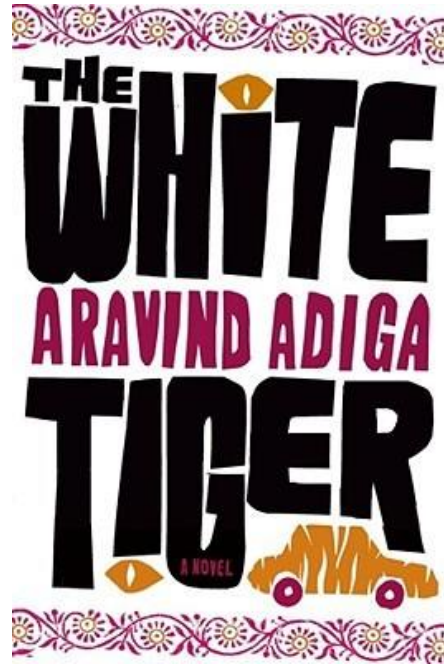


**Sociological Aspects in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* and
*Last Man In Tower***

D. Nivetha, M.A., M.Phil.



Abstract

Aravind Adiga is a contemporary writer of Indian Writing in English. His novels deals with serious topics like corruption, poverty, terrorism, political turmoil, caste and class discrimination etc. Adiga's novel *The White Tiger* provides a darkly comical view of modern day life in turbulent India. The main theme of the novel is the contrast between India's rise as modern global economy and its working class people who live in crushing poverty. Through the protagonist Balram, Adiga presents the dissimilarities that persist in India despite India's new prosperity. Adiga's second novel *Last Man in Tower* attempts to explore the human impulse to become rich. It explores how the greed to become rich makes people more self-centered and provokes them to do dirty, unimaginable horrors to fellow human beings. Adiga clearly portrays the sixty-one year old science teacher named Yogesh Murthy who is affectionately known as

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 17:9 September 2017

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Masterji. His resistance to the lucrative business in the city is discussed. The novel discloses how the frenzied desire for money and material benefits turn life-long friends into enemies and force them to kill their friend. Both the novels *The White Tiger* and *Last Man in Tower* throw the light on the ignorance of the Indian counterpart and their mere acceptance of the western culture without asking the question concerning the validity and adaptation.

Keywords: Corruption, Poverty, Human Greed, Globalization and Consumerism.

Depiction of the Corrupt System of Government

India is greatly noted for its democracy. The word democracy appears to be very attractive and sophisticated. When we look at it as a system, its flaws become obvious. Some are robbing others freedom for their own freedom. Powers are again exploited by the power holders. In the novel, *The White Tiger* Adiga depicts the corrupt system of our government as, “any issue can be settled with government because this is India, not America” (TWT 121)

Aravind Adiga is a keen observer of life around him, its social evils, corruption and growing difference between the rich and poor. His novels give us a glimpse of contemporary India. His views on the growing gap between the rich and poor and the failure of the police in tracking the criminals are clearly shown in his novels. His novels also deal with other serious topics like corruption, poverty, terrorism, political turmoil caste and class discrimination etc.

Post-independence India is the main concern in the writings of Aravind Adiga. In India, the existing economic inequality paved the way for the various class systems. Adiga’s writings prove that one of the main challenges that India faces is regarding class struggles than the caste system. It creates two types of citizens: masters and servants, ninety five percent of the citizens are servants who are obliged to serve their masters. One of the recurrent themes in his writings is servitude and it is an attitude that is innate in every Indian citizen. The evils of contemporary Indian society such as corruption, assassinations, poverty, corrupt media, emergence of real estate mafia and deterioration of human value are highlighted in his works.

Balram Halwai: Extreme Poverty and Suffering

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The narrator, Balram Halwai is a highly complicated man. He is a servant, philosopher, entrepreneur, and murderer rolled into one. Over the course of seven nights, sitting under the chandelier, the narrator narrates the horrible, fascinating story of how he overcame his failures of life, without having any other means than his own intelligence to help him all the way. Born in the dark heart of India, the protagonist finds freedom when he is appointed as a driver by his village landlord.

Balram's family is so poor that they cannot afford to send him to school, and so he is put to work in a tea shop. As he crushes coal and wipes tables, he nurses a dream of escaping from the banks of mother Ganga into whose murky depths have seeped faeces, straw, soggy parts of human bodies, buffalo and seven different kinds of industrial acids.

