

Aravind Adiga as a Novelist of the New Generation

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Abstract

Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* and *Last Man in Tower* came out when old set up of society was losing ground. Rise of materialism, advancement of technology, modernization, social mobility, sense of cut throat competition, disloyalty, change in the norms of social institutions, alienation, extent of urbanization, globalization consumerism, and so on are some of the characteristics which constitute the mode of a new generation, causing changes in the psyche of the man of the new era. These factors are solely responsible for social, cultural and economic changes. Balram Halwai alias Munna, the police officer and Mr Ashok (*The White Tiger*) and Dharman Shah and Masterji's co-resident (*Last Man in Tower*) are the major characters through which the wave of the new generation can be seen. This paper attempts to make a study of Aravind Adiga's novels and present how they project a clear picture of contemporary society when traditional set up of society losing its ground very speedily all moral and social values are on the wane.

Keywords: new generation, rise of materialism, modernization, urbanization, traditional society, social values

Arrival of a New Generation

Just as the Restoration period begins with Samuel Butler's *Hudibras*, the Romantic period starts with the publication of Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads*, the end of the Second World War marks the beginning of Post Modernism, just as the beginning of the twenty-first century marks the arrival of the new generation. At this juncture, India is passing through a crucial period as never before.

The beginning of the new generation marks the revolt against the traditionally set up of society. Rise of materialism, prevalent corruption, decline of caste system, advancement of technology, Modernization, social mobility, sense of cut-throat competition, disloyalty, change in the norms of social institutions, alienation, extension of urbanization, globalization consumerism, and so on are some of the characteristics which constitute the mode of the new generation, causing the change in the psyche of the man of the new generation. This awakening of the masses projects the mood of a changing society and indicates revolt against the rich.

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Sanjay Kumar, M.A., M.Phil. and NET and Surjit, M.A. and NET

Aravind Adiga as a Novelist of the New Generation

Balram Halwai, Ashok and his wife (*The White Tiger*), Dharman Shah, (*Last Man in Tower*) and others are the best representatives of this trend. If these characters are studied in the light of the twenty - first century and as the product of new generation, they seem to be the significant part of this contemporary changing world.

The findings of this research paper will delineate how the new generation is no longer in the mood to bear this load of traditionalism. Due to this, India is passing through a crucial mode never before seen or heard, one of tremendous change. Due to this, everything is in a state of chaos. They do not wish to follow the trodden path, but neither do they know very well how to make their own path.

Lack of Belief in Human Values

Adiga's leading characters like Balram Halwai and Ashok Sharma in *The White Tiger* (2008) and Dharman Shah and Ajwani in *Last Man in Tower* (2011) don't believe in the human values, but are totally mercenary minded. They are always lying in wait to grind their own axes. Public and private offices are projected as the places where common man is exploited physically, mentally, economically, and psychologically. Corruption is a canker which originates, exists and flourishes without check in every nook and corner of our society.

Against Traditionalism

Our democratic government does not pay much attention to the welfare of the masses. But the increased rate of literacy has changed the outlook of the masses. So the men of this century don't want to be the followers of their forefathers who used to play into the hands of the rich, but their offspring strongly resist this ancient cultural trait. This trend of contemporary society indicates that they are no longer in the mood to bear the burden of traditionalism. They have come to know that they can play major roles in the formation of this new world. So they don't want to be exploited at all, but are desirous of breaking out of these old shackles which have been put on them since ages.

Materialism and Urbanization

Rise of materialism and extension of urbanization are responsible for this mode of society. Now the working class, which makes up the major part of the population, has awakened from its lethargy. This awakening of the masses projects the mood of the changing society and indicates revolt against the rich. Balram Halwai, Dharman Shah, and others are the best examples of this trend. If these characters are studied in the light of the twenty-first century and as the products of the new generation, they seem to be the significant part of this contemporary changing world. They don't pay much attention to social and moral values as their forefathers used to do. This trend of contemporary society will lead to the transformation of our traditional society and on to the path of anarchical growth. These aforesaid trends are followed everywhere

in the era of the twenty-first century. Thus these trends constitute the mood of the contemporary world and suggest to us that something serious and decisive is lurking in the offing.

