

Neo-Colonialism in India as Represented in Aravind Adiga's *The Last Man in Tower*

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Abstract: The term 'neo-colonialism' generally represents the indirect involvement of the developed countries in the developing world. Post-colonial studies show in detail that in spite of attaining independence, the influence of colonialism and its representatives are still very present in the lives of most former colonies in different forms. These influences constitute the subject matter of neo-colonialism. Aravind Adiga's *Last Man in Tower* abounds with incidences that represent neo-colonialism in India. The novel portrays how Mumbai, one of the metropolitan cities and an important commercial centre has developed a place of multiple opportunities. To have a decent house in a commercial city like Mumbai therefore remains only a dream for the middle class people. The residents of Tower-A are ordinary middle class people of Mumbai who try to live their both ends in the globalised India. The novel spins around two opposing forces: the retired school teacher Masterji, trying to fight for his rights and Dharmen Shah, the greedy real estate developer. This paper therefore is an attempt to identify the elements of neo-colonialism in India as represented in Aravind Adiga's *Last Man in Tower*.

Keywords: *Post-colonialism, Neo-colonialism, Globalisation, Liberalisation, Modern India*

Colonialism and Neo-colonialism (1964) of Jean Paul Sartre contains the first recorded use of the term 'neo-colonialism'. The term has become a dominant theme in African Philosophy, and particularly in African political philosophy. Sartre argues in the book for the immediate disconnection of France's grip upon its ex-colonies and for total liberation from the influence of French policies on those colonies. However, the term was first officially used in Africa in one of the All African People's Conferences (AAPC), a powerful political group,

which held various sessions in the late 1950s. Neo-colonialism is a continued survival of the colonial system in many of the African states, by turning them into victims of political, economic, social, military and technical forms of power.

Neo-colonialism can be described as the continuation of the colonialism in the form of economic model after a colonized territory has achieved formal political independence. Europeans had colonized many countries in the late nineteenth century, instituting a system of economic exploitation in which the raw materials, particularly minerals, were appropriated and exported to the benefit of the colonizing power. Once colonialism came to an end, a new type of colonisation emerged with a new strategy. Neo-colonialism therefore suggests that when European powers granted nominal political independence to colonies, they continued to control the economies of their earlier colonies. According to the Social Contract Theory of Thomas Hobbes, “it is because of our self-serving desire for security that we agree to subordinate ourselves completely to an absolute sovereign power.” (399) But when this power overpower us in varied ways then we find injustice all over.

The term ‘neo-colonialism’ was made famous in day-to-day life by Kwame Nkrumah through his work *Neo-colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* in 1965. Since then neo-colonialism has become an important theme in African philosophy and literature, which is widely studied and written by scholars in Africa and beyond. Not only Africa but also most of the colonized countries experience post-independence neo-colonialism. One such country is India. Due to severe impact of globalisation, India in the twenty-first century experiences tremendous neo-colonialism. One of the writings in which we find the representations of neo-colonialism in India today is Aravind Adiga’s *Last Man in Tower*.

Aravind Adiga was born on 23 October 1974, in Madras, Tamilnadu, India. He studied Mangalore until the family immigrated to Sydney, Australia, a place of multicultural living. After his high school studies in Sydney, he moved to the United States for his literary studies. He received his Bachelor of Arts in English Literature from Columbia University, New York. His passion for literature and writing brought him back to India, where he became a news correspondent and editor in leading magazine *Time*. A number of his writings have also been published in *The Financial Times*, *The Sunday Times* and *The Independent*. He started his

journalistic career as a financial journalist, and he covered areas like investment and the stock market.

Adiga is the author of four critically applauded fiction, of which one is a collection of short stories *Between the Assassinations*. Other novels are, the Booker Prize-winning Novel *The White Tiger*, *Last Man in Tower* and the *Selection Day*. *The White Tiger* portrays the contrast between modern global economy and the rural poverty of India. Adiga's second book *Between the Assassinations* whirl around different problems of India such as class, community and religion. It is composed of twelve short stories that are interlinked. The third novel *Last Man in Tower* presents the story about the varied difficulties that the middle class people undergo due to real estate business. The last novel *Selection Day* is a painful and gripping story of slum dwellers whose aspirations is to become the cricketers and their dissatisfactions in the contemporary India. His novel *The White Tiger* received huge critical approval and won him the 2008 Man Booker Prize award. After Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy and Kiran Desai, he was the Fourth Indian-born author who won this prestigious award.