The novelist is passionately concerned with the extreme poverty and the personal suffering induced by severe economic disparity. The novelist attends to the plight of the "boys" working in a typical tea shop along the banks of the Ganga:

Look at the men, working in the tea shop (men), I say, but better to call them human spiders that go crawling in between and under the tables with rags in their hands, crushed humans in crushed uniforms, sluggish, unshaven, in their thirties or forties or fifties but still "boys." But that is your fate if you do your job well—with honesty, dedication, and sincerity the way Gandhi would have done it, no doubt. (TWT 51)

Adiga draws our attention to the abject poverty that exists in India. Balram narrates his mother's death and funeral as,

My mother's body had been wrapped from head to toe in a saffron silk cloth, which was covered in rose petals and jasmine garlands. I don't think she had ever had such a fine thing to wear in her life. (Her death was so grand that I knew, all at once, that her life must have been miserable. My family was guilty about something (TWT 16).

Deplorable Public Health System

Adiga depicts the public health system in India, through his protagonist Balram. Balram's father suffers from tuberculosis. His eyes are deep and vacant. He is as lean as a skeleton. Nonetheless, he ekes out his livelihood by pedaling a rickshaw. When he is crippled he is supposed to be admitted into a hospital. To the dismay of the characters, there are not any hospitals in Laxmangarh "although there are three different foundation stones for hospitals, laid by three different politicians before three different elections" (TWT 47). The lack of hospitals in rural communities is a sad reality across India. With the help of a boatman, Balram and his brother manage to take their father to an unimpressive building on the other side of the river. Lohia Universal Free Hospital receives them

with three black goats sitting on the steps to the faded white building.
. . . The glass in most of the windows was broken; a cat was staring
out at us from one cracked window (TWT 48).

The patients slowly pour in, but the doctors never appeal. These doctors are in the good books of the politicians who receive huge amounts from them. The powerful politicians tolerate these doctors who earn huge amounts elsewhere and ignore the patients in the rural areas. Consequently Balram's father collapses, and the entire family is in despair. Under these circumstances, Balram searches for greener pastures elsewhere. His quest for freedom and light continues.

Some Break from Poverty

Balram gets his break when he is hired as a chauffeur for a rich village landlord's son, daughter-in-law, and the couple's two Pomeranian dogs; Cuddles and Puddles. Balram is taken to the prosperous suburb of Gurgaon, a satellite city of Delhi. He feels that Delhi is the place of light. Amid the cockroaches and call centres, the 36,000,004 gods, the slums, the shopping malls, and the crippling traffic jams, he is increasingly aware of the immense wealth and opportunity around him. Caught between his instinct to be a loyal son, his obligations as an indentured servant, and his desire to better himself, he learns of a new 'morality', i.e., acquisitiveness and hedonism, at the heart of Delhi.

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Delhi forces newcomers to the city like Ashok, a formerly innocent man during his stay in America, to become corrupt. Balram, the village lad, is also transformed.

Trapped in Rooster Coop

Balram soon examined why there cannot be any protest from his own family. He believed that the servant class of India is trapped in the Rooster Coop. The result is the self-imposed servitude. Instead of protesting, the oppressed class will actually feel proud in demonstrating the blind loyalty towards their masters. It was because of this blind obedience towards their landlords that the poor are not able to rise above their suppressed condition. Explaining the metaphor rooster coop, Balram said,

The greatest thing to come out of this country in the ten thousand years of its history is the Rooster Coop...On the wooden desk above this coop sits a grinning young butcher...The roosters ...see the organs of their brothers lying around them. They know they're next. Yet they do not rebel. They do not try to get out of the coop. The very same thing is done with human beings in this country (TWT 173).

Adiga through the metaphor of the rooster coop wished to explore how the rich is trapping the life of the poor for relentless exploitation. The poor were made so busy in struggling for bare survival that they had no time and energy to question the authority of their rulers. In fact, they feel proud of their own servitude. Balram comments,

Never before in human history have so few owed so much to so many, Mr. Jiabao. A handful of men in this country have trained the remaining 99.9 percent—as strong, as talented, as intelligent in every way—to exist in perpetual servitude (TWT 175).