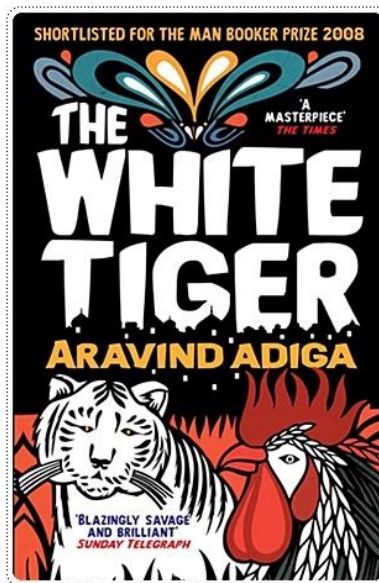
Modern Writers Holding a Mirror to Society

It is said that literature holds a mirror to society. What is happening in society is reflected in the works of art and literature. It is studied from different points of view, but the main purpose of it is to project a crystal clear picture of the concerned period. But the literature of twenty - first century is highly different from the previous periods.

There are so many novelists who write in the contemporary world such as Aravind Adiga, Chetan Bhagat, Amit Kumar, Anita Nair, Kiran Desai, Shiv Kumar, Manju Kapur, Jhumpa Lahiri, Arundhati Roy, and others, who raise the issues of present day society. When these novelists are studied in the light of twenty-first century, they seem more relevant and they do help us understand contemporary society in a better way.

But when Adiga is studied specially as a novelist of the twenty first century, his novels appear to be more appealing and charming for contemporary youth. The youth of the present century more or less have declared a revolt against the social and moral values of traditionally set up society. At present, some old customs, social and moral values are losing their ground very quickly, while the new ones are not coming into being as rapidly. The general decline of faith in traditional values and a new melancholy constitute the mood of the twenty-first century. This strange development causes confusion and projects the lopsided picture of contemporary world.

The White Tiger



Aravind Adiga's first novel *The White Tiger* came out in 2008. Balram Halwai alias Munna is the protagonist of this novel. He comes from a humble background; his father is a

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Sanjay Kumar, M.A., M.Phil. and NET and Surjit, M.A. and NET

Aravind Adiga as a Novelist of the New Generation

rickshaw puller and his mother is a bed-ridden sick woman who dies due to the curse of poverty. After this, the protagonist learns driving in Dhanbad. Now he is hired by a Delhi based rich businessman Ashok, who is a politician as well, as chauffeur. As he drives his master and wife to the shopping mall, he becomes aware of the sources of immense wealth and opportunity all around him. This awareness compels him to think over the status of the master and the servant. After this, he becomes worldly and ambitious. This ambition drives him to become a part of this glamorous new India. Ashok's increasing involvement in political corruption and divorce from his wife, provides Balram a chance to fulfil his dream. One day, when Ashok is having seven hundred thousand rupees in cash as money to be given as bribe to a politician in New Delhi, Balram murders him and flees to Bangalore. After this, he uses the loot to bribe a police commissioner and sets up his taxi company. He changes his name to Ashok Sharma and becomes a wealthy entrepreneur.

Indian Village in the Novel

Educational institutions are deemed to be the temples of teaching and learning where the lessons of moral education, and the rule of honesty are taught. But the novelist depicts a different picture of Indian villages where the money of the world's largest midday meal scheme is stolen and government supplied free uniforms to the poor student are sold in the neighbouring villages. These social crimes are committed by the teachers who are deemed to be the role models in the society. The novelist, by highlighting such issues, raises the burning issues of the contemporary India. As the protagonist remarks:

“If the Indian village is a paradise, then the school is a paradise within a paradise. There was supposed to be free food at my school - a government programme gave every boy three *rotis* yellow *daal*, and pickles at lunchtime. But we never ever saw *rotis*, or yellow *daal*, or pickles, and everyone knew why: the schoolteacher had stolen our lunch money. The teacher had a legitimate excuse to steal the money - he said he hadn't been paid his salary in six months” (TWT 33).

