

## ***Last Man in Tower: A Faithful Copy of Contemporary Society***

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“Jackets of, sleeves rolled up, a ‘no-nonsense’ approach”;(Cuddon 729) these crude and striking features of the realist novel are well projected in Aravind Adiga’s *Last Man in Tower*; the latest novel by the Booker Prize winner. The realist novel is a faithful copy of the world in the sense that it reflects real events. It reflects reality but in its own way. That’s why, even after reflecting reality Realist novel is the part of fiction instead of history, journalism, diary etc. “The Realist novel represents stories, characters, and settings that are similar to those commonly found in the contemporary everyday world.” (Earnshaw 14) Instead of directly representing an actual existing individual, it copies the real world. It copies the incidents, we don’t need to be told because we already know it and live it in everyday of our lives. The main aim of the realist novel is to mirror reality. Mirrors are not allowed to possess their own view but they have to show what is before them in their real shape. This is the thing which has been portrayed in *Last Man in Tower* by Aravind Adiga. Following the concept of realism, Adiga has presented the life with fidelity. He comes towards us, and very cleverly leaves all the responsibility to draw any conclusions over its readers.

The plot of *Last Man in Tower* begins with the word picture of ‘Vishram Society’ i.e. ‘unimpeachably pucca’. Vishram Society has two towers: Tower A and Tower B. Of course, both of them are within the same compound but they are totally different from each other. The seven-story Tower B has been erected in 1970s while Tower A around which the novel’s story revolves was unveiled on 14/11/1959. In comparison to Tower A, Tower B is the more desirable building to purchase or rent in but the tower about which the neighbours think of as ‘Vishram Society’ is Tower A. All of the residents of ‘Vishram Society’ live like a family. From Mary, the ‘khachada-wali’ to ‘Master Ji’, the most respectable person in the society; all of them have an affinity to one another. All of the residents of ‘Vishram Society’; as Mr and Mrs Pinto, retired accountant for the Britannia Biscuit Company, Ramesh Ajwani, the real-estate broker, Mr and Mrs Puri, Ashvin Kothari, the secretary of the society, Ibrahim Kudwa, internet store owner etc. respect Yogesh A. Murthy, popularly known as ‘Master Ji’ a retired school teacher, now living alone after the death of his wife, Purnima.

Basically, this novel is the tale of Yogesh A. Murthy i.e. ‘Master Ji’ and his struggle against the real, moving and changing world. A world that is changing with the time, a world that is now not caring for principles, a world that is now not caring for human emotions or human lives. It is changing with the time. Now it is running after money, status and ‘a drawing room with flamingoes’. But it is the reality which we can’t ignore. And it has been portrayed very clearly in this novel. It has been portrayed that how money get success in “turning good people in to bad people” (319)

Everyone respects ‘Master Ji’, and perhaps in lieu of that or to engage him in some work, he takes the ‘top-up classes of Science’. He teaches all the children of Vishram Society, whether

they are Hindu, Muslim or Christian. He really enjoys teaching. He feels honored that most of the students taught by him are appointed on good posts. Everything is running very smoothly and people of Vishram Society are like ideal for others. But reality can't be hidden within covers; it comes out as soon as it gets chance. There comes a property developer named Dharmen Shah, who is determined to tear Vishram down and replace it with luxury apartments. For it he gives very generous offer to all of the residents of Vishram. Some of them get ready at the moment and some of them after getting extra 'sweetener' from Shah. As soon as resident of Vishram Society get chance to get money, their greed awakes. Their greed makes them what they actually are. They forget everything, their humanity, their religion, their fear of god, their life-long relation to each other but remember only one thing that how to remove the big stone named 'Master Ji' from their way, which has blocked their way of riches.

Venue of this story is Mumbai. If we think pointedly, this novel portrays the real situation of present Mumbai, where property development is a serious business, sometimes deadly serious. But at broad level, this is the picture of contemporary changing world where prime land is costly and human life is cheap, where money can purchase everything whether it is police, lawyer, human values or emotions. Even blood relations stoop before money and get ready to change their loyalty. This novel has very clearly painted the corruption which has been scattered everywhere. From top to bottom, everyone seems to be involved in it and if any one tries to fight it, he meets the fate of the protagonist, 'Master Ji'.