Protest against Blind Obedience and Slavery

With the gradual exposure to corruption in Delhi, Balram started getting cynical and dishonest. Feeling how much he has been cheated through corruption, he started resenting the upper class people and looking for a way to avenge himself. Once while driving Mr. Ashok, he reflected,

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See—Mr. Ashok is giving money to all these politicians in Delhi so that they will excuse him from the tax he has to pay. And who owns that tax, in the end? Who but the ordinary people of this country (TWT 244).

Balram determined to protect himself from blind obedience and slavery, one day when he got a suitable opportunity, he murdered his master Mr. Ashok. Balram wants to escape from the Rooster Coop. Having been a witness to all of Ashok's corrupt practices and gambling with money to buy politicians, to kill and to loot, he decides to steal and kill. Adiga delves deep into his subconscious as he plans to loot Rs.700,000 stuffed into the red bag.

Go on, just look at the red bag, Balram – that's not stealing, is it?

I shook my head.

And even you were to steal it, Balram, it wouldn't be stealing.

How so? I looked at the creature in the mirror.

See- Mr. Ashok is giving money to all these politicians in Delhi so that they will excuse him from the tax he has to pay. And who owns that tax, in the end? Who but the ordinary people of this country – you! (TWT 244)

Now an Entrepreneur in Bangalore

He sums up his success story as an entrepreneur in Bangalore. He moves from success to success- from being a social entrepreneur to a business entrepreneur. He has perhaps become another incarnation of Mr. Ashok by christening himself Ashok.

Yes, Ashok! That's what I call myself these days. Ashok Sharma, North Indian entrepreneur, settled in Bangalore... I would show you all the secrets of my business...my drivers, my garages, my mechanics, and my paid-off policemen. All of them belong to me Munna, whose destiny was to be a sweet-maker! (TWT 302).

All that he can remember is his past juxtaposed with his present status, from a sweet-maker to a business tycoon. The circle is complete in his case like that of his boss Mr Ashok, who was from a cook's family. He claims to be different from Mr. Ashok.

Once I was a driver to a master, but now I am a master of drivers. I don't treat them like servants – I don't slap, or bully, or mock anyone. I don't insult any of them by calling them my 'family' either. They're my employees, I'm their boss, that's all. I make them sign a contract and I sign it too, and both of us must honour that contract. That's all. If they notice the way I talk, the way I dress, the way I keep things clean, they'll go up in life. If they don't, they'll be drivers all their lives. I leave the choice up to them. When the work is done I kick them out of the office: no chitchat, no cups of coffee. A White Tiger keeps no friends. It's too dangerous (TWT 302).

Self-confession of a Murder

In the end, after doing his self-confession to the Chinese Premier Mr. Jiabao, Balram justifies his act of murder by saying,

I'll never say I made a mistake that night in Delhi when I slit my master's throat. I'll say it was all worthwhile to know, just for a day, just for an hour, just for a minute, what it means not to be a servant. (TWT 320-321)

The White Tiger is a depiction of the social and economic inequalities of contemporary India. It is a penetrating piece of social commentary, attuned to the dissimilarities that persist despite India's new prosperity. Thus the novel presents a startling contrast between India's rise as a global economy and the plight of the marginalized class of society living in devastating rural and urban poverty. It is a powerful commentary on the ever widening rich-poor divide that has gripped India in the twenty-first century.

Last Man in Tower

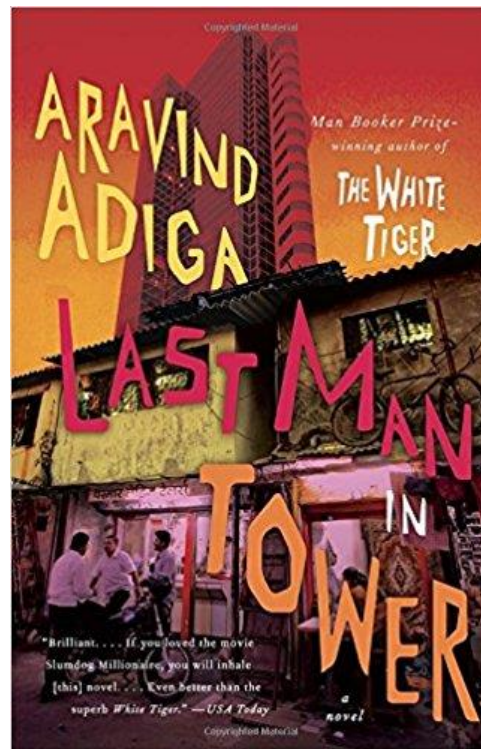
Aravind Adiga has carved his name in the galaxy of eminent Indian novelists delineating the landscape and places in their writings. India is a land replete with rich cultural heritage and illustrious religions and political history. A literary work, in which a significant interaction