Bribe and Corruption Everywhere – Medical Care

As cancer is a fatal disease to a man, likewise corruption works as canker to society. Presently, India is advancing in the medical facilities, but the conditions of the government hospitals in the many areas are still pathetic. Government hospitals are supposed to be giving better treatment to the citizens, but ironically these medical facilities are not utilized for the needy, so the real picture of Indian towns and villages is quite different. The government doctors take their postings in the rural areas so that, by working in the private clinics, they can supplement their monthly income. For this manipulation they have to bribe also. They maintain fake records of the rural patients and medicines in the government hospitals.

When Munna's father is brought to the government hospital during duty hours, no doctor is reported to be there, but they have to bribe the ward boy to know when the doctor will be available. At last, Munna's father dies in want of treatment in the campus of the government hospital. By doing so, the novelist projects the deep-rooted corruption of the government hospitals where the poor are cheated.

The Police Department

Adiga is a highly conscious novelist whose readership is very wide, and he does not spare other departments. Secondly, he takes up the police department where corruption originates, exists and flourishes in different forms. They don't do their duty seriously. On the one hand, if somebody goes to the police, they don't listen to them. If they pay attention to them, they refuse to lodge any of their FIRs against the rich. If in case, by hook or crook, complaint is registered, they are tortured and terrified to withdraw their cases against the oppressor.

When a boy is killed by Munna's employee then the protagonist, by bribing the commissioner, manipulates the case very smartly. Now the police commissioner threatens the brother of the dead boy and tries to pressurise him by saying that at the time of the accident your brother was at fault: "see, at the time of the accident, your brother's bicycle had no working lights. That is illegal, you know". (TWT 309) Now the brother of the dead boy finds himself in a fix, in which he does not know what he should do or not do. At last he becomes very hopeless and expresses his mental agony: "My brother is dead. This man is a killer. I don't understand what's going on here". (TWT 309) But the protagonist remains successful in the game of manipulation with police. He, by manipulating the case of the murder of his master, projects the deep-rooted corruption of the police department and conveys a message that these kinds of cases can be dealt in this way and suggests to us its modus operandi.

As the novelist remarks: "You can give the police all the brown envelopes and red bags you want, and they might still screw you". (TWT 320) This protagonist's remark depicts that corruption is rampant everywhere in our society.

Corruption Exists Everywhere

Corruption exists at every quarter of our society. It undermines the importance of all social and moral values and causes social pollution. The police department has been given special focus as the department where the employees are always lying in wait for a bribe: "The assistant commissioner who sat in the station was a man whom I had lubricated often. He had fixed a rival for me once. He was the worst kind of man, who had nothing in his mind but taking money from everyone who came to his office. Scum". (TWT 308) By doing so, the novelist highlights the crystal clear picture of contemporary world where old set up of society is losing its ground and a new order is coming into being where everything is in a state of chaos. That is clearly visible in the given paragraph.

Corruption in Politics

Adiga is a keen observer who does not spare even the politician. He thinks that they are like leeches who suck the blood of a nation. They accumulate money by illegal ways and deposit it in foreign banks. They are involved in different criminal activities, but our judicial system is too weak to punish them. Money is a tool by which and for which corruption originates and flourishes. The votes of the poor are bought by the rich during election times. Cash for vote and proxy voting are generally afoot during these days. Fake birth certificates are supplied to this illegal task beneficial to the politician. Metro cities are the centres where corruption flourishes freely. Mr Ashok has to bribe a politician to achieve his political goal in Delhi. Poverty and ambition to get power play an important role in shaping the mind of the man of the twenty - first century who always hankers after money. If the rich follow uses the illegal and unlawful methods to meet his ends, so the poor cannot lag behind. The rich, in popular culture, are followed by the poor. So the poor, generally, follow the rich in their daily lives.

Munna is the embodiment of the masses, who sees the height of corruption and follows the footprints of his master. This psyche invites scams such as Harshad Mehta Share scam, the telecommunication scam, the Bofors Scam, Adarsh Building Scam, the 2G Spectrum scam, the Fodder Scam, The Taj Corridor scam, Chit-fund scam, Recruitment scams in different states, Saradha scam, Cash for Vote Scandal, the Commonwealth Game scam, the Coal-mines distribution scam, the National Herald scam, the Augusta Westland VVIP Helicopter Scam, and many more of the same kind.