Aravind Adiga has written the story of a New India; one is full of greed and opportunism, and other is underpinned by the daily struggle of millions in the lower classes. This novel is the story of money and power, luxury and deprivation; it is the story of a small apartment building and its owner occupants. All of them are not much rich and satisfied but happy in the company of each other. Trouble begins when a self-made real-estate mogul, Dharmen Shah decides to build a luxury high rise where the building of Vishram Society currently stands. He offers each of the residents 250 times what their dinky little apartments are worth. Dharmen Shah is the real estate developer. He rose from nothing to create an empire and hopes to seal his legacy with a building named 'the Shanghai' which promises to be one of the city's most elite addresses. He says, "Every man wants to be remembered...I'm no different" (87). He was really a dangerous man to refuse. But this time in case of 'Master Ji' he himself did nothing. He just played a trick and as soon as he found that money is dancing before the eyes of all of the residents, he makes the friends enemies, turned the acquaintances into conspirators with the help of his right hand man Shanmugham. The hope to get money exorbitantly changes many equations, friends become foes, enemies flock together to serve their personal motives and diehard followers of ideals shun their ideology. As soon as the deadline of leaving the apartment comes closer, all of the residents who have dreamt for money feel as something is going away from them. The cozy atmosphere of the society gets vitiated by the alluring offers of Dharmen Shah. Master Ji stares at three of his neighbours; women who had once pampered and flattered him but who now conspires his undoing. He wonders whether he is looking at good or bad people.

When Dharmen Shah offers to redevelop the society, 'Master Ji' was not serious about it. He was opposing him just to support his friend Mr and Mrs Pinto. Mr and Mrs Pinto were not in favour of this redevelopment because Mrs Pinto was blind. And she was scared of the situation which she will face if she goes to a new place. Here in Vishram she is habitual of way; she can go anywhere very easily by counting her steps. When Shelley, another resident of the society hears the cry of her husband, she is aware that she is 'just twenty-nine steps away' from the guard's booth. She is not ready to go anywhere because of her inability but this is not the case

with her husband. He is just avoiding it in greed of money. Being his wife, when she doubts her husband, Mr Pinto says that he is just ‘cal-cu-la-ting’ the money. He says that ‘Master Ji’ is his friend “of thirty-two years. I will never betray him for US dollars.” (250). But finally he too crouches down before the money and betrays his friendship of thirty two years.

In the beginning, Mr and Mrs Puri, Ramesh Ajwani and Mrs Rego; all of them oppose the offer but as soon as they get ‘sweetener’, they get agree. They think that it is the wish of ‘sweetener’ which is making ‘Master Ji’ to deny for the proposal. Dharmen Shah also tries to convince ‘Master Ji’ he invites him to his home, but unfortunately, because of the less traffic ‘Master Ji’ reaches there before time. At that time, Shah is in the school of his son Satish. There is a parent teacher meet. Shah is also a widower like ‘Master Ji’. As much as he tries to succeed in his profession, he fails in his family matters. His son goes out of his hand. He begins to hate him. The hatred between son and father is so strong that the son himself prays for the failure of his father’s dream project for which the father is very desperate. The episode of praying before Lord Ganesh for his dream project becomes heart rending when we see that Satish, the son, too prays to God just opposite of his father. This portrayal of father son relationship makes the plot more realistic.

The residents of Vishram Society think that ‘Master Ji’ denies the offer because he wants . Of course, he wants but not money. There may arise a question that why actually ‘Master Ji’ denies Shah’s proposal. Is Master Ji’s refusal meant to protect a more vulnerable tenant? Is he holding out for more cash? Is he simply afraid of change? Does he relish the sensation of power? Is his refusal rooted in incorruptible principle or dictatorial ego? And answer seems that it is his ego, which stops him to accept the offer. At first he opposes Dharmen to help his friend but when Mr Pinto takes his steps back, ‘Master Ji’ doesn’t get back with him. He takes it on his honour. He himself says, “Wasn’t Gaurav right- wasn’t it just pride that kept him from running to Mr Shah and saying: ‘I accept your offer. Now leave me alone!’” (300).

