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## **Capturing the Chaotic Canvas: A study of Post-millennial entropic Urban India through Aravind Adiga's *Last Man in Tower***

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**Abstract:** The paper tries to critically analyze the changing scenario of the Indian society in contemporary time and how the field of literature is being influenced by the current situation. Post-millennial Indian English writings clearly indicates that a plethora of new forms, genres and contents have emerged where everyday life, changing lifestyle, multiple opportunities, urbanization, complex relationships, conflicting ideologies etc. forms the core subject. The paper investigates the chaotic state of urban India, evils of real estate, ambiguities and complexities of the ambitious middle class, their conflicting ideologies, aspirations, consumption habits and sense of belonging in the twenty first century consumer India through a critical study of Aravind Adiga's *Last Man in Tower*.

**Keywords:** Urbanization, post-millennial, chaos, ambition, conflict.

Rapid changing socio-political scenario and the storm of global economics, that has hit India of late, has affected the dynamics of India significantly and the field of literature is not deprived of its touch as it is reflected in the contemporary Indian writing in English. Although the growth of Indian economy has been at snail's pace in the last decade of the previous century after the Indian economy was liberalized, it has taken full flight in the new millennium and it has influenced the day-to-life of Indian citizen. The employment opportunity has been on the up ever since the communication innovation has made information readily available and gave greater access to International contacts. The mushrooming of multinational companies and the rapid growth of electronic media has also played its part in the formation of huge potential for the employment which led to the mass migration from rural to urban places. The result is very much apparent in the way the Indian middle class is growing with greater ambition of consumption, and the consumer culture of



the age is ready to provide them with alluring lifestyle and glamorous leisure sites which put dreams and desires in the eyes of the consumer and ‘generate direct bodily excitement and aesthetic pleasures’ (Featherstone 13). Globalized Indian middle class of the twenty first century is far removed from the Indian middle class of the last century; ‘globalised capitalism, in particular since the new millennium, has produced a large and heterogeneous middle class that is distinctly different from the “old” middle class’ (Brosius 2). Economic progress, technological boom and fast changing socio-political scenario has inevitably influenced the Indian English literature in the forms of the rise of new form, content and genre. Aspiring young generation of the globalized India considers English as a ladder for ‘global opportunities’ (Sen and Roy 13) and that is why English readership has been skyrocketed in the contemporary time. The new millennium has been exciting for Indian English literature for it ‘demonstrates new departures in writing in English, often in genre, form and voice...’ (Varughese 15). Everyday life, changing lifestyle, multiple opportunities, urbanization, complex relationship, conflicting ideologies etc. forms the core subject of the contemporary writings. Indian English literature has carved a niche by establishing an identity in the world literature and moved forward from the postcolonial writing which dominated the Indian English writing in the 1980s and 1990s. India is “writing anew” in place of “writing back” (Sen and Roy 14) in the twenty first century. Aravind Adiga’s *Last Man in Tower* is one such piece of literature which talks about the chaotic state of urban India, evils of real estate, ambiguities and complexities of the ambitious middle class, their conflicting ideologies, aspirations, consumption habits and sense of belonging in the twenty first century consumer India.

Adiga in *Last Man in Tower* portrays a true picture of multiculturalism in urban India whose sprawling suburbs are spreading like wild fire in all directions because of the heavy inflow of population migrating into the city from all parts of the country. The novel sets in the twenty first century Mumbai and the storyline revolves around Vishram society’s Tower A in Vakola which is situated in Santa Cruz (east). The residents of the society are from



different parts of India, some from east, some from south India, and they found themselves together in the society for their occupation. Adiga beautifully penned down how the residents, who migrated from other places, pride themselves with a sense of belonging in the city by pointing others who are moving into it in the present situation. Mrs. Puri, a resident of the society, is promptly reminded by Mrs Rego, another resident of the society, that she herself was from Delhi; “And did you drop to Bombay from heaven, Mrs Puri? Isn’t your family from Delhi?” (Adiga 39). when Mrs Puri tried to question the new migrated people; “Too many people come into the city, it’s a fact” (39). Mrs Rego speaks out a truth about the city in urban India like sage shares wisdom “Without migrants, this city would be dust” (39). The residents bear the testimony of being cosmopolitan by residing and mixing together without any hullabaloo regarding their race and religion. The door of the Flat 3B reveals how it has been used as an altar over the ages by the residents of different religion without removing the traces of other deities. Adiga mentions at the beginning of the novel that

...the building was originally meant for Roman Catholics. Hindus were admitted in the late 1960s and in the 1980s the better kind of Muslim- Bohra, Ismaili, college-educated. Vishram is now entirely ‘cosmopolitan’. (Adiga 5)

Nuclear family system is in the process of dilution in the globalized urban India of twenty first century. People are career oriented and so busy with their occupation that they don’t think twice before moving out of their ancestral or parental house to make their life easier. Masterji’s son Gaurav does not live with his parents even if he works in Mumbai. Since he has been offered accommodation by his employer he has “migrated to the golden citadel of inner-city Bombay” (30). Another resident of the society Mr. Hiranandani has also moved into Khar West which is considered to be ‘a better neighborhood’ (22) since he has been prospering in his business and could afford a better accommodation.

