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JOURNAL OF LANGUAGE AND LINGUISTIC STUDIES

ISSN: 1305-578X

Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies, 17(3), 2265-2268; 2021

Realism In Aravind Adiga's Last Man In Tower

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APA Citation:

Suganiya, C., & Gejeswari, N. (2021). Realism in Aravind Adiga's Last Man in Tower, *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, 17(3), 2265-2268.

Submission Date:08/10/2021

Acceptance Date:22/12/2021

Abstract

The characteristics of Realistic fiction tend to take the first place in the present or recent past literature. The characters and the background portrayed in the works are real or seem real. The characters represent real people with their real issues and try to solve them realistically. The characters are not imaginary but are engaging and authentic. There is an honest portrayal of the problems faced by the characters. The solutions to the problems are also discernible and plausible; there will not be any supernatural things. This paper is an attempt to trace these characteristics of realism in Aravind Adiga's novel *Last Man in Tower*.

Keywords: Realism, bourgeois, Adiga, Last Man in Tower.

1. Introduction

Realism is an artistic movement that started in France in the 1840s to show opposition to Romanticism which had dominated French literature and art till then. In the Romantic age, the artists had the style of foreign subject matter and exaggerated emotionalism and drama. A realist portrays the actual situation in society and the surroundings in their works. They will not neglect to write about any disagreeable or disgusting aspect of life in contemporary society. The primary aim of realism is to offer a true, accurate, precise, clear-cut and objective representation of the real world. Primarily realism is concerned with how things appear to the eye. Realists' works are the mirror image of contemporary society.

For realists, the characters in the novels or dramas are more important than the plot itself. The realistic stories have plots that highlight social or personal events or issues that mirror contemporary life, such as falling in love, marriage, seeking a job, divorce, and the changes brought by the industrial and commercial revolutions.

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Aravind Adiga is a Booker Prize winner (2008) for his first publication, *The White Tiger*. He published *Last Man in Tower*, the third book, in 2011. In his writings, Adiga uses black comedy and satire to narrate the realities of contemporary India. He is one of the critical contemporary realistic writers. His works show a crystal clear image of Indian Social, Economic, Religious, Political, and Ethical conditions. This novel, *Last Man in Tower*, reveals a perplexing tension between traditional values and modern living in Mumbai. It is an existentialistic drama. It is evident in one of the interviews by Aravind Adiga with Goodreads, where he says, “The format of the new (*Last Man in Tower*) novel is dictated by my own experience in Mumbai: The apartment building is based on that I live in” (Goodreads).

This novel is about the positive and negative effects of developments in the Metro city of Mumbai. The novel’s protagonist is an old man, Masterji, a retired school teacher living in Vishram Society Tower ‘A’ at Santa Cruze in Mumbai. The antagonist Dharmen Shah, a Middle aged man, is a property developer. He is offering a huge amount of money valued 200 per cent more than the market value of towers ‘A’ and ‘B’. Tower ‘B’ is filled with the IT field people who accept the offer and start to move to different new places. In tower A, except Masterji, all other residents accept Shah’s deal and are ready to leave the building and gain more profit. Masterji refuses to sign the bond with Shah; he becomes a great villain in the eyes of the residents of his building. So he faces many troubles and threats from the neighbours and Shah. However, he is not ready to change his mind and his decision. He faces many rejections by the residents and by his son. Finally, he is mercilessly murdered by the near and dear ones.

One characteristic of realism is that the places mentioned in the novels could be real. In the introduction part of the novel, *Last Man in Tower*, Adiga gives a map of the clear-cut location of Santa Cruz, Vokola. It is a real place in Mumbai. Adiga describes the surroundings of the places lively and evidently. All the places, which are mentioned throughout the novel, are accurate. (Malabar hill, Tamil Temple, University of Calicut, St Catherine’s School, etc.) Vokola is a section of the city of Mumbai under a great deal of redevelopment by many of Mumbai’s great, famous builders. Vokola is an outer area in Mumbai, located near the international airport and the railway station.

