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MASTERJI'S OBSTINACY : A MEDLEY OF ADHERENCE, EGOISM AND FRUSTRATION
WITH REFLECTIONS OF BETRAYAL AND CORRUPTION IN ADIGA'S
'LAST MAN IN THE TOWER'

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ABSTRACT

Humans are essentially empathic and human-friendly beings, and those who are not, basically don't fit in any social society. The people who are not able to survive in seclusion and separation, get deep-down in loneliness, frustration, self-absorption and ultimately become melancholic and depressed. This sort of state of mind undoubtedly creates an irritated, pessimistic, egocentric, and respect-less mentality in such humans and ultimately egocentrism can be observed. This is undoubtedly one of the root-causes of all human misery in the world. Aravind Adiga sketches a similar condition of Yogesh Murthy alias Masterji in his novel 'Last Man In The Tower'. In spite of being the good man of the novel, Masterji suffers because of his adherence to the precedent memories of his wife and family and is frustrated by the ingrained corruption and gluttony for money. Ultimately he seems to become egoistic and self centered which leads him to his dejected death.

Keywords- frustration, narcissism, egocentric, nihilism, reminiscences, destruction, betrayal, stubbornness, bereavement, idealism.

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INTRODUCTION

Aravind Adiga, a man of journalism, observes the people around him ardently. His portrayal of the Indian society as a whole is the transparent reflection of changing values in our socio- political -religious structure. He excels in sketching his characters, especially, being a journalist. He has with great ease, depicted the evils surviving in the society like corruption, social discrimination, difference between classes on the basis of their caste, creed, color and economy. His characters are the mirror images of the people living around in the Indian society.' *Last Man in Tower*' is an appealing study of human temperament in war between principle and practicality. When Dharmen, Shah a property developer offers to buy out the residents of Vishram Society for eye-watering sums, the righteous yet conceited teacher is the only one to turn down the offer. He is not the first person to refuse to go along with Shah's offer but ultimately becomes the last to do so. Initially he resists to the offer of Dharmen Shah to help out his friend but when Mr. Pinto takes his steps back, 'MasterJi' doesn't get back with him. He takes it on his reputation. His firm determination and unwillingness to lay down

his arms against his sentimental attachment to his home. He considers it as his right to live in the house for he does not want to part with the reminiscences of his wife and daughter. He wants to spend "the cigarette stub of years left to a man already in his sixties" (30) by teaching bi-weekly science 'top up' classes to the children of the society; by playing with Rubik's cube; by reading *The Soul's Passageway after Death* or by lending Agatha Christies' murder mysteries to his neighbors.

Now the question arises that what is the critical explanation behind his refusal. Is Masterji's refusal meant to shield a more vulnerable tenant? Is he looking out for more cash? Is he just afraid of change? Does he relish the sensation of power? Is his refusal entrenched in incorruptible principle or tyrannical self-esteem? The property developer shows his contempt:

"In my experience, some older people oppose a redevelopment project because they are frightened of any kind of change. Some just want more money. And then there is one kind of person, the most dangerous, who says no because he is full of negative will power: because he does not enjoy life and does not want others to enjoy life." (114)

Masterji, an insightful educator but proves to be ineffective, stubborn and solitary. He is one of the most delightfully contradictory characters to appear in recent fiction. He is an interesting portrait of all the colors of egocentricism, strict adherence and aggravation. In the beginning, the situation makes readers believe that his stand against Shah is commendable, especially considering the situation he is forced into by his fellow residents. But as the novel progresses, Masterji's obstinacy starts to grate. Is he to be lauded for his adherence to his principles, or is the issue more multifaceted? Masterji has led a lonely and isolated journey of life and has nothing to carry along at the end or accumulate for anyone. He chooses to adhere by his principles though he himself does not know why.

The residents of Vishram Society earn enough only to make up with their needs. They do not have any extra money to maintain their building's infrastructure and spend on its repairs. The availability of water and electricity is uncertain and unreliable. "After four decades of monsoons, erosion, wind-weathering, air pollution, and the gentle but continual vibrations caused by the low-flying planes, Tower A stands in reasonable chance of complete collapse in the next monsoon."

Dharmen Shah's offer is of \$330,000 per family to leave their crumbling six-story complex so that he can build a luxury skyscraper named Shanghai in its place, is like butter melting on the hot plate. Almost everyone in the Vishram is elated by the transaction: "Now all of us in this building, all of us good people, have been blessed by the Hand of God," one happy mother declares. Masterji's rejection to the proposal and his opposition to vacate the building is enough to hold every resident's good fate. Such stubbornness can undoubtedly create a wretched feeling and furiousness against anyone no matter whosoever he is. "There is so much anguish in the building over your strange actions," one tenant tells Masterji. But the old science teacher, who is so in the swing of things, to the stars and the moon, to the ideas of history and political idealism, is indifferent to such poignant pleas.

