

Globalization: A ray of Hope or Despair in reference to the novel Last Man in Tower by Aravind Adiga

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ABSTRACT

This paper is an attempt to look at the elements of light and darkness that exist in Independent India. India gained independence more than 70 years ago but there still exists a wide gap between the North and the South. A country as large as India is divided not merely by geographical differences but by money and caste to a great extent. The powerful politicians play their cards wisely and manage to run the show despite poverty, corruption and increasing crime rate. Aravind Adiga, journalist turned- writer, who won the Man Booker Prize Award in 2008 for his book the White Tiger has recorded the voice of the voiceless in a powerful manner. His Second work between the Assassinations highlights the Quest for Identity that exists in so many people. His third work Last Man in Tower depicts the war between the rich and the poor and there is no room for sentiments. This study presents the various aspects of Adiga's novels with the aim of creating awareness amongst the people. Adiga does not intend to either condemn or applaud the good or the bad but rather present the stark reality that exists. Modern India which has received much Type for its various developmental schemes and achievements has done nothing much to represent the invisible man. This study explicates the sufferings of the poor and the various other social issues of modern India that are palpable but remain unnoticed. Aravind Adiga has been instrumental in bringing these issues to the lime light.

This paper present the novel Last Man in Tower focuses on light and dark India, but in a different manner and in a different society. The story revolves round the lives of the people who live in Vishram Society Tower A and B. The White Tiger comprises of seven mornings and nights, while the narrative of Last Man in Tower begins on 11th May and ends on 25th December. As far as Vishram Society is concerned, it is not only the outside which lacks colour. There has been water leakage within the houses due to which the walls have become stained. There is much to say regarding the people who live there. The Vishram society consists of many old people and Surprisingly young people too. Young executives who have got their jobs in the nearby Bandra – Kurla financial complex, live in Vishram society with their family. Vishram is a mini India where one can find secularism. In spite of these problems, the people who live there never complained about any of these problems. They have their own enjoyment. In short, they are a group of friendly people who are good Samaritans. Into this Garden of Eden enters Satan in the name of Dharmen Shah, a property developer who plans to buy the entire Vishram Society. Initially, Dharmen Shah sends his man Shanmugam to find out various details about the Vishram Society. One can say that the peacefulness has vanished from the day Dharmen Shah expresses his wish. Shah is ready to provide the owners of Vishram Society, flats, a generous amount and if they resist, he is ready to

pay more. His intention is to demolish the entire Vishram society and build luxury and deluxe apartments. As expected, the residents are more than willing except one.

1. INTRODUCTION

In this paper Aravind Adiga targets the middle class people. The cosmopolitan city Mumbai suits his purpose where the real estate business is at its peak. Old and demolished buildings are bought by the builders who build deluxe apartments for the rich. It is a bargain where the builders and the affluent people are benefited, whereas it is a loss for the middle class for whom accommodation poses a huge problem. Renting a house will consume at least half of their income. It is in this scenario Shah's proposal came out of the blue. Initially, everyone welcomed it except four families. Gradually comes a dividing line which was hitherto absent. All the residents on one side, on the other, the four families who nurture a staunch belief that the builders will not give the assured amount which they have offered. But, for Masterji, one among the four, it is a different story. The readers can give many reasons. Adiga has left it to the choice of the readers.

Masterji has been deprived of his daughter and wife by God in this house. Every single article and every nook and corner of the house remind him of their presence. He feels at ease when he lives in the house and leaving permanently is absolutely not possible for him. This is one such view. The other three families' do not have sentimental value. It so happens that all the residents have become one and finally have gone to the extent of killing Masterji and have framed the incident as though he has committed suicide by jumping from the terrace unable to tolerate the mental agony of being separated from his wife and daughter. In *Last Man in Tower*, Adiga exposes the middle class mentality-their narrow mindedness, their regional prejudices and above all their indifference to the injustice done to the poor. *The White Tiger* enables the readers to glimpse a gulf between the rich and the poor, while *Last Man in Tower* focuses on the fight between the rich and the middle class. In Mumbai, the middle class is the target of the real estate developers. The poor yielded to them easily, but the middle class surrenders after a long struggle. The middle class is defined as occupying a position in the middle of the socioeconomic scale. They have high class or rich on one side and on the other the poor or the working class. The person who first used the term middle class was James Bradshaw in 1745 in a pamphlet called *Scheme to prevent running Irish wools to France*. The term Middle Class has come into vogue in India in the nineteenth century, especially during the British Rule. Middle Class is an umbrella term which encompasses many concepts. In three urban centres, which are called cosmopolitan cities, there emerged a group of people who are called the middle class. The number grows with the growth and development of the Indian economy which is the result of Independence in 1947. There seems to be a huge expansion of this class with the advent of globalization.