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occurs between characters and place, depicts the landscape as a dominant character. Adiga has attempted his best to depict the topography and geography of Mumbai and tries to give the feel of the particular place mentioned by him in metro-city. Adiga's *Last Man in Tower* is saturated with the details of places. As Adiga's *The White Tiger*, traces the life in Bangalore and Delhi, similarly his *Last Man in Tower* is set up in Mumbai, ultimate in civilization.



As a development model, “Shanghaization” symbolizes “fast-growth” based on real estate revitalization to make the city internationally competitive. In Mumbai this has taken the form of gentrifying former industrial districts, redeveloping slums, and regulating public space in an effort to spur foreign investment. These redevelopment practices have resulted in the displacement of the low-income residents like industrial workers, slum dwellers, and street vendors from the central parts of the city to the urban periphery. However, these transformations have also engendered various poor people’s movements in Mumbai that have made demands for housing, livelihood, and good governance.

Adiga has showed the real life of Mumbai people who need money to fulfill their desires and dreams and for the sake of money they leave their dreams and human relationship. He has shown that people for money can easily get affected by the man like Dharmen Shah. It is an

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interesting story of human nature and the war between principle and practicality. Property development is a serious business in Mumbai. It is sometimes deadly serious. Land is costly and life is cheap. *Last Man in Tower*, is the story of a showdown, a struggle between two men; Shah and Masterji. The first and second sections “How the Offer was Made” and “Mr. Shah Explains His Proposal” introduce the main characters Yogesh Murthy and Dharmen Shah and all other minor characters of the story. Dharmen Shah, a property developer makes a generous offer to the inmates of Vishram Society for redevelopment. The next three sections explain the resistance of a few families to vacate the building and how Shah with his left hand man Shanmugham offers bribe to those who oppose. Eventually except Murthy known as Masterji, all the other people accept the proposal. The sixth section “Fear” depicts how Masterji was threatened and boycotted by the people of the Society for not accepting the deal. The remaining sections of the novel depict the efforts of Masterji to fight against the real estate developer. In his struggle Masterji is rejected by his son and neighbours and is mercilessly killed in the end by those in pursuit of wealth.

Life in Tower

The tale revolves around the Indian middle class residents of Tower A of Vishram co-operative housing society in Vakola, Mumbai. Adiga describes Vakola as,

On a map of Mumbai, Vakola is a cluster of ambiguous dots that cling polyp-like to the under-side of the domestic airport; on the ground, the polyps turn out to be slums, and spread out on every side of Vishram Society (LMT 3).

The charming genuine relationship of the residents has started chipping away when Mr. Dharmen Shah, the ruthless property developer decides to build his luxury sky scraper named ‘Shanghai’ in the place of Vishram society. He generously offers a huge sum nearly twice the market value to the residents of Vishram society to make their way for his magnificent new project. Starting with smuggling and slum clearance, Shah has now become the managing director of the Confidence Group, one of Mumbai’s real estate. After completion of the present high-rise apartments like Fountain head and Excelsior, Shah wants to take up his dream project Confidence Shanghai in Vakola. Vakola place is considered as the golden line of the city, a line that makes the people rich.

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Shah offers such a huge amount not out of his generosity, but because of the expanding financial center:

You have Santa Cruz airport there, you have the Bandra-Kurla Complex there and you have the Dharavi slums there. Why is this line golden? Air travel is booming. More planes, more visitors. Then' - he moved his finger - 'the financial centre at Bandra-Kurla is expanding by the hour. Then the government is starting redevelopment in Dharavi. Asia's biggest slum will become Asia's richest slum. This area is boiling with money. People arrive daily and have nowhere to live. Except' - he dotted his golden line in the centre - 'here. Vakola. (LMT 54-55)

Modern Concept of Real Estate

Very emphatically has Adiga expressed the modern concept of real estate in Mumbai, where a builder is desperate enough to possess the old, dilapidated buildings in order to create modern luxurious apartment for the affluent population and thus add a great amount to their bank deposit and, on the other hand, the deprived and unfortunate middle class who have no other option but to vacate on monetary terms.

