

**REFLECTIONS OF GLOBALISATION AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC
CULTURE OF CONTEMPORARY MUMBAI IN ARAVIND ADIGA'S
NOVEL 'THE LAST MAN IN TOWER'**

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Abstract

This paper attempts to comprehend the concept of globalization and its influence over the English literature with special reference to Aravind Adiga's novel 'The Last Man in Tower'. The socio economic activity of an individual shapes his values, culture and literature. Globalisation has affected the social as well as cultural institutions widely. Mumbai being a commercial and financial hub has emerged as place of varied opportunities and migration has resulted into congestion of space and the burden over the basic amenities. To have a pucca house in Mumbai is a distant dream of middle class because of the corrupt politicians with short sight and developers and their intimate relations. The inhabitants of Tower A represents the middle class psyche of Mumbai trying to share the rocketed wealth on account of globalisation, the retired school teacher a stubborn hero-antihero and the greedy developer as villain a symbol of contemporary developers of modern Mumbai.

Key Words: *Capitalism, Development, Globalization, Lunghai, Mumbaikar, New Economic Policy, Privatization, Pucca House*

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The era of globalization is generally viewed by world economists and social scientists to have emerged after 1989, with the fall of the Berlin Wall (and, subsequently, in 1991, the Soviet Union) and the rise, in the 1990s, of the United States as lone remaining superpower. The process of globalization in India started with the introduction of New Economic Policy in 1991 after pursuing the import substitution for nearly 40 years. The globalization and liberalization and privatization are interconnected. Thus, it is typically defined as a period in which the sovereignty of nation states has declined, and modes of exchange – of money, technology, products, and people – operate with increasing ease and speed across national boundaries, producing configurations of power that exceed the boundaries of the nation state. There are divergent opinions about whether this situation constitutes global hegemony (a homogenized monoculture dominated by the US military, the mass media and the US-led IMF and World Bank), which is the position that Jameson himself, even in his recent writings, upholds, or whether it opens the possibility, with the radically increased speed of information flow, for new kinds of cultural production and political resistance – the optimistic (if sometimes excessively idealistic-seeming) position of such theorists as Michael Hardt and Tony Negri. Of course, it is not necessary to choose between these extremes in order to recognize the common ground they share: the sheer fact of globalization and its impact, potential and already realized, on all spheres of life.

The socio economic activity of individual decides the outcome of literature and culture. Therefore, the globalization as an economic activity has not remained detached with other cultural canons of the society. In fact, deep rooted influence of globalization is inseparable in modern English writings. Though, the attachment of globalization and literature is complex matter of study and research. As Paul Jay claims, "our awareness of the complex ways in which English and American identities have been constructed historically through migration, displacement, colonialism, exile, gender relations, and cultural hybridity has radically restructured our sense of what Paul Gilroy has dubbed the "roots/routes" of these identities. With this awareness it has become increasingly difficult to study British or American literature without situating it,

and the culture(s) from which it emerged, in transnational histories linked to globalization." After explorations on the core of this connection and as far as the objectives of the present study are concerned here three correlative levels of attachment or association become further highlighted. At one conceptual level, this relationship mainly engages with literary theory, discipline and criticism. The second level could be called one of tools or mediums with certain key terms. The Media and specially its new forms is one of the key terms here. Indeed, modern technologies such as satellite communications and World Wide Web have made drastic changes in dissemination of various forms of literature and quite relevantly information explosion has played a central role in distribution of social and cultural packages all around the globe. Also we may have a short look here at the globalization of publishing and literary institutions. The third level in itself includes broad disciplines and methods through which literary studies has evoked globalization. This is partly about the reflection of different themes of globalization in literature, and to another degree about the way the literary texts and the interpretation thereof have been recruited to support or elucidate conceptual positions taken by political and social or cultural theorists about globalization.

Mumbai has evolved from being a fishing hamlet to a colonial node, subsequently to being the cradle of textile civilisation, and in contemporary times has become the hub of India's commerce and finance. The most widely held popular perception about Mumbai is that of a city of opportunity for people from across South Asia, and now even beyond. These opportunities have of course been distributed unevenly, with Mumbai's rich and poor co-existing, and not always peacefully, with fundamentally differing entitlements to basic services – water and sanitation, health care and nutrition. In some of its large slums – the suppliers of cheap labour – children from poorer homes die because these slums exhibit malnutrition, morbidity and mortality levels closer to those current in the states of Bihar or Orissa. About 60 per cent of Mumbai's population lives in such slum areas, occupying a mere 8 per cent of land, and their lives are characterized by degraded housing, poor hygiene, congestion, inadequate civic services and yet expanding peripheries of its slumming suburbs. In 2005, Suketa Mehta wrote an extraordinary expose of Mumbai, *Maximum City*, in which he castigated the greed of the middle class and their disregard for the breakdown of civil order. He wrote of the slums, the racial divisions, the corruption, the gangsters, threats, bribes, extortion - that's how you get things done. And how do you keep your head above the writhing vortex? Money. The relentless forces of capitalism engulf a poisoned 21st century India in this troubling follow-up to the Booker-winning *White Tiger* to the *Last man in Tower*.