Last Man in Tower reflects the Campa Cola issue but the logic is different. In *Last Man in Tower* Dharmen wanted to build a luxury apartment after demolishing the Vishram Society, in Campa Cola Compound, an apartment complex in the Southern part of Worli in south Mumbai, stands tall though the construction beyond five floors is illegal. The Camp Cola Compound was constructed in

a Land leased to m/s Pure Drink Limited in 1955 which was permitted by Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (B.M.C) in 1980 to develop it for residential purposes. Pure Drinks Limited in collaboration with builders, B.K. Gupta, Yusuf Patel and P.S. B Construction went ahead and erected seven buildings in the Campa Cola Campus and these building ranged between 17 and 20 storeys each. Notices were issued by the authorities to the builders when the construction was in progress, ordering them to stop work. They did not have the required permits to build such skyscrapers. The builders were fined by the authorities but they remained undeterred. They paid the penalty and went ahead and resumed construction work. The apartments were sold and on completion of the buildings, the buyers occupied the apartments. The authorities failed to prevent the apartment owners from occupying their property. Soon Co-operative housing societies were formed and 230 families resided in this campus. They continue to reside there for over 25 years. The society has seven buildings namely: Midtown Apartment, Orchid Tower, Patel Apartment 7A and 7B, Esha Ekta Apartment by Apartments and Shubh Apartment. On 31 May 2014, the Supreme Court ordered the residents of Campa Cola Society to pack up and vacate their apartments in a fashion similar to Dharmen Shah's order in Last Man in Tower. Supreme Court's order to demolish the illegal floors of the building in Worli's Campa Cola Compound made people across the city to feel a fraction of the resident's shock says Pronoti Datta, *Times of India* reporter, in her article *Lessons From the Campa Cola Case*. Even though millions of people in India live in illegal buildings the Campa Cola issue could be a quirk of circumstances. Not many may face a similar tragedy but what is needed of course is, the government should have an effective means to keep track of building plans and permission.

Many residents expressed their pain, confusion, and helplessness at how the civic body had allowed the builders to escape scot free "It was the builder who hid facts from us for a long time. He would only keep assuring us that he would get the structures regularized. Look at the irony now. He stands to gain when we are vacated," said 49-years old Rajeev Chawla – a resident at the Campa Cola Campus (Deshpande). The resident alleged that the civic body was looking forward to vacate the campus as they had vested private interest. Mr. Sacheti, yet another resident said, "Krishna developers which has brought over the rights from Pure Drinks, wants to construct a five star hotel here...that builder wants a stretch of our land to construct a good approach road" (Deshpande). The label middle class has been used in the novel and thus it becomes imperative to identify people who come under this term. It is possible to know only about their economic status. But as far as their vision, goal, their way of thinking and reacting to a particular situation it remains a mystery. While in some countries, the term middle class depends on the basis of one's income, in other countries it is based on lifestyle. In other words, it depends on how much they are capable of spending. Yet in some other countries, the state of the mind of the people is taken into account. Here it is a dilemma whether one's education is taken into account or not. It is a known factor that people earn more with little education, whereas people who have a fairly good educational background have a job in which they find it difficult to make both ends meet. Hence it is difficult to tell if it is based on the income of a person. According to National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER), India's middle class population is 267 million and it would be doubled in the years to come the label middle class has been used in the novel and thus it becomes imperative to identify people who come under this term. It is possible to know only about their economic status. But as far as their vision, goal, their way of thinking and reacting to a particular

