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**APARTMENT PSYCHOLOGY AND CHANGING HUMAN VALUES  
WITH REFERENCE TO ARAVIND ADIGA'S LAST MAN IN  
TOWER**

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**Abstract:**

Aravind Adiga has become the foremost chronicler of Indian life. Adiga's concerns

And concepts are closer to that of Dickens's. Their central theme is the same. Both ask a simple question: in a world of rapid progress—economic, industrial, and arguably social – what are we leaving behind? In both the writers there is a profound love for the good in people and an awareness and understanding of the bad too. In Indian context he can be compared with Rohinton Mistry as both deal with social issues in melodramatic mode. The novel under study the *Last Man in Tower* shows Bombay as its locale and is about land mafia and real estate, a business that is thriving in all metropolitan cities. Adiga has not only captured the colours the smells, the density and variety of human mass that makes up India, but also the human frailties, superficial neighborliness selfishness, pettiness greed, lust, desperation and fear of people.

Underneath every old building that is brought down and replaced by a new one, there remain dissenting voices that are either coerced into submission or forced into silence. Aravind Adiga's second book *Last Man in Tower* deals with this theme and shows how in matters of real estate, when big money is offered one has to part with property, and accept it or be forced into accepting it. There is no choice except to accept the offer. The theme of Adiga's book is not new. There have been films made on it and probably books written. The relevance of this issue becomes a topic in big towns of today's India where often Foreign or illegal money is pumped into big real estate projects,

My Paper deals with the clash in between good and bad, Mr. Yogesh Murthy and Dharmen Shah represents the both qualities in the novel. And also how money and mafia suppress the good in the people.

**Keywords:** Money, Mafia, Real Estate, Apartment Psychology Poverty, Pollution, Monopoly.

## **Introduction**

Aravind Adiga was born to Dr. Madhava Adiga and Usha Adiga on 23<sup>rd</sup> October 1974, in Chennai. Initially he studied in Mangalore. After migrating to Sydney, Australia, with his family, he studied at James Ruse Agricultural School. After a stint in USA, Adiga returned to India, Joined Times and got himself acquainted with the trends in Indian society. The urge for original writing in him was so strong that he left the job in 2006 and became a freelance writer. He got immediate success with his debut novel. *The White Tiger* winning for him the glory of some prestigious awards. A collection of short stories entitled *Between the Assassination* was published in 2008 and *Last Man in Tower* (2011), selection day (2016) Amnesty published in (2020), is a novel about an undocumented Sri Lankan immigrant living in Australia. It was short listed for the 2021 Miles Franklin Award. His articles on politics, business and the arts have appeared in international papers and magazines like *Time*, *The Financial Times*, and *The Sunday Times*.

The novel under study *Last Man in Tower* shows Bombay as its locale and is about land mafia and real estate, a business that is thriving in all metropolitan cities. Adiga has not only captured the colours, the smells, the density and variety of human mass that makes up India, but also the human frailties, superficial neighborliness selfishness, pettiness greed, lust, desperation and fear of people. Aravind Adiga's book *Last Man in Tower* deals with this theme and shows how in matters of real estate, when big money is offered one has part with property, and accept it or be forced into accepting it. There is no choice except to accept the offer. The theme of Adiga's book is not new. There have been films made on it and probably books written. The relevance of this issue becomes a topic in big towns of today's India where often Foreign or illegal money is pumped into big real estate projects.

## **Yogesh Murthy and Dharmen shah – Opposing Characters**

In *Last Man in Tower*. Dharmen Shah, a wealthy developer approaches the inhabitants of a block of flats (Vishram Society A) in Mumbai; they are middle class, middle aged, emphatically nice people. He makes them an offer 1.52crore rupees-around dollars 330,000 per family – for each of their flats. It's well over twice what the flats are worth, enough to set inhabitants up for the rest of their lives, and there is only one condition: Since the building stated for destruction, everyone must accept the offer. If only one refuses, no one benefits. 'Money makes many things'. It can make the relations or break the relations. The novel *Last Man In Tower* by Aravind Adiga brings out the apartment psychology and tells the story of struggle for a slice of Mumbai real estate, bringing out the socio-political issues to the limelight. It is suspense filled story of money and power, luxury and deprivations, a rich tapestry peopled by unforgettable characters not least of Mumbai itself. *Last Man In Tower*

opens up the minds of great city – ordinary people pushed to their limits in a place that knows none. It is a novel of reminiscence (underneath \_ every old building).