Criminalization of Public Life

Criminalisation, horse trading, booth rigging, cash for vote and such have been the burning issues in politics. These play an important role in shaping the mode of present day politics. The latest court decision places the responsibility of giving the people a government free from criminality on the PM (Prime Minister) and CMs (Chief Ministers) and it is their moral responsibility also. Here Adiga raises the similar issue of contemporary politics. Such issues are the blots on the face of our democracy.

The leader of the great socialist party has been projected as the boss of the depressed class. There are so many cases of rape, murder, gun-smuggling and so on are pending against him, and still he is regarded a great politician.

Side by side, the novelist raises the issue of black money that is kept in the foreign banks. Black money has been a burning issue of some political parties and of Yoga Guru Baba Ramdev. Recently the Centre has constituted SIT to deal with this complicated issue. As the novelist writes:

“You see, a total of ninety-three criminal cases - for murder, rape, grand larceny, gun-smuggling, pimping, and many other such minor offences - are pending against the Great

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Aravind Adiga as a Novelist of the New Generation

Socialist and his ministers at the present movement. Not easy to get convictions when the judges are judging in Darkness, yet three convictions have been delivered, and three of the ministers are currently in jail, but continue to be ministers. The Great Socialist himself is said to have embezzled one billion rupees from the Darkness, and transferred that money into a bank in a small, beautiful country in Europe full of white people and black money”. (TWT 97-98)

Dominance of Materialistic Approach

Rise of the Materialistic approach plays an important role in shaping the psyche of the man of the new generation. He always hankers after money. This approach makes him so corrupted and selfish that he forgets his loyalty even to his master. He remains so busy that he does not have much time to think about the members of his family. All this happens with him due to the influence of the materialistic outlook. Here the novelist expresses his grave concern over this burning issue.

As the novelist remarks: “It has been a long time since you came to visit us - and an even longer time, a total of eleven months and two days, since you last sent us any money. The city has corrupted your soul and made you selfish, vain- glorious, and evil”. (TWT 262)

Munna – Embodiment of New Generation

Munna is an embodiment of new generation. Social and moral values are no more important to him. He believes that money is all while social and moral values are nothing. He throughout the journey of novel does not show any sign of morality and sincerity. He himself admits that the new generation is completely devoid of morality. As the novelist remarks: “The new generation, I tell you, is growing up with no morals at all”. (TWT 316) So this immorality and psyche of contemporary society produce a white tiger that has no friend and no feeling toward anybody. As the novelist declares: “A White Tiger keeps no friends. It’s too dangerous”. (TWT302)

Munna heralds war and conflict between the rich and the poor. Here the novelist propels the theory of Dialectic Materialism. Here Philosophical idealism and theological conflict are opposed by the theory of dialectical materialism. As the protagonist reflects during his course of action, Munna is the product of the new generation. So Munna does not show any kind of respect for non-material things. Social, religious and moral values are the things of the past for him. Therefore, he satirizes the Hindu religious rituals and practices from the very the beginning:

“Now, I no longer watch Hindi films - on principle - but back in the days when I used to, just before the movie got started, either the number 786 would flash against the black screen - the Muslims think this is a magic number that represents their god – or else you would see the picture of a woman in a white sari with gold sovereigns dripping down to her feet, which is the goddess Lakshmi, of the Hindus. It is an ancient and venerated

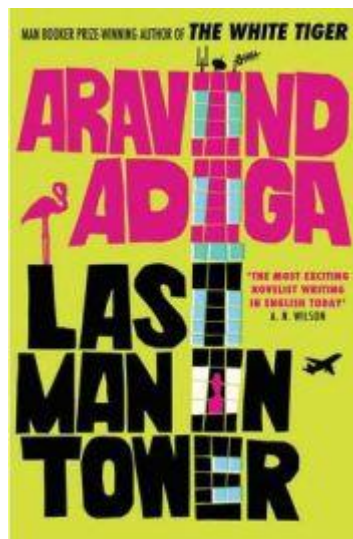
custom of people in my country to start a story by praying to a Higher Power. I guess, Your Excellency, that I too should start off by kissing some god's arse. Which god's arse, though? There are so many choices. See, the Muslims have one god. The Christians have three gods. And we Hindus have 36,000,000 gods, making a grand total of 36,000,004 divine arses for me to choose from". (TWT 8)

Changes in the Norms

As society is changing very fast, it causes changes in the norms of social institutions also. The poor are exploited by the poor. The common man has been the follower of his masters since ages past and presently he is still following them. In this pursuance they follow the path of artificial life, but lag behind on the path of real life.