India in the new millennium has made a rapid progress in economy and technology. An Indian is to be found well placed and leading many big companies in all parts of the



world. India's current generation is utterly swayed by the western influence, and their ideological stance and lifestyle is always at loggerhead with the old generation which has always eyed the foreign influence on India on a negative note. Old Generation is still in the mode of nostalgia and any deviation from their ideology meets with scathing criticism. In the novel the librarian is to be seen lamenting in front of Masterji; 'Remember when we were young. We had to walk to school every morning. Study by candlelight during exam-time. Now the computers do their work for them' (Adiga 23). Later in the market Masterji bemoans 'Boys were hard-working in the old days. I wonder where those days have gone....' (125), In the age of globalization and consumer culture India's middle class also is growing at breakneck speed, and their ambition to go higher up in the hierarchy and consumption habit is changing their taste and lifestyle. Radhakrishnan very beautifully points out stark difference between the old middle class and new of contemporary India;

In the earlier Nehruvian model of Indian nation building, the "old" middle class was made up of government workers who served the nation by working for it. In a globalized model of the Indian nation, the middle class engages in a global economy of work and consumption, serving the nation by, ironically enough, directing itself away from it. (Radhakrishnan 42)

Radhakrishnan's observation is aptly reflected by Adiga in the novel when he describes the type of residents that occupies the two towers of the Vishram society; 'Tower B is modern. Finance, high-tech, computers. Tower A is old. Teachers, accountants, brokers' (Adiga 57). The close analysis of the novel reveals the changing attitude of the women too. All the women characters in tower B are housewives except the resident of 3B which is occupied by Ms Meenakshi who is twenty five years old which clearly makes her belong to the new generation, and works as a journalist. Since the housewives do not have to go out for work, basically they are bored doing the same work every day. They are always interested what is going on in others' lives and their eyes and ears made sure 'there was no privacy in the building' (21). Adiga did not leave any stones unturned to make the status of middle class



apparent of the building and its residents. He goes on to describe the building and its occupants in a hilarious manner:

Vishram is a building like the old people living in it, middle class to its core. Improvement or failure, it is incapable of either extremity. The men have modest paunches, wear checked polyester shirts over white *baniyans*, and keep their hair oiled and short. The older women wear saris, salwar cameez, or skirts, and the younger ones wear jeans. (Adiga 9)

The difference of lifestyle and complicated mindset among the residents is also taken up for discussion by Adiga since the social dynamics of India is changing fast in post millennium India. Young single woman Ms Meenakshi is a hot topic of discussion in the society because she works at various times of day and night, she comes back late at night and her boyfriend visits her at times. Having noticed that the lights are off in Meenakshi's flat Mrs Puri has only staunch criticism to offer, 'young people of that lifestyle are never home before ten' (26), and she gets very excited while sharing the information of 'what had been found in her rubbish by the early-morning cat' (26), and she lays even harsher criticism on them 'Those people are known for their number two activities' (26). Consumer culture plays a big role in shaping the lifestyle and perception of modern India. The new generation is highly influenced by western way of living. Their habits and tastes, their approach to the daily life, attitude towards relationships, choice of partners, holiday destinations, and cars pose a threat to the long held ideologies of the old generation. Young Meenakshi's modern lifestyle and the visit of her boyfriend do not go well with traditional Mrs Puri, and a heavy lambaste is thundered upon the new generation;

Among young people today, it is a common thing for boy and girl to live without marriage. At the end, one says to the other, you go your way, I go my way. There is no shame in the modern way of life... (Adiga 22)



Masterji advises Mrs Puri to be flexible in her thought because he understands that the mindset of modern India is also in the process of transformation along with the social landscape, and reminded Mrs Puri that she would not have been allowed to reside in the Vishram society in the first place had the society not been flexible enough having started its journey as a resident of the Roman Catholics;

When this building first came up, there were no Hindus allowed here. It is a fact. Then there were meant to be no Muslims, it is a fact. All proved to be good people when give a chance. Now, young people, unmarried girls, they should also be given a chance. (Adiga 26)

The growing middle class in globalized urban India and their ambition to go up the ladder in hierarchy, their ambiguities and complexities has been dealt with finesse in this novel. The ambition of the Residents of the Vishram society and the ambition of the real estate builder Dharmen Shah forms the crux of the novel. When the rehabilitation offer was made almost all the residents were preoccupied with the thought of big dreams and they considered the offer to be a miracle. Most of them desire to move to a better place from the old fashioned building. The first reaction of the secretary Kothari in Ajwani's office 'All your dreams are about to come true, Ajwani' (73), Mrs Puri dreams of spending sixty-five lakhs for a flat and rest of the money he is planning to save for Ramu's future. Mrs Saldana aspires to send her daughter Radhika to Syracuse University in New York to study Journalism with the money whereas Masterji's son Gaurav and daughter-in-law Sonal started planning several things even before Masterji made his mind. All of their ambitions and aspirations depended on the decision taken by Masterji. So, when Masterji thought of otherwise, they could not let their dreams slip off for one person. The drive for their ambition and bribe offered by the Dharmen Shah turned people against each other. Ajwani, Mrs Puri, Ibrahim Kudwa and several others started conspiring against Masterji where many tricks and politics are seen to be played in the Vishram society even though at the beginning of the novel Masterji is seen to be garnering utmost respect from the residents for years of his good work. In the present



