

**UNDERSTANDING THE CRUX OF GLOBALIZATION WITH ARAVIND ADIGA'S  
*LAST MAN IN TOWER***

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Hermeneutics refers to the study of interpretation of anything that is manmade and which can have several embedded meaning it unlike the natural sciences which does not have multiple meanings. It is basically applied to understand Biblical texts but can be applied to other texts as well. A text can be understood against its context in a different way. Hermeneutics is a theory of interpretation which tries to find the meaning of smaller units and bigger units trying to locate the meaning of both. To understand and interpret the Indian Fiction in English of the new millennium, a proper understanding of the background is necessary. One of the important factor that has influenced everything in the new millennium is the globalization. The effect of globalization can be seen everywhere including the literary world. So a proper understanding of globalization and its effect on people of India is needed to understand the contemporary writing.

The term 'globalization' is hard to define as it conveys different meaning in different fields. In cultural realm it refers to the cohesion of cultures, in commerce it refers to transnational trade relations and in Economics it refers to the flow of revenue across the borders. Globalization is not a new phenomenon to India, as there are evidences from Pliny the Elder, Adam Smith and Claudius Ptolemy on the flourishing trade practices in India. But the contemporary globalization, which started in 1980s guided by the economic policy of neoliberalism, is different from the earlier one.

Neoliberalism is the reincarnation of classical liberalism that advocated the protection of private property. Liberalism advocated relaxing of the tight grip of the state over the market but neoliberalism goes a step ahead and encourages the state to intervene and help in

the growth of the market. This economic policy became a hegemonic discourse, when the leading nations like the United States of America, the United Kingdom and China adopted this policy to improve their economy. From these epicentres, the policy spread all over the world. With the efforts of the USA, G 7 states, GATT, NATO and IMF this policy spread to many countries particularly the countries in the Global South including India. (Global South is relatively a new term to refer to the under developed and developing countries which were erstwhile colonies and most which are situated in the Southern hemisphere of the world).

India embraced the neoliberal globalization in the year 1991, taking a new turn from proto-socialist economy of Nehru which rejected both the Western liberal ideal of free trade and entrepreneurial individualism and the authoritarian Marxist Leninist forms, to uplift the Indian economy which was in a severe crisis. Due to the failure of monsoon and other political issues country's debt approached 50% of the GDP. To avoid a major catastrophe the country received a loan of \$ 1.8 billion from IMF agreeing to amend the structural adjustments as directed by it. The structural adjustments under neoliberalism stressed on deregulation of industries, curbing the power of labour and dismantling of all welfare measures to the public, especially to the agricultural sector.

A New Economic Policy (NEP) was implemented by the Finance Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh. Under this new policy, Liberalization, Privatization and Globalization came into existence. The restrictions on private businesses was relaxed, many sectors which were under the control of the state were privatized and through globalization Indian markets were opened for foreign investors. The pro-liberalization rhetoric promised that once the benefits are enjoyed by the capitalists, it would trickle down to the grass root level to the poor. But unfortunately, the developments favoured some and did not help the vast majority. The free market capitalism helped the rich and they became richer. The educated middle class

found jobs in thriving service sector. Unfortunately the uneducated and unskilled populace were left behind in the process of development.

Globalization opened up many lucrative job opportunities to the educated Indian youth in the IT sector and BPOs. While the production sector became weak, the service sector had an unprecedented growth. With the disappearance of production sector, the labour class began to diminish and the executive class emerged in large numbers. Most of the IT hubs were located near the city and it had a direct impact on urban spaces. The city spaces were compartmentalized and the poor people were peripheralised from city and suburbs. Malls and multiplexes became the success symbols of neoliberal globalization while the poor lost their living spaces. Urban redevelopment to accommodate the executive class and to satisfy their growing needs resulted in the peripheralization of poor.

All these changes in the Indian society is captured by the novelists of post liberalization period and their novels are distinctively different from the novels written before globalization. These novels move away from the postcolonial novels which focussed mainly on the emerging new India, the effects of colonialism and the life of the people before and after independence. The post liberalization novels try to portray the effects of globalization in various sectors, metamorphosing India and the changing mind set of the people. Aravind Adiga is one of the novelists to breaks the myth of globalization by presenting a dark and real picture of the country. His Booker winning novel *The White Tiger* portrays the condition of the people in the underbelly and their sufferings. The criminalization of youth to accrue the benefits of the improved economy through globalization is presented in the novel. His next novel *Last Man in Tower* presents the problem of urban restructuring and its harsh effect on the people. Adiga gives a true picture of neoliberalization that creates spatial irregularities and demarcation of poor. The novel also shows the changing mind set of people who have become materialistic.

The novel presents the ongoing neoliberal restructuring of the city of Mumbai, and how it affects the life of the residents of an old apartment, Vishram Society, in Vakola, a suburb of Mumbai. Vakola was considered 'slummy', till the new Bandra-Kurla financial complex comes in its precincts. The area's proximity to the airport, which was once considered a big problem, now after globalization, with boom in the air travel, becomes a plus point for the area. Moreover, the suburban location of the area, invites redevelopment by smart entrepreneurs, who could create a special space for the consumption of the growing new middle class and the rich. So, Dharmen Shah, an enterprising builder and his rival, J.J.Chacko, try to take hold of this area through their redevelopment projects. They try to persuade people of this location to sell their land and building for the price offered by them, so that they could demolish it and use it for their dream projects with all world class amenities for the consumption of rich. Dharmen Shah makes an offer to the residents of Vishram Society, for a redevelopment project and offers an amount that is much above the market price. Though the residents are encouraged to buy it, they cannot do so, because of its high price. With the money, they are forced to move to locales, where they could afford to buy a house. The redevelopment of city space result in the financialization of space.