Gaurav is the only son of ‘Master Ji’, who instead of living with his father lives in a house provided by his company. It doesn’t seem big issue but what is to notice is that he has never offered his father to live with him while his father-in-law lives with him. Masterji was a man of 61. At this age a man needs extra attention while he was not getting the one he once had. His wife has expired recently. It is after her passing away, he began to miss him more and more. When the calendar of kitchen sounds due to wind coming from kitchen window, he thinks that his wife is trying to say something to him. He thinks that she is still there in kitchen and chopping onion on the cut board. He misses her terribly. He tries to fill this blank by meeting his grandson but feels that his daughter-in-law doesn’t like it. ‘Master Ji’ presents a book named *The Illustrated History of Science* to his grandson on his birthday but one day when ‘Master Ji’ goes to meet his son to his son’s home, Sonal his daughter-in-law returns that book and says that “The boy doesn’t read much; he plays cricket...It is better that you keep this yourself”(45). It hurts ‘Master Ji’ and he thinks that was their flat is so small that they can’t put his single book in it. He feels insulted at the act of Sonal “to shove my gift back in my hands” (45). This is other thing that this is the book which saved him when he is attacked by two boys sent by Ajwani, the broker.

But it is after this attack we find that masterji gets more and much closer to the realistic principles of *Bhagawadgita*. He seems to follow those principles in his own life. He doesn’t fear death. He begins to believe in:

*vāsāmsi jīrṇāni yathā vihāya navāni gr̥hṇāti naro ‘parāṇi  
tathā śarīrāṇi vihāya jīrṇāny anyāni samyāti navāni dehī* (22)

Which means:

Just as a man shedding out worn out garments, takes other new ones, likewise the embodied soul, casting off worn out bodies, enters into others which are new. (Goyandka, 29)

Masterji thinks that his son loves him but it is under the effect of Sonal he doesn't care for him. But soon he realizes that it is not true. In the case of 'Master Ji', Shah never plays any game directly. Everywhere he uses tricks. This time he finds the man of his own match. So he takes every step very thoughtfully. When he finds that 'Master Ji' has asked for help from police, he doesn't say anything to 'Master Ji'. But he goes to police station and gives a bit of 'sweetener' to them also. He seems to waste his money but it was his dream project for which he can go to any level. When 'Master Ji' goes next time to police station he finds that all are advising him to get agree by taking some "sweetener". He sees the same sweet box, which Shah has distributed to the residents of Vishram and then realizes that how corrupted our society is.

After failing at police station, he goes to a lawyer named Mr Parekh. He feels much confident that law is with him. He prepares himself to face all sorts of boycott by his own society members. They stop the supply of water and electricity, and law helps him but only till the moment Shah doesn't contact him. As soon as he comes in contact with Mr Shah, he also suggests him for treaty and proves our helplessness before corruption. Now if anything remains before him that is the help of media. But here also he doesn't get anything.

'Master Ji' has made a list that can help him at the time of need. He has always felt honoured of his being a teacher. He thinks that in it one can include police, media, Law and Order, Family and finally students and old boys. He always feels proud of his students. Often he names one of his students, Noronha, who is at present in *Times of India*. Noronha has been his last hope but there also he fails. He has always given importance to his duty, to his students even over his family. As Gaurav complains, "Your students always came first for you. Not that they had any love for you...They used to give you nicknames in class. (p.298) We find that in this attempt 'Master Ji' loses his son, his family also. His own son begins to hate him. During his early days Master Ji punishes Gaurav, student of the same school where he teaches, even at the little mistakes just to prove towards other students that "there was no favoritism" (298) . Unlike the phantasmagoria of other writers here we don't find any reward for these selfless duties of 'Master Ji', just like the real world he suffers and suffers a lot without any relief from any side.