On one hand, we can consider his standpoint of his right of freedom, and his desire to see the ideal of cooperative living as apparent but then again, from the point of view of his neighbors, who are struggling against their own odds, his refusal to Shah's proposal is a lack of empathy. Their dreams of a better and secure life seem to be held hostage by one man. And do the convictions of one man cancel out the desires of the rest of the civic body? After all, because of his stand, he is denying Shah's generous buyout to everyone in his building. Masterji's apparent obstinacy – his refusal to sign the offer means no one in the building can sell – has its justifications, and ultimately the readers seem to come on the side of his neighbours on the matter of the offer. While all the members of Vishram Society look for to get higher together through monetary means, the old man still clings to the authority and significance that he attaches to his position as an educator. In many ways, although a figure of Indian authority, Masterji is also a pillar of Western autocracy or at least a stature whose actions pit him against his neighbors who represent contemporary India. Adiga casts Masterji as a spokesperson of India's heritage and tradition, a mix of both colonial and post-independence ideology.

Sometimes, even Masterji himself is compelled to think whether he is going the right path or not. He often contemplates when people are unnaturally kind to him and says, "Wasn't Gaurav right? "- Wasn't it just pride that kept him from running to Mr Shah and saying: 'I accept your offer. Now leave me alone!" (p.300)

He stares at three of his neighbours; women who had once pampered and flattered him but who now conspire his undoing, and wonders: "Am I looking at good people or bad?"

However, Masterji's soreness and anguish, bereavement and desolation is incomprehensible. His miserable condition owes to his wife Purnima's recent demise and of course to his daughter's untimely death. He lives with the memories of his earlier happy days in that old apartment building. An old calendar against the kitchen wall, a portrait of his wife's favorite deity, the Lord Balaji and her wedding sari call to his mind the happy moments of his past .Masterji finds his joy in the wistful moments around himself in his apartment.

"He closed his eyes and brought his hands near the gold border of the sari. He breathed in the camphor-tinted air from the shelf. He thought of the time he had not defended her from her brothers in Suratkal. The old calendar began to hit the wall faster, tap-tap-tap, and now he was sure that Purnima was speaking to him. Tap-tap-tap. She did not want to know the past."(77)

Where on one hand these sweet reminiscences of the past fill his life with an air of freshness, his only son Gaurav's unsentimental connection creates a physical rift. The old man is very well aware that his son's major interest is for his property and his mother's jewellery. He was never concerned with his father's emotions. Ronak, his grandson was the only reason in his life with whom he felt life as worth living. He was a simple and a different man while he enjoyed the playful pleasures with him. An old isolated man of no significance to his family and betrayed by his close friends .The pain caused by his own family on one side; and the betrayal of the Pintos, who were so close as to imagine themselves as "Vakola Triumvirate," on the other side throw Masterji into a state of despair. The torments and sufferings of Masterji are not noticed. He holds no other title rather than an obstinate revolutionary in the eyes of his Son, friends and his students and is at last abandoned by all. After failing to avail any help from the police and law, he is deeply frustrated and it gives impetus to his decision to face any sort of ill behavior from his neighbours, friends, students and other residents of the society. This unshakeable willingness and capacity to bear the things like piss of an eighteen years boy on his door, again reflects his geocentricism

Masterji's fight is no doubt daring and noble but isn't it futile? Masterji values courtesy, decency and his wife's memories above monetary gain, but he is also an unpleasant disciplinarian. His neighbours are seen as greedy but is their desire for life improvement, proper food, cloth and education for their children really a greed. The residents of Vishram Society see Shah's offer as a life supporting offer and they act accordingly.Masterji is an embodiment of 'good' but his obstinacy is no good for the people who need a better place to live in. The issue is concerned with the basic amenity which every common man needs to survive and can fight till his last breath for it. Of course this does not favours the wrongs done with Masterji or justifies his killing by the residents. It is a matter of concern that business icons like Dharmen Shah can easily change the natural, temperament of a human beings seeking survival and a man of ideology is unable to resist the hawks gliding over the money, gold and real estate.

Adiga takes us deep into the psychology of Mumbai where no act can seem too desperate or too outrageous; no wall can be built high enough to hold back the urban realities. At the city's core, one million people live per square kilometer , thus the setting of a semi-prosperous apartment block is symbolically in tune with all that Adiga is exploring. the residents of the block, set amid slums must do what is necessary to survive. Thus, the members of the society play their own part to defend their destiny while Yogesh Murthy alias Masterji suffers his own pathetic fate as a reward to his unyielding idealism, narcissism adherence and ensuing obstinacy.

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