At first some of the residents of the apartment are reluctant to accept the offer. They suspect the builder and his promise. Mr.& Mrs.Pinto, the oldest of all, resent the offer as Mrs.Pinto being blind couldn't survive in any other apartment. Mrs.Rego, a communist, fights against the redevelopment. Mr. Yogesh Murthy or Masterji refuses to move out as he feels that his house is filled with the memories of his dead wife and daughter. Other residents feel happy and excited and readily accept the offer. Dharmen Shah uses his dirty business techniques and makes everyone accept the offer but fails to convince Masterji, who adamantly opposes the offer. He with the help of the residents he threatens Masterji in several ways. When the deadline nears the attitude of the residents change completely and they end

up killing Masterji, the last man in tower. The novel gives a real picture of changing India and the materialistic attitude of the people.

Adiga touches upon several issues of urban development and shows how the public space is demarcated between the rich and the poor of the city. The rich locality, where Shah lives is made congenial for the rich by cleaning and making it usable for them. The beach of Verosa is strictly divided and the place is cleaned up for the use of rich, who practice yoga, tai-chi and spot jogging. The poor are restricted to use the area of the beach, which is used by the rich. The new middle class, who have moved to the position of upper middle class, and the rich show aversion towards poor and consider them as pollutants of the city. Ajwani, a real estate broker, tells how the lower income people were compelled to move from a place, when it becomes financially upgraded. He narrates his expedition to meet a young actress at Juhu. He says “the real estate prices went up in Juhu. Even those holes-in-the-wall became too costly for that actress and other nice girls like her. They packed and went up to north: Verosa, Oshiwara, Lokhandwala...the real estate prices went up in the north too. The girls moved to Malad” (LMT 375). The value of land increases with the development of new sophisticated buildings in the city limit. The neoliberal process of financialization results in soaring prices of city space, which pushes the poor to slums. The immigrants, who come to city in search of livelihood, unable to afford the high price move towards slum or sometimes occupy the vacant places to build their makeshift houses.

Neoliberal policy believes that the labouring capacities of individual would bring them success and so encourages everyone to find their own ways to become successful. This infuses competitive spirit in individual, and to win the race they become selfish. Community building is discouraged and individual becomes important than the community in a neoliberal state. This aspect of the policy permeates every field and people take their own initiative to improve themselves, and those who do not join the race are considered failures and are cast

out. Neoliberal ideology, unconsciously but strongly, infuses the competitive spirit in individuals, and self-improvement becomes an obsession. The residents of Vishram think that they are moving in the right direction and blame Masterji for being traditional and selfish. The residents become true neoliberal citizens, who without mercy for anybody, work for their individual benefit. The episode which narrates the killing of Masterji is a warning that Adiga gives to the society. Adiga shows how money changes the mind of the middle class through the episode in which the residents of Vishram kill Masterji without any remorse.

Ibrahim Kudwa lifted the hammer he had brought from the secretary's office, lunged forward, and hit Masterji on the crown of his head. .... Kothari pressing his knee on his torso, turned the hammer upside down and stubbed it on his forehead using both his hands... now Shiv Puri came from the bedroom with a large dark thing, which he lowered on to masterji's face. ...yes the pillow from his bed... Shiv Puri was sitting on it. (LMT 388-390)

After killing Masterji, they throw his body from terrace and frame the murder as a suicide. The changing mind set of the middle class for the want of material comfort is exemplified by Adiga through one more incident in the novel. The death of Masterji's daughter, Sandhya, shows the callousness and selfishness of people in a neoliberal state:

She had been on her way to college, when someone elbowed her out. She had fallen head first on to the tracks, and lain there like that. Not one of her fellow passengers stopped the train. They didn't want to be late for their work. All of them women, good women. Secretaries, bank clerks, sales managers. She had to bled to death. (LMT 103)

She travelled with respectable middle-class people, who did not worry about a fellow human's plight but were engrossed in their work. They were keen on making money than helping a fellow passenger.

Neoliberalism favours individualism and opposes community welfare. This largely influenced people. Shah symbolises neoliberalism that wants to shake the root of community welfare. 'Vishram Society' that has been prided for cooperative communal living is demolished by Shah. He likes to favour individuals and bribes them secretly. He does not call all the members and offers them extra, rather he tries to build individuals not a group, to which the residents fall a prey. By tearing down Vishram, the old ideal of 'one for all, all for one', on which the cooperative society was built, is put to an end. Masterji, who has struggled, when the country faced severe crisis, by forgoing his meals, stands for communal living. He is killed by the selfish neoliberals, who can calculate only the monetary benefits and nothing else. They are keen on building a unique identity for themselves with money and are ready to discard their old identity.

Thus the novel when read against the backdrop of globalization offers a different meaning to the text.

### **Abbreviations**

IMF- International Monetary Fund

NATO- North Atlantic Treaty Organization

GATO- The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade

LMT-Last Man in Tower

G7 States-Group of Seven countries- Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States.

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