Mrs Puri puts the piss of his 18 year old Ramu at the door of 'Master Ji', he says nothing and cleans it silently. Mrs Puri is a woman of the twentieth century. When she gets married, just like conventional society norms of this century she wishes to give the priority to her career instead of family life. She tries and tries again to get a job but all efforts go in vain. It is not the case that she revolts with her husband but she does all this with the consent of her husband. Her husband was just an accountant. Both of them were aware of this real fact that with the help of the salary of an accountant, they can't maintain a standard of which they have dreamt. It is medically approved that the best time of child bearing is between 24 and 30. When Mrs Puri gives birth to a boy named Ramu, she has already crossed the age of 30. After few years, both Mr and Mrs Puri come to know that their son is afflicted from Down's syndrome. Now what remains before her – to take care of her son throughout her life? 'Master Ji' also loves Ramu, he is with Mrs Puri to support her mentally even at the time when she comes to know about his son's illness for the first time. The boy also loves 'Master Ji' and whimpers if anyone talks against 'Master Ji'. But all this relation and understanding evaporate in light of money, 'the sweetener'.

Mrs Puri, who has not enough money to give medical treatment to her son, seems to become superstitious to some extent. She was not happy and satisfied with her life. She always blames that even at the age of 18, her son used to piss in his pants. She is fed up of everything. She thinks that if 'Master Ji' will sign the paper, the obstacle between her and comfort will fade away and she may have enough money to get a nurse for Ramu.

In case of Mrs Puri the realism comes to the bare surface when we analyse the cause of her visits to temples and religious places. She visits temples everyday because there is no hope and option for her. It is not the case that she is such a devotional lady but she visits temples and other religious places just because she has no option at all. But as soon as there comes an opportunity of getting money and better living standard, she forgets everything. She comes towards us as the most cunning lady in the society. She plays the role of 'Lady Macbeth' of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* who even doesn't shiver to murder the person who is of the age of her father.

'Master Ji' has always helped everyone and doesn't seem to ask any thing in lieu of it. He thinks, "I have done good to others. I was a teacher for thirty-four years." (287). When in market, he sees a cow "creaming good milk out of bad air and bacterial water." (287), he thinks that he has also done the same thing. When he touches the living organs of the cow he feels that cow is saying him: "all this power in me is power in you too" (287). He thinks of his neighbors also who has been changed suddenly just at the possibility of money. What the money can do for them? But even though 'Master Ji' doesn't blame anyone and hopes that as soon as the last date of signing will pass, all of them will again live together with each other. But when bit by bit, Adiga strips away the cover of so-called goodness of all the neighbors, we feel shocked.

When deadline passes away, 'Master Ji', feels relieved. He hopes that now very soon he will take his top-up classes once again. But Dharmen Shah here once again plays a trick and doesn't send anyone to collect the paper on the last date. And it is after crossing the last date all of the residents plan for the simplest of the way to get the money. They plan to push 'Master Ji' from the top floor. Ajwani seems to play the lead role but as soon as the time comes, he rings Mr Pinto and says, "Tell them not to do it. We can live together in the building like before. Tell Mrs Puri. Tell the secretary." (385). But Mr Pinto the best friend for thirty-two years betrays 'Master Ji' and doesn't convey this message to anyone.

Finally, this novel substantiates my claim when it projects the stories, characters and settings in realistic way where all the conspirators including Ibrahim Kudwa go to the room of 'Master Ji'. All of them attack him, and then bring him to the top floor with the help of lift and Mrs Puri gives him final push as he is the stone blocking of her happiness for so long. She thinks of him as big stone and "pressed her back and buttocks against the stone that had blocked her happiness or so long" (391) Master Ji falls down and dies. Everyone knows that it is not suicide but a murder. Even though all of the residents get first installment of payment from Dharmen Shah and Shah begin his construction over there. Ajawani in form of penance refuses to take money and moves somewhere else. At the end of novel we find that everyone has got money and all of them are enjoying the glamour of money. No one is suffering even after murdering the humanity and trust. Being the writer of this novel he would have punished the characters who were involved in the conspiracy of murder, but it would have been much far from reality. This cruel ending justifies that this novel is really a faithful copy of this contemporary world where nothing stands before money.

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