In his Booker-winning first novel, *The White Tiger*, Aravind Adiga began his fictional exploration of the less attractive face of modern India: a densely populated urban society in transit, in motion, and on the make. An India where temples arrange express-entry lines for paying customers, and money trickles from the glassed shards of the finance centres into the slums "like butter on a hotplate... enriching some and scorching others". The eponymous White Tiger, Balram Halwai, was at home here. Poor but ambitious, Halwai saw himself as an entrepreneur, a man made "from half-baked clay". He meant that his potential wasn't yet fulfilled, but the phrase also carried baggage that Halwai might not have cared to haul, with its echo of Richard III's complaint about being born "scarce half made up". India today, especially in its great cities, notably Mumbai, the setting of Adiga's novel, is in a comparable position, a comparable state of development. "Development" is, in one word, his subject. Mumbai is being transformed; it is a city where great fortunes are being made, especially in the construction industry, a city where the prospect of sudden and previously unimaginable riches breaks social bonds and corrupts relationships.

'Last Man in Tower' is a state of the nation novel or more accurately a state of Mumbai novel. The novel of 421 pages published by Harper Collins Publisher, New Delhi begins with the dedication to the fellow commuters on the Santacruz Churchgate line and a map of Mumbai showing the location of Vakola a western suburban region of Mumbai and the descriptions of the flat owners' of Vishram Co-operative Housing Society Limited. The title of society as 'vishram' contradicts to its meaning on translation as 'rest' by leading the entire society in restlessness in the hope of remaining 'in rest' for the rest of lives. The immoral and corrupt builders that operates in Mumbai today is represented through a tale of a struggle by Dhiren Shaha a wealthy developer approaching the members of society with Rs. 1.52 crore to acquire a land occupied by three towers of the lower-middle-class, crumbling Vishram Co-operative Housing Society for flashy redevelopment and it lies a colourful and ambitious story of the so called progressive, modern India struggling to acquire the share of poisoned as much by the rocketing wealth all around to change the standards and habits of the citizens of Mumbai with a desire of a standard of life in terms of the globalised India is attained. The sum offered by the developer Shah is so high that the middle class could never have acquired the total in their life time earnings. It's such a simple plot, yet one redolent of Adiga's concerns and Shah seems symbolic the new India, a callous, unstintingly ambitious man who apparently arrived in 'bare foot' from the north of Gujarat with ten rupees in his pocket. Adiga succeeds in portraying the acute problem of these ambitious builders having self looks who have poisoned the distant dreams of middle class to have a pucca house in Mumbai. The Shah's success as developer on the

backdrop of his lungs with swamp of poisoned mucous on constant exposure to the toxic dust from the demolition of projects displays the greediness in developers. His announcement of converting the Vishram Society into 'Confident Shanghai' satirizes the repeated announcements by successive heads of the state of their intention to convert Mumbai into Shanghai and exposes their failures resulting into '*Lunghai*' (a city of dust, pollution, corruption, malnutrition, crime, unhygienic living condition, slums and etc.). This novel with its crystal clear journalistic style in depicting the problems of corruption, politician builder nexus, lack of standard life, unhygienic conditions of living, slums and the age old chronic and infected perpetual problems of visionless politician which have been remained unsolved by successive governments since 1960 and also after the globalization in special reference. Hence, 'Development in terms of globalised India' being the subject matter of this novel reflects unimaginable riches who breaks social bonds and enters into corrupt relationships marks the clear divide in India of have and have nots. The tower was built in 1950 where it is described on a plaque in honour of Pandit Jawaharhal Nehru as 'Good Housing for Good Indians' with an intention to serve as an example but the intention remained in initial stage and remained absent in progress of the course of developing India. It reflects the citizens having worries, concerns and lack of pleasures. The location of tower is a symbolic example of progressing India in the midst of wretched slums ridiculing a utopian dream of 'Developed India'.