Masterji, the Protagonist

Masterji, the protagonist of the novel resists the generous offer for the memories of his deceased wife and daughter. Adiga narrates:

Though the men and women around him dreamed of bigger homes and cars, his joys were those of the expanding square footage of his inner life. The more he looked at his daughter's sketches, the more certain places within Vishram - the stairwell where she ran up, the garden that she walked around, the gate that she liked to swing on - became more beautiful and intimate. . . Sometimes he felt as if Sandhya and Purnima were watching the rain with him, and there was a sense of feminine fullness inside the dim flat. (LMT 150)

With his uncompromising behaviour Masterji ruins the hopes of his neighbours for better homes and happy life. He becomes a nightmare to Shah. Shah manipulates the inhabitants to do the brutal thing to get away with Masterji by building up pressures. Their frantic desire for monetary gains and material benefits induce them to stoop as low as possible. Since all their efforts fail to convince Masterji to accept the proposal before the deadline, they decide to do that simple thing, a simple thing to take away someone's life. Adiga vibrantly elucidates the life-death struggle of Masterji,

Now, when he opened his eyes, he could not tell if he were dead or alive; these men seemed to be demons, though kindly, who were forcing his body to budge from some place between life and death where it was stuck. And this was because he was neither good nor bad enough; and neither strong nor weak enough. 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. (LMT 391)

You Have To Respect Human Greed

The contemporary materialistic society where people value money and material benefits above all is indicated through the words of Shah: "you have to respect human greed" (LMT 107). The slogan of the contemporary globalized world where people strive to elevate their status is exemplified through Shah's words:

You should look around you, at people. Rich people. Successful people. You should always be thinking, what does he have that I don't have? That way you go up in life (LMT 230).

Adiga exposes the realities of a changing city. He brings to light the repercussions of countless millions of people being stuffed into the commuter trains every day. The atrocities and brutal realities of the redevelopment field in the mighty city are ruthlessly unveiled in the novel.

Adiga explores the violent and cruel methods adopted by the developers to grab the land. To convince the land owners they approach with sweets and smiles. But "behind the smiles were

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lies and knives” (LMT 168). This is the everyday reality of the property business in Mumbai. Mumbai is the city where land price is more than gold price. *Last Man in Tower* focuses on the grim realities of the restless city.

Changing Picture of Rural and Urban India

A changing picture of rural and urban India is projected. It can be said that the prevalent corruption, decline of caste system, rise of materialism, advancement of technology, modernization, social mobility, law and legislator, cinema media, sense of cut throat competition, disloyalty, change in the norms of social institutions, alienation, extent of urbanization, globalization, consumerism and such are the same characteristics which constitute the mode of the new generation and cause the change in the psyche of the man of the new generation.

Both the novels *The White Tiger* and *Last Man in Tower* shower the light on the ignorance of the Indian counterpart and the mere acceptance of the western culture without asking the question concerning the validity and adaptation. The novels *The White Tiger* and *Last Man in Tower* serve as the eye opener for Indian masses for their frenzied outlook towards the western societies. The novels highlight the issues pertaining to the reasons behind the slagging down of the Indian culture in the face of the West. It too exposes how foreign cultures dominate the minds of the easterners. Influence of Western languages, sense of dressing and western life style are most concerning issues related to the cultural degradation of Indian society.

The new generation does not want to follow the trodden path of the previous generations, but it knows how to make its own path. The psyche of this generation has undergone radical changes. The rich has to change their outlook towards the masses, because this century is the second renaissance of the new generation without which they would be wiped out. It is a period in which people want to go behind money, they don't want to care about their paths and footprints towards money, people just want to obtain money. Not only the rich, but also poor people want to grab money even by killing someone.

Today's society lacks patience, humanity. These two novels show humankind is moving towards its destruction. Modern generation doesn't want to extend their helping hand to the needy, they failed to show mutual love and understanding towards their fellow Mankind. The poison of casteism, communalism, regionalism, and discrimination on social and economic basis, etc., is the obstacle in the way of progress. The obstacles need to be overcome with determination and strength by every Indian.

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