Yogesh Murthy and Dharman Shah, who oppose each other by profession and qualities. But they have a similar kind of past. Murthy has come to Mumbai at the age of sixteen of his father's death. Shah too has come to Mumbai at the same age being deprived of his father's love. This way both face dislocation from their native land, and are relocated in to the city of Mumbai. *Last Man In Tower* is the one which deals with real estate and mafia. It is a simple set up, which shows Adiga's concern towards the society. Shah seems to be symbolic of the 'new Indian', a callous, unstintingly ambitious person who apparently arrives with bare feet. Whereas Murthy believes in community and corporation. He is a respectable retired teacher. The residents of Vishram Society are contended lot who have desired little more than respectable, comfortable life. They have lived together as a cooperative of decades. In spite of aero-planes fly narrowly passed it, sporadical availability of running water, the walls peeling and crumbling, they feel secure in their flats as the bonding of the community is strong. It is a symbol of community cooperation. Initially Vishram was built for Catholics, then gradually accepted Hindus and Muslims. The inhabitants know most of the details of each other's lives. They share duties and hold "parliaments" over what needs to be done. Adiga populates his building with people deserves thought. Among the people who live there, there is Sanjeev and Sangeeta Puri, a middle-aged Hindu couple whose 18 years old child suffers with Down's syndrome; Ramesh Ajwani, loving father of two children, a shifty estate agent and a stock broker. Among others there is Georgina Rego who is fondly called a "battleship" a social worker desperate to "trump" her well-off sister, and at the centre of the story, Yogesh Murthy or "masterji" a retired school teacher who having a lost his wife to illness and his daughter to accident, lives alone and passes his time playing with his Rubik's cube and offering extra lessons to the children of the residents.

#### **Problems Exposed in The Novel-**

The novel revolves round the Vishram society exploring their psychology, social issues like corruption, mafia, marriage and its attendant problems, 'live in relationships', showing the post modernistic way of living in a metropolitan city of Mumbai. It also deals with poverty, diseases and pollution in a different way. The issues highlighted in the novel are such that one cannot turn a blind eye to them. One such important issue is pollution.

Pollution in cities is different from that in the village. In this novel the writer speaks of pollution through Georgina Rego and Dr. Nayak.

South Mumbai has the Victoria Terminus and the Municipal building, but the suburbs, built later, have their own gothic style: every evening by six, pillars of hydro-benzene and sulphur dioxide rise high up from the roads, flying buttresses of nitrous dioxide join each other swirls of unburnt kerosene, mixed illegally into the diesel, like gargoyles, and a great root of carbon monoxide closes over the structure leaving people suffer with respiratory diseases. (p.174)

Shah, suffers from chronic bronchitis. He even does not care for it even after the advice of the doctor. Doctor Nayak says "leave Bombay. Atleast for a part of each year go to Himalayas, Simla or abroad. The one thing money can't buy here is clean air".(p.53).

The other glaring problem is dense population and slums in the closer vicinity of apartments which are illegal occupation. Vakola is attached to such slums. And this redevelopment is a threat to the slum dwellers, Mary the servant- maid of Vishram stays there. The precarious unsettled transitory lives they lead are portrayed in graphic description in the novel, exposing the dark side of the urban living. In spite of threat of inundation during monsoon, the slum dwellers compromise in their safety and prefer to continue to live there as illegal occupant's. People in the slums have come there after the last government amnesty for illegal slums. They also have a threat from flood during heavy rain. Due to this they are not granted with the identification cards which the regular slum dwellers have. But then on every threat someone's intervention is saving their huts. Other problems associated with overpopulation include the increased demand for resources such as fresh water and food, starvation and malnutrition, consumption of natural resources faster than rate of regeneration, and a deterioration in living condition. It is one of the major reasons for poverty and disease.

Poverty provokes many to opt for undignified means of living and one such is prostitution. Prostitution, a social evil, is a great drawback to a developing country. For a person like Shah it is not a social evil, it is service that a can buy. For him women are service providers devoid of feelings. Devoid of conscience or moral picking he openly resorts taking women to hotel rooms and enjoying them. This goes on till he built his own hotel Versova. He makes a ritual out of the illicit relationships with women. The moral degeneration reaches its highest as he ironically compares it with that of a religious ritual.

"Before every new project, like a religious ritual, he had to come here, to this flat, to which ever girl he was with that moment, Nannu or Smita or Roasia , to inhale her perfume, eat toast, watch the ocean, touch the golden fittings in the toilet. In the presence of luxury his capacity for violence was always heightened. (Pp.91-92).