The story of the novel *Last Man in Tower* takes place in Mumbai, an actively moving financial city of India. It starts with the narration and portrayal of Vishram Society Tower-A and its occupants comprising variety of people such as teachers, business people, social workers, and other members of the middle class. Vishram society is the registered co-operative society near Santa Cruz airport surrounded by slums at Vakola, Mumbai. It was built as a model for development after independence. Though the overview of the society appears as a delightful work, the stains caused by rainwater and fungus for more than forty years of air pollution, erosion, and the vibration of low-flying planes show a state of fall in the next monsoon.

The novel unveils the subtle presence of neo-colonialism and the complex tension between traditional values and modern living. It explores the obscurities in administration, evil of corruption, devastating vices and bribery. The first and second sections of the novel details about the antagonist Dharmen Shah, a Mumbai developer who makes an offer to the inmates of middle-class Vishram Society. The intention behind this offer is that he wants to purchase the two-building property and build a luxury high rise building called the Shanghai. The next three sections describe how most families are ready to vacate the building but few families are not. Shah therefore with his bodyguard Shanmugham bribes through various means those who oppose the offer. But in the course of time, the proposal is accepted by all except Yogesh

Murthy known as Masterji. The sixth section presents how Masterji is in a helpless situation as he is rejected by the people for not accepting the offer. The rest of the sections of the novel details about the struggles of Masterji to combat Dharmen Shah, the real estate business man. In this battle, Masterji is rejected by the members of the society including by his own son and finally he is cruelly murdered in quest for wealth and fortune.

The novel discloses vividly the crimes associated with real estate business, a thriving industry in the globalised India, which becomes a new type of colonisation within. This neo-colonialism has widened the divide between the rich and poor. As a result, the insatiable lust for wealth drives the middle class and under-privileged to indulge in criminal activities and make them more inhuman rather than being human in dealing.

India after its colonial rule, emerged as an independent nation in which the political power came to the hands of educated Indians. Yet, as Mukherjee says that in spite of getting freedom from British colonial rule, India is yet to be free from the philosophy of colonialism for the foreign power still triumphs but with different strategy. Though the political colonialism had come to an end, the economical colonialism has taken an upper hand in the form of globalisation. As a result, we find that the core concept of India, 'Unity in Diversity' is shaken. Though the nation-state got itself adapted to the multi-language, multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-religious elements, yet a new type of colonialism shattered its base. As a result, contemporary India is still not free from the subordination of class, caste, age, and gender. Loneliness, alienation, lack of deprivation, subjugation and subordination have become the everyday affairs of the subalterns. If at all they resist and rise up, they are defeated by their power head. They have no agents to speak for them and as a result they are marginalised and forced to be under a kind of colonisation. According to Immanuel Kant, "any rational being exists as an end in himself, not merely as a means to be arbitrarily used." But we find in the so called modern India, people are used as a means.

Though in the broad sense neo-colonialism describes a type of indirect foreign intervention, it can be limited to the concepts of capitalism, exploitation, business tycoons and the domination of corrupted native politicians. It is here globalisation plays an important role. Globalisation is a kind of international addition and interchange of views, products, and other elements of culture and practices. As the novel depicts about the dark side of modern India, it indirectly throws light on the neo-colonialism. With the introduction of New Economic Policy

in 1991, globalisation came into existence in India, which is after the import substitution for nearly 40 years. Globalisation, privatisation and liberalisation are all interconnected. Though globalisation is considered a step towards enormous developments in countries like India, yet it has its darker sides of suppressing the freedom and empowering the native micro-agents of neo-colonialism like Dharmen Shah.