situation everyone's anger towards him prompts him to think 'they treat me like they would treat an untouchable in the old days' (217). At the end even Masterji's son turned his back against him. Masterji ended up losing his life by the hands of greed and ambition of the middle class. Dharmen Shah's bloodthirsty ambition and deadly competition with J. J. Chacko reveals the bitter truth about what goes on in the real estate business in the metropolitan cities and how corruption and crime reigns supreme at the heart of the city while the common man receives inhuman treatment. Dharmen Shah utterly refuses doctor's advice of taking rest against aggravating his health because his competitor Chacko was expanding real estate business in his territory, 'how can I take holiday when J.J. Chacko doesn't? Does his doctor tell him to slow down?' (54). He is ready to go to any extreme to come out on top in this dangerous game. He bribes policeman, he bribes Kothari, Ajwani and Mrs Rego in the process of acquiring the possession of the Vishram society. He plays all kinds of dirty politics to quench his thirst of greed and fulfill his aspiration of coming out on top of his business.

The meteoric advancement of technology and better communication system has led to the rise of media houses in plentitude in post millennium India. Although they are doing commendable job they have a propensity to sensationalize the matter and even alleged to have created fake story or make the incidents fabricated most of the times for cheap publicity. Masterji 'wrote three letters to English-language newspapers and two to Hindi newspapers' (Adiga 246) including one of his student Noronha who works in Times newspaper but to no avail as no one thought it to be bringing any extra mileage to the big media houses like them. The hopelessness and frustrations are utterly visible in masterji's tone when he asks for Gaurav's help, 'My last hope is Noronha. At the Times. I've written letter after letter, and he won't write back. If there's some way to reach him, son...' (286). The intention of the big media houses is pretty clear that they are not interested in any stories; they are more interested whether the story at hand can satisfy their ambition by bringing more reputation and doing publicity of the company, whereas the tabloids are interested in any stories to publish by fabricating to sensationalize the matter for cheap publicity to come to the fore in





their line of business. Meenakshi's boyfriend, who works for a tabloid, gets excited and lets out a loud shout at the knowledge of what is going on in the Vishram society and Meenakshi advises Masterji at her boyfriend's insistence to sell the story to the tabloid, 'go to the papers. Tell them your story' (Adiga 312). Upon learning the information that masterji has already approached Noronha at Times she plays her part of trickery;

'Not the *pucca* papers. A tabloid. My boyfriend works for the Sun, Masterji- the one you....' She smiled. 'I told him what is happening here, and he said at once: "It's a story!" He'll interview you. The paper will run your photo. You'll become famous. People will follow you on Facebook'. (312)

Masterji is bewildered and astonished at the fabricated news of the story which has been published without his permission and knowledge at the tabloid. The same treatment is meted out by the Law firm Parekh and Sons towards masterji. Having approached by Masterji the Law firm did everything they could do to increase their credibility. The conversation between the guards of the society reveals that the fact if Masterji is a good man or bad is decided by the baksheesh the Masterji gives to them; "But is this Masterji of yours a good man or a bad one? Another guard asked. 'Does he give good baksheesh?'" (313)

Adiga has captured the chaotic state of the postmillennial urban India in the pages of *Last Man in Tower* like a painter pictures his work on a canvas. From the survival of the lower middle class in the age of rat race to the inner struggle of the growing middle class to rise above their present state of being, the novel is a fitting testament that the ambition to achieve desired goal by hook or by crook to maintain the prestige has been the major driving force behind the utter disillusionment and great pandemonium in the Modern India. Greed, envy, intolerance, compassion, lack of flexibility in thought, treachery, betrayal all these vices have replaced the traditional value system, and contemporary metro cities are turning into factories of corruption. There is no such place for good human beings like Masterji who wish to live a peaceful life by holding on to his nostalgia and sweet memories. In the present



scenario if one has survive he must have to resort to malpractices as Ajwani, Kudwa, Mrs Puri etc. did or have to compromise before evil forces as Mrs. Rego did in front of Dharmen Shah. Rapid urbanization, construction of skyscrapers, foreign lifestyle, emerging consumer culture is making People more individualistic and self- oriented. People's hearts are becoming concretes like the jungle of concrete we live in where there is no soft spot, no compassion, and no place for harmony. A big void of emotional crisis is pervading the society and the chaos is making everyone restless and sleepless. Relationships are falling apart, Insanity germinates, crime and corruption reigns; our society in the new millennium is staring down on a gaping hole.

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