Opulence leads to unethical practices. It is not the society comprises of people like Shah alone, there is Yogesh Murthy, the masterji who commands respect with his upright behavior and benevolent attitude. The austerity he maintains adds dignity to human conduct, marital disharmony is another angle that found placed in Adiga's novel. In a manner of fact manner he speaks of 'disputes' and 'live in relationships' as though it is also a way of life in cosmopolitan culture with its emphasis on convenience. The attitude is a mocking reflection on the institution of marriage which is founded on 'Dharma', the Hindu code of right conduct or a kind of way of life in contemporary India which takes pride in imitation of the west.

Mrs. Georgina Rego the 'battleship' stand as an example for , marital discard and Miss Meenakshi for 'live in' relationship. Both become cause of concern for other occupants of the building who have had their wards to take care of. Mrs. Rego, daughter of a reputed doctor marries a man of her father's choice, a Catholic, working in accompany who deserts Mrs. Rego for a woman of his choice, blaming Mrs. Rego that she is not compatible wife for him. Along with him the property she owns to goes, leaving her helpless and in an objure condition bare handed, with a responsibility to take care of her two children. This becomes the vulnerable point for Shah to cash on her necessity and make her yield to the pressure tactics in accepting to sell the flat. In the instance of Miss. Meenakshi it is a different story. Miss Meenakshi is a journalist by profession an unmarried woman having a boyfriend who visits her often. The relationship becomes point of debate among the residents. The observation that Adiga makes here is the live in relationships are due to the desire of the people to kick away loneliness from their lives and sharing responsibilities outside the institution of marriage which they feel is a threat of their freedom and independence. When condoms were found in the dustbin or when they come tumbling down on to the door steps of others, vehement voices protest especially Mrs. Puri, Meenakshi decides to part with flat for the handsome offer proposed by Shah. The whole incident highlights the point that in the apartment culture there is no privacy and one cannot afford to have secrecy even in dustbins.

The story of Mr. and Mrs. Sanjeev Puri has it bearing on the disability factor of their only son Ramu who is a teenager with down syndrome. Mrs. Puri is very much worried about her son Ramu. She always complains of the behavior of Miss. Meenakshi. Probably the disappointment back at home might be the reason for her to be vociferous about the moral standing of Miss. Meenakshi. However she decides to sell her flat to provide better care and comfort to her son. It is the age factors that prevent Mr. and Mrs. Shelly, living in one of the flats of Vishram society say no to the offer extended by Shah initially. Later on they yield to the pressure tactics of Shah

when he gets Mr. Pinto beaten up by boys engaged by Mr. Shanmugam who is Shah's emissary to strike the deal with the residents to get the flat vacated. This makes the old couple accept the offer given by Shah.

It may be personal needs that prompted them to sell their flats to Shah but there is an undercurrent of fear and anxiety that prevails in the lives of all the residents as they are conditioned by instances of forceful parting with the properties that they have witnessed. Adiga mentioned two different types of Mafia. 'One is 'card mafia' and the other is the mafia of the builders. There is one thing common though these two are different in their operation, that is monopoly of the situation. One monopolizes time and space in local trains causing inconvenience, to the passengers during peak hours by a group playing cards occupying sitting space during entire run of the journey. The underworld shadows the lives of the people to the extent that it becomes part and parcel of their day of day living. The other 'mafia is that of that builders' which is very subtle in dislocating people.

#### **Vishram Society - A Symbol of Community Living-**

The residents of Vishram society, a block of flats in the East of Mumbai, live in harmony. Their tower block, tower A, may be soggy and at risk of collapse when the monsoon comes, but it is 'absolutely, unimpeachably pucca'. In a questionable neighborhood, 'surrounded by slums and right under the roaring flight path of the nearby airport, Vishram is "anchored like a dreadnought of middle-class respectability". To the outside world and in general perception the residents are putting up with the inconveniences that are there in their flats, A general feature of Mumbai. Though life shabby, dirty and damp, it is kind and co-operative, for the residents convene a daily 'parliament', a circle of plastic chairs where they sit together to wait for the evening water to come on. They look out for each other, they gossip, hilariously, and together they watch the only television on the building in Mrs. Saldanha's house through a crack in the curtain of the flat on the ground floor. A glimpse of 'slice of life' of flat culture speaks of transition that has happened in the life styles of people who have had started filling their lives with inessential activities instead of living.