Adiga has given a number of interviews to leading media of India and outside India as well. He repeatedly says in most of his interviews that the intention of his work is to throw light on the lives of the least and the poor in India who are often ignored. He repeatedly makes reference to the new economic policy of 1991, which shows a clear division of Indian history. In an interview he says,

When I was a boy in India, we lived in a closed-off, socialist economy where just about everything was controlled by the government. It was stagnant, largely corrupt system, and this defined life. And in 1991 everything changed, and the economy was opened up and what is called the New India began. (Sharp)

However, from *The Last Man in Tower*, we come to know that the new economic policy has brought-in neo-colonialism in India. The so called New India has become a neo-colonised India. We shall now analyse this aspect in a deeper level from the perspective of the novel.

In Adiga's *Last Man in Tower*, Vishram Society Tower-A, is a reputable, middle class housing cooperative unit where most of the residents are happy by a remarkable offer from the real estate developer whose desire is to buy their flat for his mega project of skyscraper. Here comes the question of social and individual morality. Here the colonisation of ordinary people is evident. The common man is exploited and marginalised just because someone else is powerful and has money. The native man, the masterji represents the marginalised class where he tries to defend the tradition. Shah and his 'left-hand man', Shanmugham become the neocolonizers, who offer a huge sum of money to vacate their residents. The Sanghai is keen on bringing down the Vishram Co-operative Society and replace it with a luxury apartment. To make this happen Shah offers each family about 1.50 crore rupees and a little more depending upon its situation.

Dharmen Shah, the neo-colonizer pressurizes and tempts the residents by his varied offers and plans. At the end the inhabitants almost become the colonizing agents who go to the extent of murdering the innocent Masterji to enjoy their offer. Mumbai is only one of the many

cities of contemporary India where there exists neo-colonisation, breaking of law, immorality, corruption and greed in abundance. In such a situation, the predators always triumph and people of integrity and good-will are almost always guzzled. In fact, Masterji is the one voice that questions the havoc done to the city in the name of progress. His moral righteousness and social consciousness is devoured by the gluttonous business monster and materialistic residents.

It is clear therefore, the problems of corruption, real estate violence, unhygienic conditions of living, existence of slums and the lack of standard living are nothing but the neo-colonial elements of modern India. The development in terms of globalised India have ended up in neo-colonialism. This ambient in India, as Mukherjee would say, not only allows the rich to enter into corrupt practices but also increases the gap between those who have and don't have. The site of tower is a figurative example of developing India in the hub of despicable slums mocking the idealistic dream of developed India. On accounts of the rise in materialism, consumerism, globalisation and neo-colonialism there is a change in cultural values. Here money decides over the principles, cultural values, morality and patriotism. As a result, there is a weak political system, vote bank is influenced by the influential rich economic class. This results in uncontrollable greed, which destroys the sense of community living and sharing.

Last Man in Tower thus portrays the modern urban India as a place where the middle class, poor and marginalised are almost non-existent. Though they are politically free and yet not free in varied circumstances. The novel is also satirical and constantly mocks how each and every occupant of the Vishram Society are ready to leave their place for the uncertain land promised by a real estate business man. Adiga's novel highlights the neo-colonial aspects of Mumbai, the metropolitan city that has become unsentimental with colourful buildings where there are quite a lot of immoral activities that happen in slums and red light areas, and the poor become poorer day by day. Adiga asserts in an interview,

At a time when India is going through great changes and with China, is likely to inherit the world from the West, it is important that writers like me try to highlight the brutal injustice of society. That's what writers like Flaubert, Balzac and Dickens did in the 19th century and, as a result, England and France are better societies. That's what I'm trying to do – it's not an attack on the country, it's about the greater process of self-examination. (Jeffries)

Thus Adiga's *Last Man in Tower* outlines a holistic view of India where due to globalisation, privatisation and liberalisation and its results in socio-political, cultural and economic classes has brought the nation under neo-colonialism. It is so much deeply rooted in India that it is in this struggle, the middle-class and the lower middle class people try to fashion their future by declaring their combined will.

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