

Scattered Old Values in *Last Man in Tower*

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Abstract

Ask any Bombaywallah about Tower A of the Vishram Co-operative Housing Society and you will be told that it is very reliable and trusting. Despite its location close to the airport and bordered by slums. But then Mumbai has changed in half a century, not least its name and the world in which Tower A was first built is giving way to a new city, a Mumbai of new development and new money; of wealthy Indians returning with fortunes made abroad.

Key-words: Tower, Dharmen, Vishram, Masterji

Aravind Adiga's novel *The White Tiger*, is a novel that took rage and anger at injustice and turned into a thrilling murder story in the novel *Last Man in Tower*. Now with the same fearlessness and insight, he broadens his canvas to give us a riveting story of money, power, luxury and deprivation, set in the city of Mumbai. Mumbai has changed in half a century, not its name, and the world in which Tower A was first built is giving way to a new city, Mumbai of new development and new money of wealthy Indians returning with fortunes made abroad. When real estate developer Dharmen Shah offers to buy out the residents of Vishram Co-operative Society, planning to use the site to build a luxury apartment complex, his offer is more than generous. Yet not everyone wants to leave; many of them have lived in Vishram for years, many of them are no longer young. But none can benefit from the offer unless all agree to sell.

As tensions rise, one by one those who oppose the offer give into the pressure of the majority, until only one man stands in the way of Shah's luxury high rise. Masterji, a retired schoolteacher, once the most respected man in the building. Shah is a dangerous man to refuse, but as the demolition deadline looms, Masterji's neighbours', friends who have become enemies, acquaintances turned co-conspirators may stop at nothing to score their payday. Dharmen Shah drew a line on the window with his finger:

'There is a golden line in this city: a line that makes men rich.'

Vishram Society is a middle class building. It is a home to respectable middle class people – a retired accountant, a social worker, a real estate broker, a cyber café owner and an old teacher. The world is changing fast and the growth of the nation valued in terms of economy, trade, science and political power. The social,

cultural, moral and spiritual values are side-lined. Aravind Adiga told the Times of India, “Money itself is amoral. It can liberate people as easily as it can destroy them.” We see it happen in novel *Last Man in Tower* turning the once extended family into a ruthless murderous mob. Values reflect a person’s sense of right and wrong or what ought to be the novel brings out the old and the new voices of Indian values. Aravind Addiga say that the two chief characters Dharmen Shah and Masterji reflect ‘Who he is and who he wants to be.’ Shah represents the modern India in tradition and development and Masterji represents the old Indian values. Values of India are disintegrating. The death of Masterji symbolizes the death of values. The principles of the man, who thought the world and its people to be good, faces his end in the brutal hands of the new India that is more materialistic and thinks in terms of personal development. Masterji who stands for the old faith is the only obstacle that stands between the rapidly developing modern world steeped in western wealth and ease.

Dharmen Shah is a self-made man who had hard earned his wealth, knows the way to do his business. He would give bribe and felt every man has a price and there is no one who wants nothing. According to Shah, in a village, a man lives as a social animal pleasing his father, grandfather, brothers, mother, grandmother and cousins. But man is free in the city. A city like Mumbai, has a number of people coming from outside. They have their own culture and ways to live in the city. They have no regret for the wrongs committed by them to others. The novel presents various characters of the future, for instance the Masterji’s son Gaurav who is without any affection and rejects even his father to avenge the hurt and was inflicted in his childhood by his father. Shah’s son continues to rebel and get caught by the police. He wants to be strong for the future by doing all these.

All the people in the society - the pintos, Ajwani, Ibbly, the secretary, the Puris including Shah’s henchman Shanmugam represent the traditional India that wants both the goodness of the old values and the success of the future. People are trapped and they want to be trapped. Masterji said about the Pintos ‘Vakola triumvate’ cheats in friendship. Masterji’s family declares him to be insane and cuts off relationship. The clergy refuse to help the old man. The police and the lawyers promise to help him and forsake him leaving him to fight his struggle alone. The neighbours appreciated him to be a gentleman but now they declare him selfish and insane. And they start hating him enough to kill him. The novel presents the old moral, social, religious, ethical and cultural values disintegrate to set forth a new set of values that are formed for sustenance in the world.

Masterji may be called insensitive to the sentiments of his wife and daughter. In the fast developing and growing city like Mumbai, what is right and what is wrong is a topic of discussion. Aravind Adiga expresses anger about cities in India, which economic expansion comes at an impossible price for their inhabitants.

Last Man in Tower is a passionate indictment of the social and ethical bankruptcy of contemporary India, particularly Mumbai. Here Adiga delivers a mixed portrait of Mumbai. His writing presents the energy of the city. It also describes the garbage and pollution in Mumbai. The result is an ironic story with morally and ethically engaged. This novel is funny and deeply melancholic work. Life in Mumbai is reflected with keen observations and sharp imagery. *Last Man in Tower* can tend slightly towards the schematic and each resident fallen and stop under Shah's spell. The power in the suspense is described in the novel. Masterji will triumph or eventually be subsumed by peer pressure, external threat or both. But the novelist manages to thicken his narrative with subtle examination of the nature of personal corruption. This novel shifts in tone to become darker and troubling story about the corruption bred by greed otherwise healthy communities are presented.

The harassment and severe torture done about the family of Masterji is very important turning point in the novel. If the novelist takes these severe events lightly in the novel the interest in the novel will be decreased. But whatever presented in the novel is with keen observation by Arvind Adiga.

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