#### **Dharmen Shah An Anti-Social Element -**

Into this civilized existence comes property developer Dharmen Shah who wants to knock down their tower and build luxury apartments. He offers enormous amount of money for each flat. Some refuse initially but as each gives into the developer's offer, "the last man" to hold out is an elderly widower, retired teacher, Mr. Yogesh Murthy, 'Masterji'. People who deny the offer initially include Masterji, Pintos and Mrs. Rego for three different reasons. Shah initially sends his "left-hand man" (p.128). Shanmugam to the Vishram for an enquiry. It is an interaction of different nature where in the conversation revolves around legal settlements, murders,

suicide and assaults. He also asks about things which give bad luck or negative energy in the vastu sense. The secretary of the residents association stands firm in his denial of the proposal.

Adiga here introduces the touts, henchmen and others like Shanmugham who is referred to as “left hand man” who can do anything unlawful with the support of people like Shah. He has no title, no role to play in the development of projects, not even a business card but can do all the things that the right hand cannot do. Contact police, paying money to politicians and breaking someone’s knuckles if needed. Though people of this kind have no power, they wield power of their masters like Shah. Shah has police under his control and he knows well, political loopholes.

Shah’s life is testimony to the growing corrupt practices and the thinking of the modern India. Success is the objective and goal and means can be dubious for him. With this view he targets ‘Vishram Society and manages to win tower B which is in dilapidated condition and fails in his attempt to convince tower A residents to part with their flats. It is community living that bonds the residents. For them it is a registered co-operative society. Not a jungle. Of all the people who reside in the society it is only Masterji that stands firm denying Shah’s offer. He has his own personal reasons for not living the building. The memories of his late wife and daughter who have lived with him during the best days of his life prevent him to vacate the flat and relocate. A man who can adopt himself to any adverse situations and contexts fails to see the risk involved in saying no to Shah. The reminisces of wife Purnima and the sketches of daughter that predominate his mind and soul, that he fails to understand the logic and rationale behind other resident’s needs.

#### **Money Makes Many Things –**

Mrs. Puri needs money for her son’s medical attention. Mrs. Saldhanha, one who avoided meetings all her life needs money to make her daughter study journalism at Syracuse University, Mr. Pinto who initially says ‘I will not betray him for US dollars’ accepts the offer, Mrs. Rego in order to trump her sister who lives in the old Mumbai married to a Jew agrees to the offer, and Ibrahim Khudwa, cyber-café owner, all accept for different reasons.

It is Yogesh Murthy, the retired teacher becomes the *Last Man In Tower* not accepting the offer. He gets isolated and the respectability that he commands still then gets bared and life becomes miserable for him.

He has been kept in a boycott situation and he has been accused of many worst things by the whole society, like, that he took classes which are far beyond the strict requirements of syllabus and don’t appear in question papers. That he has never given a rupee of ‘baksheesh’ for Deepawali, Christmas or Eid. And had no TV of his

own and every evening he would sit in front of Mrs. Saldanha's house and block all others' views. The humiliation is to that extent, he starts feeling They treat me like they would treat an untouchable in the old days, he thought: even at the thought of his shadow, falling on them, his neighbours cringed and withdrew" (p.217)

"Different persons at different times, threatening him-"Act your age-old man. Grow up. Take the money and leave before something bad happens". (p.233). But even this has not changed him a little. Adiga analyses the situation vividly pointing out the what ought to happen and what is happening. All those who are with him like the Pinto's too become victims of Shah's criminal initiatives. It is made to understand that there are administrative structures in existence as per law in India but most of them are non-functional in post independent India. MOFA ACT (Maharashtra ownership of flats Act) too fails to rise to the occasion as land mafia gains supremacy over government agencies.

The result is searching for loopholes in the Act to make masterji agree to their proposal. As per the Act 1960 a member may be expelled from the flats on moral grounds come handy for the touts and with allegation, has used his flat for immoral purposes or misused it for illegal purposes habitually. On these grounds, it was proposed by Mr. Ajwani that Yogesh Murthy, of 3A (formerly known as 'Masterji') be expelled from the Society; as he has not paid his dues with regularity, and has engaged on questionable, and immoral activities within his promises.(p.274)

Murthy experiences when his own son Gaurav joins the majority, Sticking a notice on the notice board claiming.

