

A Materialistic Study of Aravind Adiga's *Last Man in Tower*

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Abstract

Materialism clearly defines the greed for money other than human values in which the moral and ethical values seems nothings. A materialistic person valued wealth to humanity, and his greed to get enrich himself exploited several other fellow beings. This paper attempts to highlight the materialistic theme in Aravind Adiga's *Last Man in Tower*. Published in 2011, the novel is set in Mumbai concerning the lives of every strata of the society. While dealing with the tyrannical attitude of money-minded people like Mr. Shah, it also reflects the painful struggle of middle class which dreams of its improvement in the society. Misuse of power and money has been discussed effectively in the novel. Lust for money and power makes people so blind that humanity seems to be dead in the story. The common masses are always exploited and ignored everywhere. Materialism leads people to the path of corruption and immorality. The present paper explores how materialism paves way for crimes and violence.

Key Words: materialism, power, corruption, money, society.

Introduction: Materialism is such a disease that infects people morally, honestly and socially. Man is ambitious by nature and he falls prey to it. In order to gain more and more material pursuits, he even sells himself. It is the ill effects of materialism which make people immoral as well as corrupt. The greed for money and property has grasped all kinds of people. Oxford English dictionary defines materialism as "the belief that money, possessions and physical comforts are more important than spiritual values" (Oxford English Dictionary, web). The rich as well as the poor keep planning to get a lot of wealth. The lust for money incites people to indulge in unethical and illegal activities. It causes selfishness,

dishonesty, corruption and crimes in the society. Powerful and influential people spoil all the institutions the society and the poor yearn for justice for a long time. Everyone in the society longs to achieve more wealth as he is never satisfied with whatever he has. Following the path of others, he makes his own life miserable.

Literature and society are interconnected with each other. The way in which demand and production helps to run the society, it also helps to exploits the poor in the hands of corporate. Society produce the individuals some are socialistic in nature but some are not. The societies formed into a structure in which earning profit is the sole purpose. In which the corporate exploited the poor with the materialistic approaches. Almost all the economic relations formed by the elites. Engels and Marx define “With the change of the economic foundation the entire immense superstructure is more or less rapidly transformed”(Engels, Marx 57). The famous Marxist considered history is a product of class struggle in which the ruling class imposed their ideologies over working class. There are several authors talking about the class struggle in their works but Aravind Adiga is the most significant among them. As he worked for the economic TIMES magazine, his novel *Last Man in Tower* beautifully captured the ideologies of ruling class and the struggle of middle class in contemporary era.

Aravind Adiga, an Indo-Australian writer and journalist, born on 23rd of October in 1974 in Madras Grew up in Mangalore and studied in Oxford and Columbia Universities, when he moved to Australia with his family. He began his carrier as a journalist and started writing for the magazine, "Financial Times". He is one of the fourth Indian-born authors to win the prize, after Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy, and Kiran Desai. His novel's studies the contrast between India's rises as a modern global economy. Now he lives in Mumbai, India. His Major works such as "*The White Tiger*" (2008), "*Between the Assassinations*" (2008), "*Last Man in Tower*" (2011), "*Selection Day*" (2016) and some stories as "*The Sultan's Battery*" (2008), "*Smack*" (2008), "*Last Christmas in Bandra*" (2008) and "*The Elephant*" (2009).

Aravind Adiga has deftly explored materialism in *Last Man in Tower*. It is the ill-effect of materialism where humanity and friendship seem to be dead. The story exposes the selfishness of fake friends who change their friends in difficulties. It is the material benefits which make them do so. They are tempted by the offer given to them by Mr Shah offers them double amount of the actual rate of the property. Money is said to be a major weakness of human nature and people fall victim to it. On the other hand, Mr Shah yearns to be successful at any cost. He employs every tactics to get more and more money. Mr Shah. Masterji remains alone in the end in Vishram Society. There is no one who can stand with him in his struggle and his is murdered by Kothari, Sanjiv Puri, Ibrahim and Ajwani and other people at the behest of Mr Shah. The dark side of materialism can be traced how good friends or neighbours turn into enemies in the story. Masterji boycotted by his neighbours and his own son. After a long struggle with law and order Masterji came to know the money minded people around him. He state that “*I am no longer fighting Mr Shah, he thought. I am fighting my own neighbours*”(321). This quote clearly defines that the neighbours who lives for thirty years alleged Masterji wrong and favoured Mr Shah. Materialistic thinking of neighbours evidently seem when they urging Gourav against his father only to convince him.

In *Last Man in Tower*, Aravind Adiga effectively exposed how materialism has grasped every system in the society. Media, police and judiciary have not been spared from it. When Masterji is compelled to sell his flat again and again, he approaches judicial authorities. He has a firm faith in justice. He advises the advocate to fight his case in public interest. However, the advocate insists on demanding his fee. His ideals are shattered when he comes to know that judiciary itself is a puppet in the hands of corporate and real estate mafia. He, in fact, doesn't know what the power of money is. Moreover, he dreams of his utopian land. This can be obviously seen:

This is to state that intimidation in a free country will not be tolerated. I have been to the police station and received every assurance from the Senior Inspector that this is not a neighborhood where a teacher can be threatened. I am not alone. The famous legal team of Bandra, Parekh, and Sons, with whom I am in constant touch, will initiate action against any person or persons threatening me via phone or mail. In addition, I have students in

high places such as the Times of India office. Vishram Society Tower A is my home, and it will not be sold, will not be leased or rented or will not be redeveloped (268).