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The land values are soaring high due to globalization and economic development. In this scenario, buying a property has almost become a nightmare for the middle class people. As far as the rich is concerned, it is a very good business which will yield those millions. In order to achieve this, the real estate people are ready to go to any extent for achieving the goal. It is violence and not values which seem to be the watchword of their world. Adiga in an interview says:

The novel usually evolves out of something I've seen or read, Last Man in Tower began when I read an article in the Times of India in early 2007, describing a redevelopment offer by a builder, opposed by one old man in the building. I went to the building and spoke to some of the residents... I was looking for an exciting plot that would let me tell a story about Mumbai." Last Man In Tower unfolds like a drama before the eyes of the readers – a drama where the plot, characters and the complication are indicated in Book One itself. The backdrop of the novel is Mumbai, one of the cosmopolitan cities and the entire action takes place in a building called Vishram Society, which is in Vakola consisting of "one-fourth of the city's slums" (LMT 3). The building was built in the second half of the 1950s and it has been the only registered Co-Operative Society among the other buildings in that locality. While Tower A was constructed in the 1950s, Tower B was in 1970s. Though Tower B was the latest among the two, the recognition was given to Tower A which stands in the middle. This "grandmotherly building is spoken of with reverence throughout the neighbourhood" (LMT 4).

Adiga describes the outward appearance of the Vishram Society in the following words: "After more than four decades of monsoons, erosion, wind weathering, air pollution, and the gentle but continual vibrations caused by the low flying planes, Tower A stands in reasonable chance of complete collapse in the next monsoon" (LMT 9). While the outside looks like this, the inside is no better. The residents do not have water supply all the twenty four hours. Water comes from the tap only for two hours in the morning and in the evening between 7.30 pm to 9.00pm. The people in the Vishram Society, no doubt, have storage tanks but they do not have a greater capacity since it will affect the building itself. Hence they see to it that they do all the routine works like washing, bathing and cooking between 5pm to 7.30pm. Apart from this, the residents of Vishram Society face yet another problem. It may be amusing for the readers, but it is a fact, as the house has become very old. The residents can hear what is happening in the flats above them and next to them as the walls have become very thin: For the past three decades, the residents of Vishram Society 3A (Murthy) and 2A(Pinto) had been four people with one set of sleeping habits. If one couple went to bed early the other couple turned off their television and went to bed. If one couple chose to

sing along to Lata Mangeshkar late into the night the other couple also sang along to Lata Mangeshkar late into the night. (LMT 75)

The current deadline for the demolition ends soon. There have been multiple such deadlines before which have been extended. Some of the residents have left while others like the stubborn Masterji in *Last man in Tower* have stayed and are still bravely fighting it out till the end. The municipal authorities will first switch off electricity and water supply to the flats slated to be demolished. They will then move in with hammers and other demolition equipment. While the nation watches voyeuristically on television there is no surety whether people will have the mixed feeling of sadness and satisfaction or whether the sight of perfectly normal houses belonging to middle-people being torn down would bring a tinge of sorrow? What thought will cross the minds of the labourers many of whom reside in slums as they actually wield the hammer to break the walls? Will it be just another job that they are used to doing or will they also face a duality of feeling? And will that duality be regret and revenge?

2. CONCLUSION

To find a solution to all these problems Adiga has given a Novel like Last Man in Tower so that readers can think and react against this kind of issue and make the citizens living in the darker side of India to move over to the lighter shade of Independent India. Once the residents of Vishram Society happened to have a glimpse of their negative side, they no longer bothered to pretend, but showed their real colour as well as claws. There does not seem to be any values. The readers are unable to digest this kind of behaviour, especially from the middle class. Usually the middle class, it is said, are the blessed ones, because they are not exposed or tempted to the evils like the rich and the poor. While the rich and the poor dared to do crime without any guilt, the middle class is always protected. They may suffer financially, but ultimately they will be saved. One finds in the two novels the rich and the poor do not hesitate to do anything. But when the middle class in *Last Man in Tower* resorted to violence, it is difficult to digest. If people are going to kill each other to climb the ladder, then a big question arises regarding culture, morals, values, etc. In short the readers arrive at a conclusion that the middle class in Last Man in Tower has turned into Mafia.

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