I Gaurav Murthy, son of Y.A.Murthy, AM PUTTING THIS NOTICE UP TO SAY I HAVE NO FATHER. I am shamed by the actions of the present occupant of flat 3A, Vishram

We request all of you not to associate us with the actions of the present occupant of 3A, Vishram Society. (p.320)

#### **The Conflict and Distracted Minds -**

Here the conflict begins. It is not only between the residents and masterji but also between masterji the lover of community living, and god fearing Shah, who always goes to Sampath Vinayak Temple. He also consults the priest Mathunga for the good and bad timings for his construction activities. He doesn't give any value to the human relations or moral values. The plot to eliminate masterji is hatched by the community on the instigation of the men of Shah which starts with the unpleasant act of applying excrement to the door of the teacher. This shows the distracted minds of

the society. Even after this, masterji denies the help of the journalist. The very next thing they do is, to get a duplicate key for the door of 3A and Shanmugham arranges for two guys to beat Masterji out. It is the fate that comes to his rescue and masterji survives the attack on him making them understand that he is a strong survivor.

Anxiety and fear grips the culprits that the Masterji may take legal recourse and bring them to book. It is goodness once again that prevents masterji from loading a complaint. The act appears as an act of cowardice and makes the culprits bold. The deadline was over by 3<sup>rd</sup> of October; all thought that they lost the offer. After this the broker Ajwani and secretary Kothari thought of doing the simplest thing to make the work get executed. Religious sentiment which rules the people of tower A too changes its colour in the face of his selfishness.

God is set aside, the demon in them comes to the fore and they decide to execute just 'a push' strategy to eliminate masterji. Rumours are floated that masterji has turned mad due to excessive obsession for his wife and daughter, to make ground for 'just a push' strategy. All go against Masterji isolating him and pushing him to a corner. It is money that gains supremacy over truth, honesty and uprightness. All wanted to get rid of him as he did not accept the offer. They plan to kill him taking advantage of his daily routine of walking on the terrace as nature becomes his only companion. As time becomes a constraint, the act of 'just a push' takes ugly turn and results in gruesome murder following the same strategy. It is not the Land Mafia but the residents of tower A especially the secretary, Mr. and Mrs. Puri and Ibrahim who compel Masterji to sign the land documents giving his consent for selling, plaster his mouth. The courage and conviction stay with masterji still the end. He refuses. "you have to agree now....Say yes now, even at that moment he asked them all to get out" (p.380).

The gruesome act of cold blooded murder happens for which the soul of masterji, alone stands as witness. The only person who needs keeps aloof from all this is Ajwani the proponet of the act of 'just a push'. The few who participate in the act take the body to the terrace and complete the act of 'just a push'.

He had lost his hands; he had lost his legs; he could not speak. Yet everything he had to do was right here in his head. He thought of Gaurav his son, his living flesh, 'Help me', he said. And then he realized that the thing that was blocking his passage was cleared, and he was falling; his body had begun its short earthly flight – which it completed almost instantaneously – before Yogesh Murthy's soul was released for its much longer flight over the ocean of the other world. (p.391)

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Cold blooded murder is proved as suicide with all the residents vouching the Masterji has lost his mind due to diabetics and fighting with them all unnecessarily. The reason for death had been declared as mental deterioration and police close the case by taking the statements of the residents as true. After this incident all the residents of Vakola dispersed to different places.

**Conclusion -**

Masterji stubbornness could be seen as selfish and perverse, since he is thwarting the aspirations of his neighbors. The other residents cannot be condemned for waiting to better their position, to move to an apartment that has continuous running water, perhaps developer Dharmen shah meanwhile, is a genuine product of the new India; born in rural village, he has made his way to the city with nothing, and succeed in construction business. He is hard and unscrupulous, it is clear he is threat to those oppose him, and yet with all his wealth and power he is not averse to the harsh environment. (Grimshaw, Charlotte, reviews)  
In an interview Adiga says

For me, Dharmen is an ambiguous figure, and the conflict between him and the teacher in the building is meant to be nuanced not one in which I hope the readers will find an easy side to pick – Dharmen is an ambiguous figure. He represents a lot of what is going wrong with the city; There is a lot of uncontrolled construction, a lot of buildings come up in unscrupulous ways. On one hand, (These builders) can be ruthless and break laws. On the other hand, sometimes they seem to be the only one getting anything done in Mumbai.” (Good reads, ‘Adiga’s interview’, September 2011)

Adiga seems to expose the causes of corruption in India which include excessive regulations, complicated taxes and licensing systems, numerous government departments each with opaque bureaucracy and discretionary powers, and lack of transparent laws and processes.

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