Here Munna is the follower of his master, Ashok. He wants to break this enclosure of superstructure that is imposed by the rich on the masses and in the formation of this superstructure; these things play a vital role. So he wants to grab more and more money so that he would be able to live a royal life like his master. All changes take place in him only on this basis. The protagonist admits: "All these changes happened in me because they happened first in Mr Ashok. He returned from America an innocent man, but life in Delhi corrupted him - and once the master of the Honda City becomes corrupted, how can the driver stay innocent?" (TWT 197)

Last Man in Tower



Adiga's second novel *Last Man in Tower* was published in 2011. It revolves around two characters named Yogesh Murthy alias Masterji and Dharman Shah. Masterji is a retired school teacher and a respected man in the building. He was one of the first Hindus who was allowed into Vishram Co-operative Housing society. He is generous with books, passionate about

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Sanjay Kumar, M.A., M.Phil. and NET and Surjit, M.A. and NET

Aravind Adiga as a Novelist of the New Generation

education and a role model to his society. His wife has died and his single son does not live with him anymore with him.

Dharman Shah – A Real Estate Builder

Dharman Shah, by profession, is a builder. The Vishram Co-operative Housing Society is purchased by Dharman Shah, who wants to transform it into a luxury apartment Complex. He convinces all residents of the Vishram Society to vacate their apartments, but Masterji does not fall for this line. But Masterji is a man of moral values and of his own principles. When he does not vacate his flat, he is harassed by his co-residents and the men of the builder. Shah is a dangerous man. As the demolition deadline looms, Masterji's neighbours and friends become his enemies. During the night, he is threatened by them to vacate the apartment. When he does not vacate the apartment, he is murdered brutally.

Real Estate and Human Psyche

Now-a-days, property is on the boom everywhere. Through this commercial outlook, the novelist wants to highlight how the business of real estate affects the psyche of the modern man. The novel highlights the clash between the ideologies of the old generation and of the new generation. On the one hand, Yogesh Murthy is the embodiment of the older generation who believes in the traditional set up of society. On the other hand, Mr Dharman Shah, Masterji's son and his neighbours are the men of the new generation who are opportunist, selfish and mercenary minded. Through these characters, the writer depicts how the cultural values are being transformed.

Depicting the Degradation of Contemporary Society

The novelist projects the degradation of contemporary society. Masterji's son does not live with his old and widower father. When master ji goes to his son for help, he does not help to his father at all, nor does he give him any kind of assurance for the future. With the help of this, the novelist highlights how the norms of social institutions are being changed. Here the novelist points towards the newly emerged norm of marriage – live-in-relationship. It is the product of the last century, but received popularity in the age of the new generation when the old set up of traditional life is losing ground very fast. Here the novelist condemns this change and expresses his grave concern over its emergence. As the novelist remarks: "Among young people today, it is a common thing for boy and girl to live without marriage... there is no sense of shame in the modern way of life". (LMT 22)

Munna, Balram, et al.

The overall outlook of Munna is materialistic. He counts everything on material grounds. He analyses every situation on the causality of materialistic approach. He, like the rich, thinks that all the social and political system of the country can be controlled by money. The politics,

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 14:11 November 2014

Sanjay Kumar, M.A., M.Phil. and NET and Surjit, M.A. and NET

Aravind Adiga as a Novelist of the New Generation

the media and the police agencies are always in the pockets of the rich. If the rich feel any kind of problem in maintaining this superstructure which always is determined by the material base, they may take help from the underworld. In this way, a nexus between the property dealers and goons is exposed.