Aravind Adiga has revealed the materialistic nature of media which has derailed from its track. In a democracy, media is believed to be the fourth pillar. Instead of dealing with the serious and major issues of the society, it functions only for its vested interests. In the novel, the editor of The Tribune publishes his story only for the publicity of the newspaper. Its partial attitude toward corporate can be observed when Mr Shah is presented as kind man in the newspaper. Media should fight for the rights of public rather than flattery of corporate. It does not raise any concern after the murder of Masterji. It is clear that Masterji has been murdered but it is thought to be just a case of suicide.

Last Man in Tower explores the transformation of cultural and traditional values with the globalization in contemporary era. Liberalisation, materialism, modernisation, urbanization, alienation are the major issues beautifully represented by Adiga with his characters like Yogesh A. Murthy (Masterji) and Mr. Dharmen Shah. The novel captures the life in the city of dreams named Mumbai, which is also known as the socio-economic hub of India. Where everyone is running after money, no one values hard work. Earning money by hook and crook is the primary option rather than working hard for money. Where the elite, corporate, political class survive on the behalf of corruption and the poor working classes exploited, subjugated and forced them to remain silent. Due to this, the rich become richer and poor become poorer. Rich lives in luxurious apartments and the poor live like animals by the roadside. The novel represents the power of aristocrats, where they imposed their ideologies over the poverty-stricken. With this all the benefits taken by the elites and the poor exploited a lot. The poor and middle working class enslaved through culturally, politically, traditionally and economically by the elites. There are number of crimes emerging in the modern society in which the crime related to real estate is one of the most significant. People run after the materialistic life and spoil their lives by indulging into criminal activities. Adiga captured the hidden aspects of our society, where the newspapers tell everyone India is a shining, but the reality is far away. Rich enjoy their life and the poor suffering in the slums like animals. The characters of this novel are neither a hero nor a villain figures but the common men.

Having spent his major portion of life in Mumbai, Adiga himself has observed the materialistic nature of people in which they ruin their lives. What exactly he wants to convey that people have become so materialistic that they don't have any serious aims in their life. Their only concern is to earn lot of money by hook or by crook. One can notice people's greed for money in the beginning of the novel. Adiga writes, "Young people don't want to go into teaching. Computers or banking for them. Money, money, money"(123). He witnesses the materialistic approach of the common man in a serious manner. Materialism has engulfed their personal relations and people face a lot of alienation in their life. In order to get rid of the alienation, some people indulge in immoral and unethical activities. Ultimately, they destroy their life too.

It is Mr. Dharmen Shah who is the most materialistic person in *Last Man in Tower* by Aravind Adiga. The symbol of 'shark' has been assigned to his personality. He is so materialistic that he uses every foil trick to get hold of Vishram Society. He is a renowned and affluent builder in Mumbai who wishes to take control of the Vishram Society. He keeps an eye on Masterji who is not willing to sell his flat. In the end, his material pursuits murder so many innocent people such as Masterji. Using the power of money, Mr Shah turns his enemies into his side. In order to fulfil his vested interests, he never takes rest. He always keeps making new plans for acquiring more and more property.

Mr. Shah has a number of workers who act according to his will. Shanmugham is considered to be his right hand. He is also a materialistic person who has sold out his soul. He works for him whether it is right or wrong. If he has to pay a bag to politician, he goes by the side of his master. If someone is approaching to police he is the only one to sort out the matters. He can kill anyone if someone is not agrees with them. He has the power to sort out the matters as his master has the money. He considers himself the teeth of shark and his master full mouth of shark. In the novel Shanmugham approaches the residents of vishram society and offer them the double amount in exchange of their property. He bribes some of the greedy fellows of vishram society to help him getting the plots. He sends his gundas to frighten Masterji. He also bribes the advocate with whom Masterji files a complaint against Mr. Shah.

Adiga writes:

The use of generosity over violence, he earned a reputation as a man who made other man rich, always preferring to entice a recalcitrant tenant out of a building with a cheque rather than with a knife, and waiting until there was no other option but to order Shanmugham(as he had done in his most recent redevelopment project in Sion) to go all the way. (88-89)

The above lines clearly define a close relationship between materialism and crime. What the novelist wants here to express that excess of everything is harmful for human beings. The lust of earning money spoils Mr Shah.

Conclusion: *Last Man in Tower*, written by Aravind Adiga, is a fascinating novel written in a wonderful way. While expressing the process of globalisation, Adiga has beautifully defined the materialistic approach of all the characters in the novel. Set in Mumbai, the novel shows how materialism causes corruption, crime, violence and dishonesty. The major character, Masterji, is the worst sufferer who falls an easy prey to the wicked plans made by Mr Shah. Mr Shah is the representative of land mafia in the society who creates panic in public by manipulating various systems such as police, judiciary and media. Apart from Mr Shah and Masterji there are some other characters which are totally materialistic in nature.

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