The characters in the realistic novel are real, and their problems are also authentic. The characters in LMT are seen in the real sense of flesh and blood. There are no imaginative characters and problems and no supernatural being found in this novel. Masterji and his problems are all plausible. Being an old man, he has his memories of the Vishram Society. He lost his daughter in a train accident; he has one painting notebook which belongs to his daughter. In that, his daughter had drawn the surrounding of Vishram Society. His wife died a few months ago, so he has memories of her in the house. He does not want to leave the house.

Sangeeta (Mrs. Puri) is the mother of Ramesh, who is 18 years old. He is suffering from Down’s syndrome. She is ready to leave the house immediately because the deal made by Shah is 200 per cent more than the market price. She wants to get a big house than the present one. She constantly imagines the new house and a wooden cupboard in that. The money to be got by accepting Shah’s deal, may help her to have good treatment for Ramesh. Not only Masterji and Puri but all the characters in and around the Vishram society seem to be accurate. All have their aims, and they run towards them.

Through the characters of Dharmenshah (Shah), the property developer and his assistant Shanmugham, Adiga shows the true face of contemporary India’s real estate and property development business. Shah owns a famous real estate development company in Mumbai named Confidence Group. In construction, the developers have to work hard and badly require physical labour. Shah knows how to handle the workers if they want to leave the job. Shah comes to know that some workers in his ongoing site want to leave the work. He threatens them by saying he will send buses around Maharashtra to pick up the villagers to work at his site. He increases their greed for money by saying he is ready to give 300 rupees daily. “I’m tossing gold in the air. Who will grab it?” (62). At the same time, he encourages them mentally to continue the hard work by saying that he worked hard to reach this position from poverty. With the money and attractive talk, he sustains the redevelopment field as a successful person. Shanmugum is a trustworthy servant who does many illegal activities for his boss.

We come across most of the problems faced by contemporary Indians in this novel: accidents, bribery, the crowd in transport, pollution, murders, traffic jam, spending more time watching TV serials, and servants' attitude towards bosses. Adiga even talks about the seasonal changes in Mumbai.

In developing countries like India, building construction is an important business. In a city like Mumbai, transforming the slum into a developed area will be the main aim of the corporation. For the development process, the government always threatens the people living in slums to vacate the place. That is also exhibited in LMT through the mouthpiece of Mary, who works as a servant in the Vishram Society. She once says to Masterji, "They're trying to throw me out of my home too. I live by nullah" (291).

From the novel's beginning to the end, Adiga mentions the crowd in Mumbai city. Another major city problem is traffic jams and rush or overcrowding in public transport. Masterji travels from Churchgate station to Santa Cruz. On the train, the old man Masterji could not find any place for him. He does not even find a proper place to stand because of over crowd on the train. Adiga satirically says, "The smell of another's shirt became the smell of his shirt." (48) This overcrowding sometimes causes accidents. In Masterji's family itself, it had happened. Masterji's daughter Sandhya died because someone elbowed her from the overcrowded train. It happened in the ladies' compartment. It makes us think if the ladies' compartment had that much crowd, how much would the crowd be in the common compartments?

Masterji goes to meet a lawyer to fight against Shah. There he overhears somebody's talk. They discuss the great dangers of the city. They mention that children and goats are the two great dangerous things in Mumbai. Children are the greatest responsibility for half of the accidents in the city. Not only the children but also some animals die because of accidents. Shah sees a dead cat on the road to Malabour Hill, where his house is located. That cat was killed by someone while driving his vehicle. That dead cat's head and body are scattered on the road. Adiga uses this chance to advise the readers by saying, "But what about you, Dharman, the pulverized animal asked. You're next, aren't you?" (120). Adiga indirectly says that accidents can happen to anyone at any time in the overcrowded city

Bribing is so common these days. Adiga describes many bribing incidents in the novel LMT. Shah gives an envelope with money inside to the policemen to bring his son Satish to his house when all the other boys in his gang are under arrest. The police do this by considering their station's excellent relationship with Shah. It means that Shah regularly gives bribes to the police station.