On the one side of the divide is a group of friends and neighbours who live in Tower A of the Society. The most respected of them is Yogesh A. Murthy aka masterji — a retired physics school teacher and recently widowed as hero or anti hero representing the frustrated orthodox and stubborn middle class psyche resisting change. But all the inhabitants of this tower are proud of having possessed of a 'Pucca' house in a crumbling world around them. Their perceptions of their prized possessions stands for something — standards, decency, and old-fashioned rules of their professed culture. In addition, the old tumbledown building represents more than land value and Adiga's skillful direction ensemble cast to access to a range of voices and experiences. Slowly, under the pressure of intimidation and lure of hard cash, the ambiguous principle of pride fades and breaks down their unity except Masterji remaining last all alone in Tower. Masterji's fight is noble, futile, willful and daring holding post modernity on globalization at bay as he desires no demand of fulfillment. In words of Christopher Cyril, "But it is also the nobility and willfulness of one who has nothing more to lose". The Dickensian style of narration tours around Masterji's hanging on for nothing and not simply to blight Shah and the globalization he represents but only for the sake of his memories of his dead

wife and a train accident victim his dead daughter. In course of the story we come across good but rather poor Mumbaikar going to be unhinged by the pressures of the outside world, which is applied by the developer, Dargem Shah. His huge offer of unimaginable sums of money to all the inhabitants with the help of his creature and enforcer, Shanmugham is just the figures the residents either have read, heard or imagined. Shah explains his dream to build something like the extravagances of Shanghai of marble stones and all sorts of unheard of modern conveniences, like air-conditioning and reliable 24-hour water. The initial refusal of the residents to discuss selling reflects their love of the place, warmth, if rather penumbral, social life; they like the antiquity of the Society (built in 1950), the old trees, the dozy guards, the exploited cleaners and their outdoor parliament, where they practice a kind of arthritic democracy.

Adiga draws a clear cut fault line in a society in Mumbai, his conscious Dickensian style novel, that of slum dwellers, criminals, police, immigrants, lawyers and fruit-sellers who do have their rich say. The fractured patriarchy on rise of nuclear family and emerging force of women are often more forceful than their husbands and the cosmopolitan culture of Mumbai in the rising Indian tradition after the onslaught of globalization is vividly presented. His Dickensian style of narration has approved his interest in the whimsical figure of speech consist of wonderfully witty, even glorious, like his description of the station: *"Stone mastiffs flew out from the central dome; rams, wolves, peacocks, other nameless hysterical beasts, all thrusting out of the station, scream silently above the traffic and clutter. Multiplying the madness, a cordon of palm-trees fanned the building — frolicking. Sensual, pagan trees, taunting, almost tickling, the gargoyles."*

Adiga uses a sort of second division of imagery which he over-indulges: *'This place with sea view had palace-of-sin plushness'* doesn't make much sense and *'the ocean — storm swollen, its foam hissing thick like acid reflux, dissolving gravity and rock and charging up the ramps'* seems to contain four not very precise metaphors. Also, sometimes the jokiness of his imagery is at odds with the underlying seriousness of his project. This is remarkably a dynamic trend in use of metaphors after the successful acceptance of Indian English Writing over the American and British English.

The evocative astonishing descriptions of temples, churches, mosques, shrines, public buildings, markets, shops, stalls, hawkers display the life of Mumbai and makes it as the central theme of novel and therefore, Mumbai is the central character in 'The Last Man in Tower'. The changing cultural values on accounts of rise of materialism and consumerism as side effects of the globalization, weak political system, capitalist economy, exclusive growth, vote bank politics and

importance to influential rich economic class which has given the most significant place for money in deciding over the principles, cultural values, morality and patriotism. This in turn has given rise to tremendous greed as almost everyone wants something i.e. a piece of wealth destroying the sense of community sharing and responsibility. Only Masterji wants nothing at all. When he is asked by gangsters and lawyers, a Buddhist priest and even schoolboys, what he wants, his answer is always the same: nothing. Nobody believes him. Soon his former friends and admirers turn on him. Even his son and the lawyer he hires try to trick him.

The comical, lyrical turns of the novel nags the sense of readers reflecting the Mumbai with an exotic cast of crooks; so susceptible to greed are they that his fellow residents would like him murdered, because under the rules of the Society, every single member must agree to sell. It's interesting to note that even the property developer, admires Masterji, even though he has had many recalcitrant tenants injured or bumped off. In his view 'deep down, everyone admires violence'. He has a very young mistress and a spray-painting teenaged son. This is the new Mumbai of ostentatious wealth hard by teeming slums and grinding poverty.

Conclusion

'Last Man in Tower' is a clear reflection of globalization and socio economic culture of contemporary Mumbai and its narration is rich in detail and the evocation of everyday life. Its periphery encompasses the Mumbai and its estate market and the builder-politician nexus, the unhygienic condition of living in Mumbai, slums, the middle class psyche, the appalling crime and the problem of immigration.

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