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Power and Protest: A Study on Aravind Adiga's Last Man in Tower

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Abstract

The article analyzes the power of capitalism, the erosion of human values, the oppression of the common people and the protest of an individual in the novel *Last Man in Tower* by Aravind Adiga. The protagonist, Masterji fights too much to protect Vishram A, a residential society. The builder Shah's offers made the people of Vishram, to fall for his money. The novel reveals how anxiety and greediness harm relationships, transforming neighbors into enemies. Masterji's loneliness and tragic end show how an individual in the society who fought for his rights faced systemic greed and injustices. Meanwhile, Masterji's protest signifies his courage against power. The novel emphasizes the cruel nature of the developer and his influence on common people. It also analyzes how the urban development of society disrespects the poor and their rights. It highlights the struggle against isolation in a rapidly changing modern society. The treatment of Masterji by his neighbors also reflects the broader themes of community and isolation. The article also explores the socio-economic conditions of urban India. In *Last Man in Tower*, oppression is exposed through the power of real estate developers and urbanization.

Keywords: Power, Oppression, Protest, Injustice and Socio-economic condition.

The article analyzes the power of capitalism, the erosion of human values, the oppression of the common people and the protest of an individual in the novel *Last Man in Tower* by Aravind Adiga. *Last Man in Tower* represents how the protagonist, Master Yogesh Murthy, a retired school teacher, faces the greed of not sacrificing his morals for the money and frights of the wealthy people. It also explores the socio-economic conditions of urban India. In *Last Man in Tower*, oppression is exposed through the power of real estate developers and urbanization. The developer, Dharmen Shah, pressures the residents to sell their apartments, claiming that the city is changing, so the old must make way for the new one. The residents of Vishram Society

are given money to vacate their flats for a project, but Masterji repels the move-out from his home. Dharmen Shah sees the residents as a barrier to his business. The protagonist, Masterji fights too much to protect Vishram A, a residential society. The novel emphasizes the cruel nature of the developer and his influence on common people. It also analyzes how the urban development of society disrespects the poor and their rights.

Masterji's neighbors, who surrendered to the trap of money, got frustrated with him for his struggle. He started to observe that they were against him. The erosion of unity highlights the division of communities due to economic pressures. This shows how capitalist forces exploit weaker people in modern India. Prajapati in the article, "The Element of Protest in the Novels of Arvind Adiga" observes, "Yogesh A. Murthy opposed everywhere but he is very surprised that we are living in a republic country where a person is threatened just before the republic day".

The article also focuses on Masterji's internal conflict and his quest for self-esteem; neighbours' betrayal and fear; and the builder's authoritative power. Masterji has faced not only the physical threats from the builder but also the emotional depression. His deep struggle against external forces make him as a symbol of resistance. Masterji's pure relationship with his wife Purnima and her memory had greatly influenced him. The memories of his past made him to be strong, courageous and to resist against the builder and cunning neighbours. It also provide him the sense of stability amidst the chaos and turmoil around him. Masterji's responses are influenced by his values of integrity and dignity when he faced with corruption. He is frustrated by the threats and dishonesty of the people surrounding him, which encounter his identity as a teacher and moral authority. His hatred to accept a settlement and his desire to maintain his self-respect reflects his protest though he was threaten by more powerful figure like Mr. Shah.

His neighbours were concern with him before the arrival of the builder Shah. Later, started to behave in rough manner and they have made choices driven by greed and fear which also leads to a failure of community integrity. The people of Vishram society were given a huge amount by the builder than their expectation. Even though four people were not ready to accept his offer including Masterji, later, three of them agreed but Masterji was against him. The novel presents the changing mindset of the middle-class family who were in need of money. They were become weak against the protest when money was offered. Subarno Chatterji comments in a review of the novel that "*The White Tiger* is an angry insight into the life of underclass and *Last Man in Tower* seems to wallow in middle class crises, ridden with money, corruption, and consumerist Utopias" (6-7).

The novel reveals the mafia Builders who were getting ample money by swapping property from one to another. Masterji was forced to leave from Vishram Society which shows the delicacy of community bonds. It also exemplifies that the people in society can split under pressure. The novel reveals how anxiety and greediness harm relationships, transforming neighbors into enemies. Masterji's loneliness is being viewed as coward. It highlights the struggle against isolation in a rapidly changing modern society. The treatment of Masterji by his neighbors also reflects the broader themes of community and isolation.

Mr. Shah symbolizes moral difficulties through his hard-headed approach to business with cruelty. He distinguishes the need for attraction and influence to steer the merciless construction industry. He exploits people's liabilities, exemplifying the ethical problems inherent in modern society. Shah's offers made the people of Vishram, to fall for his money. Everyone, including the Communists and the loyal traditionalists, falls prey to Shah's wealth. Masterji's conflict with the builder implies the struggle between the individual and the power of money. Mr. Shah has

attempted to compromise Masterji's values through financial temptation. It reflects that a societal bias is considered more important than people's dignity and inherent worth. Masterji values personal identity and precious memories more than money.