Ajwani needs to know what is in the dustbins of Puri, Pinto, Rego and Masterji to find the move of these people and their weaknesses so that he can threaten them and make them sign Shah's bond. To get that information, he gives a sweet box and a ten rupee note to Mary, a housekeeping woman in the society. In Hibiscus Society, Mary enquires about a job vacancy as a maidservant. To give the information about the vacancy, the old society guard demands a bribe "All right. But what's my interest in this? Do I get monthly cut? If I don't then..." (142). The lawyer met by Masterji is also influenced by the bribe of Shah, and he tries to convince Masterji against his own will and wish. Whoever has a chance to get bribes expects something from others for his/her duty.

Using too much cell phone is also the main problem these days. People use cell all the time, even while driving. If the elders advise youngsters not to use cell while driving, they will not consider it. Adiga also refers to that in TLM. In this novel, Rego the social worker, shouts at a motorcyclist who staggers from side to side down the road, his headset being moved to one side as he is talking on his phone; he smiles as he passes her and continues talking.

Older people's complaint about the new generation is their laziness. Adiga, through his mouthpiece of Masterji, says "Boys were hard working in the old days, I wonder where those days have gone" (125). Masterji adds that young people do not want to become teachers, and they select computers or banking for their higher studies, which can be done by sitting in a chair and not even standing. Masterji is upset that the youngsters do not have the physical and mental works and the machines and computers do all.

Being addicted to TV serials is another bad habit these days. Kothari, the society's secretary aged 55, is sitting on the staircase very sadly because of his wife, who does not allow him to watch TV. That much interest he has in watching TV. Mr. and Mrs. Pinto are more interested in watching Hindi serials than hearing what Ajwani says over the phone. If they have heard Ajwani properly, Pintos might have stopped the murder of Masterji. They put cotton in their ears by the secretary's advice to avoid hearing what is happening in society. At the same time, they are not ready to miss the day's episode of the serial, so they watch the serial with closed ears but with opened eyes. That much interest they have got in the serials. We can notice the influence of movies in plotting the murder. Masterji is killed not by trained, experienced murderers but by simple neighbours who have lived beside him for more than 30 years. Mrs. Puri explains her plan of 'simple thing' to kill Masterji. Mr. Puri wants to write the details of the plan of murder in his drawing book as in English movies in which the plan is always made beforehand.

Pollution and its effect on people are mentioned in the novel. Shah, the antagonist of the novel, suffers from 'Chronic bronchitis. Doctor Nayak advises Shah to leave the redevelopment construction. The doctor says the buildings that Shah breaks up are made-up of cheap materials and paint, which are banned nowadays and pollute the air. The doctor of Shah says that the one thing in Mumbai he cannot buy is uncontaminated air. The lawyer Parekh who sits in the AC room uses the disinfectant to protect him from the polluted air. Throughout the novel, we can read about many crackers burned for marriage or religious festivals.

The climate of Mumbai is also illustrated in this novel. In May, people suffer a lot due to heavy heat. Adiga describes the effect of heat as follows: "The coconut palms are turning brown. The cows don't want to stand even if you put food in front of them." (62). In August, there is wild rain in Mumbai. It continues till September. On the 2nd of September, there is heavy rain. When the rain stops, the Mumbai people again feel the heat. "The rains stop and it's the middle of summer again." (281) It shows that whatever rains the land in Mumbai gets, it is not getting cooled. It indicates the poor rainwater harvesting system in Mumbai.

Many threatening and cheating incidents also take place in Mumbai. Shanmugum once opens his mind to Ajwani about his illegal activities. He reveals his act of threatening the people who neglected to sign the deal of Shah by using the poor slum boys as thugs at low cost. He shares his deed of threatening a man by keeping a knife on his neck and makes him accept to sign in the deal. At first, Rego fears accepting the deal because some other property developers cheated on her uncle without giving him the money they promised in the bond. Many property developers are cheating the people without settling their money as promised.

2. Conclusion

In the novel *Last Man in Tower*, we come across the problems contemporary people face. This novel reveals a perplexing tension between traditional values and modern living in Mumbai. The characters introduced by Adiga in the novel are seen in the real sense of flesh and blood. The problems faced and the solutions sought by the characters are also acceptable and happening in our daily life. Thus Adiga has employed all the principles of Realism in *Last Man in Tower*.

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