. Internal conflict is the inner struggle or psychological conflict of the character. External conflict means conflict between groups or between one and group or between one another. He is alone in his home, his wife is dead. His daughter fallen from the train over a decade ago. His son is living with his wife and son in the city of Mumbai. Though he is retired, he continues to teach the children in the apartment. He often feels lonely and goes to meet his son and daughter in law. Mrs. Puri is very affectionate and often prepares dinner for him. Secondly, Adiga talks about external conflict which the characters in the novel encounter every day in the society. Vishram society consists of two towers: Tower A and Tower B. Tower A is old and it includes teachers, accountants and brokers. Tower B which is modern includes Finance, high-teach, and computers. Tower B accepts the offer and Tower A doesn't accept the offer. The real conflict begins when they get the notice about an offer from Shah. Shah finds that the slum in the East Mumbai is the better place to establish their project. He says,

That land is now worth more than land in London, more than land in New York...  
I am never going to underestimate this city again. Mumbai's future is here in the

east, Shanmugham... Vishram is an old society. But it is the most famous building in the area. We'll take it and we'll break it-everyone will know. Vakola is ours. (*Last Man in Tower* 108)

The conflict between Masterji and Dharmen Shah is like a conflict between individual and a collective power. Shah resembles the rich people in the society, whereas the sufferings of masterji show the painful suffering of weak people in the society. "The issue here- individual right via collective well-being was so complicated that if a single resident of Vishram went to court". (*Last Man in Tower* 144). The conflict ends with the death of Masterji. Shah makes the members of the society to murder Masterji and make it as a suicide.

Adiga talks about how media, law, and police are corrupted. Shah who is a powerful builder decides the truth and all the systems support his views. The systems such as the police, hospitals and doctors, media and politicians always go with the powerful. Shah gets the support of Policemen and politicians. After many years in Bombay, he starts a construction company and slowly acquires contracts one by one. Then he enters the business of redeveloping chawls and slums.

Before he was twenty he was smuggling goods from Dubai and Pakistan... Buying out the tenants of ageing structures so that skyscrapers and shopping malls could take their place; a task requiring brutality and charm in equal measure, and which proved too subtle for most builders-but one he negotiated with skills from his smuggler years, allying himself with politicians, policemen, and thugs to bribe and bounce people out of their homes. (*Last Man in Tower* 88)

Politicians call the confidence office at any time and ask some help from them. Shanmugham has to be ready at any time. One day a famous politician phones the confidence office, quoting a figure that will be transported that evening to his election headquarters. Shah and Shanmugham go to warehouse in Parel where five hundred rupees notes are counted by machines, tied into bricks and loaded into an SUV- the cash, filling the vehicle's front and back seats. Shanmugham drives across the state border to the politician's henchmen. It is safely delivered and the politician wins the election. On the other side, Masterji lacks the support of journalist, lawyer and police, when he is in trouble. He goes to police station to file the complaint. It is his second visit to the station. He remembers his first visit to police station when Purnima's handbag has been snatched just outside the school. FIR has been filled out by the policemen but the bag is

never recovered. Now he has gone to police station to complaint about the threatening call from unknown number. He is aware that the call is from the person who is appointed by the property developer. In the police station, he meets Ajwani, the broker who bribes the police for his clients. Police won't get any bribe directly from the person instead they have agents or brokers like Ajwani to deal with them.

Adiga clearly shows how brokers bribe the police. In the novel, Adiga uses the symbol 'sweetener' for giving bribe. Shah sends a 'sweetener' through his assistant to bribe any person. In the Epilogue, Nagarkar, the senior inspector has summoned Ajwani to the station to investigate about the death of Masterji. Ajwani has already got the clearance certificates by bribing the officers. Masterji meets Parekh who is an advocate and asks him to put a case against the builder. He promises to put a case against the property developer. After some days, Masterji visits the office to enquire about the case. Now the situation is changed, because the 'Sweetener' is given to the advocate. Shah has met the advocate the last day and bribed him. The advocate also advises him to get the settlement from the builder. Finally, he writes a letter to his student Noronha, because Noronha has written many columns against corruption. Masterji's article is published in the newspaper but there is no response for it.

Mumbai is totally polluted due to cars, buses, lands, industries, construction works etc. Especially, workers involved in building works get various diseases due to air pollution. Shah who has been in construction business for long period is affected by illness.

Listen to me. I gave up three paying appointments for this. You're picking up fevers, coughs, stomach illnesses. Your immune system is weakening. Leave Bombay. At least for a part of each year. Go to the Himalayas. Simla. Abroad. The one thing money can't buy here is clean air. (*Last Man in Tower* 53)

The doctor advises Shah to leave Bombay, because his immune system is affected due to the pollution. Workers involved in construction work also have the same problem. TB is the major disease that Adiga has mentioned in the novel. Adiga talks about the serious issue of TB in his two novels. The social worker, Mrs. Rego creates awareness about TB among the members. Masterji also wants to create awareness about TB among the children in the society. To conclude, *Last Man in Tower* is an accurate description of the contemporary Indian society. The novels of Adiga are very popular for its portrayal of social issues. He is one of the bestselling Indian writer

and his novels are sold in mass number. His novels are dark humorous, full of irony, and written for common people.

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