Commenting on Adiga's *Last Man in Tower*, Ashish Gupta writes: "Adiga has drawn most authentically the contemporary picture of Mumbai - the grime, lawlessness, corruption, moral disintegration, greed, fabulous wealth, and abject misery, a world in which predators always triumph, where people of integrity and goodwill are almost always gobbled up" (90). In the beginning, some of the residents are tempted by the wealth while others resist and hold on to the traditional values of their homes. "Men of our generation, we have seen much trouble. Wars, emergencies, elections. We can survive" (LMT 235). Later, the residents betrayed Masterji for Shah's money, and he is the last man in the tower who faces isolation, pressure, force, and compulsion.

The novel explores how capitalist power works through builders, developers, class structure and Masterji's protest against Dharmen Shah's redevelopment plan. Foucault in *The History of Sexuality* observes that "where there is power, there is resistance" (95). According to him, power is not a fixed structure and personal but a network of social relations. Power functions through norms and persuasion. In ' , Shah's control over Vishram Society is not his personal. Shah represents an authority. Shah's power socializes through his money and influence, which have given him access to social mechanisms such as media, market, law rather than being possessed by any single individual. It is constant due to a broader system of economic and social forces such as capitalism, urban development, the collusion of the residents, and the profit as progress. The residents' desires for money and modernity make them subjects of the same power system. Masterji's refusal reveals the resistance that exists within same network of power. However, resistance is not always rev-

olutionary; it may also be the form of ethical, or symbolic acts of questioning or refusing the authoritative power. Masterji's refusal to sell his flat becomes form of resistance. It is an ethical protest that emerges from within the social network. Foucault's idea that "where there is power, there is resistance" perfectly fits Masterji's protest against Dharmen Shah's redevelopment plan. Shah persuades the residents with his money and implies power through his capitalist authority control and fear whereas Masterji's protest can be seen through his refusal to sell his flat which also becomes a symbol of moral resistance.

The sudden shift of the residents from empathy to aggression towards Masterji shows how people compromise for economic needs and lose their moral values. A resident says that they are not bad people, but they are just practical people. The modernization of society is distinct when the residents have received tempting offers to vacate their homes. It shows how the economic condition of the people forces them to change their minds and make social changes. Some of his close friends came inside the house and murdered him mercilessly. Adiga shows how money changes the minds of people.

Ibrahim Kudwa lifted the hammer he had brought from the secretary's office, lunged forward, and hit Masterji on the crown of his head.turned the hammer upside down and stubbed it on his forehead using both his hands... He tried to shout, but he heard only a groan from his mouth.....The pillow from his bed...It pressed down on his nose and crushed his moustache..... he understood that Sanjiv Puri was sitting on it. His legs thrashed... 'He's unconscious. Sanjiv, enough. Get up' (LMT 322).

Masterji's loneliness and tragic end show how an individual in the society who fought for his rights faced systemic greed and injustices. Meanwhile, Masterji's protest signifies his courage against power. His rebellious nature reflects how strong he is; even though he is

old, he refuses to sell his apartment and stands strong against Shah's offer and betrayal of his neighbours. He states that this is his home and he will not leave. Even if the whole world gives in, he will not. He represents honesty and humanity in this materialist world. "When crushed under the power of the upper - class Shah, Masterji becomes the spokesperson of the marginalized section, and his struggle also embodies the resistance of the marginalized" (Badiuzzaman). The bravery of Masterji, even in his old age, shows his strongest nature. "I'm going to the police station, with or without you, he said. This builder thinks he can frighten me? In my own home?" (LMT 217). "He shows his dauntless resistance in the clash between the rich and the poor, corruption and integrity, privileged class greed and middle class morality, upper class exploitation and individual freedom" (Badiuzzaman).

Last Man in Tower emphasizes the violation of capitalist greed on common people. The passive resistance of Masterji in *Last Man in Tower* leads to a tragic end for him, which symbolizes the pointlessness of an individual's rebelliousness towards wealthy and capitalist forces. Valiyamattam in the article "Aravind Adiga's *Last Man in Tower*: Survival Strategies in a Morally Ambivalent India" states that, "Even as all his neighbors gladly embrace the incredible offer of the ruthless builder Dharmen Shah to transform their ancient housing society into a glitzy township of skyscrapers, Masterji finds himself in the unenviable role of the sole rebel who refuses to sell his flat, the only obstruction to the demolition of the old Vishram society and the ushering in of a new era of prosperity and luxury for so many."

The novel highlights the rapid modernization, social justice of the exploitation of the poor, and the resistance. It also exposes the unequal power between developers and common people. It shows how economic pressures affect sympathy, unity, community, and human values. The novel also depicts the greed, capital-

ism, and weakness of individuals and communities in the aspect of socio-economic pressures. In *Last Man in Tower*, Masterji trusts his moral courage. Masterji's commitment to his principles always pushes him forward. As a retired teacher, he has valued integrity and ethics throughout his life. He always believes in justice and values. The sense of principles and values made him to stand firm and protest against the face of threats.

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Abbreviations

- LMT – Last Man in Tower