Balram is completely devoid of moral and social values. He follows the path of crime that is shaped by the external world around him. The protagonist is fully aware that the poor are always oppressed by the rich. As he laments his agony: “How the rich always get the best things in their lives, and all that we get is their leftovers”. (TWT 233) This statement indicates that the poor are exploited by the rich and are not given equal importance even in the twenty-first century. As the novelist writes: “The country is full of people like him, I’ll give you that. And we entrust our glorious parliamentary democracy’...to’ characters like these. That’s the whole tragedy of this country”. (TWT 10) The latter get the best things of life. So the nation lags behind in every field of growth and this lopsided growth causes the pitiable plight of the poor. This lopsided picture brings out a new picture of present India where people are bereft of basic amenities. Due to this, the Indian road to progress is blocked by the citizens of this great democratic country: “And our nation, though it has no drinking water, electricity, sewage system, public transportation, sense of hygiene, discipline, courtesy, or punctuality”. (TWT 4)

Hurdles to Overcome

By highlighting these social and economic problems, the novelist points toward the serious issues of present day India which put hurdles on the way of its progress. In this way by highlighting these problems, the novelist conveys a message that it is high time we tackle these issues in a serious manner, or else they would take the shape of monsters:

“There are big issues to tackle: put the economy back on the growth path, ensure that there is enough food, clothing, drinking water, shelter, healthcare and education facilities for the have - nots, take steps to secure the nation against external and internal threat and keep our citizens safe, be generous and kind to the weak and needy and tough and unsparing to the wicked and the crooked”. (Chengappa)

Waiting for the Dawn of Freedom – Coming from Somewhere Else

But side by side, the novelist pays tribute to the great personalities who contributed a lot for the poor, such as Alexander the great, Abraham Lincoln of America, Mao of China and others. Here Adiga indicates that the people of India are waiting for the dawn of their freedom from all of their exploitation. Here the novelist indicates world-wide revolution. As the novelist remarks: “People in this country are still waiting for the war of their freedom to come from somewhere else - from the jungles, from the mountains, from China, from Pakistan”. (TWT 304)

Balram is the embodiment of the poor as well as of the working class which has awakened and wants radical changes in the existing social set up of contemporary society. These

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Aravind Adiga as a Novelist of the New Generation

changes are taking place in Southern Asia, Especially: “It is apparent that India is impatient for change ... not at an evolutionary pace, but a revolutionary one. There is now zero tolerance for corruption, which is most evident in middle-class India. It is as if we have collectively decided that enough is enough. The effete and inefficient are out” (Chengappa).

The Century of Technology and Social Change

The twenty - first century is the century of technology. It has proved a boon to humanity. Due to this, the world has shrunk. But side by side, the novelist makes us aware of its side effects and seems to convey a message, that even when the growth of science seems very charming and appealing, in fact it is not so. This advanced technology invites many fatal diseases such as cancer, impotency, mental aberrations and such: “Then white people use mobile phones too much, and that is destroying their brains. It’s a known fact. Mobile phones cause cancer in the brain and shrink your masculinity; the Japanese invented them to diminish the white man’s brain and balls at the same time”. (TWT 305)

Seeking to Learn Skills

The new generation does not want to follow the trodden path of the previous generations, but it knows how to make its own path. The novelist highlights how the psyche of this generation has undergone radical changes. Here the novelist wants to convey a message to the rich that it is high time to change their outlook towards the masses, because this century is the second renaissance of the new generation without which they would be wiped out. Now the poor have awakened: “you stop being a slave. To hell with the Naxals and their guns shipped from China. If you taught every poor boy how to paint, that would be the end of the rich in India”. (TWT 275)

Life and Culture in Metropolitan Cities

Culture in metropolitan cities is changing very fast. Traditionalism is losing its ground. This outlook of the new generation causes the change in the norms of our social institutions. Religion and caste system are no longer rigid as in the earlier times. With the help of this mode of society, the novelist highlights how quickly the culture of the metropolitan cities is changing and this mode of the new generation points toward a particular aspect of society. As the novelist remarks: “In the old days, you had caste, and you had religion: they taught you how to eat, marry, live, and die. But in Bombay caste and religion had faded away, and what had replaced them”. (LMT 217)

Big Bellies and Small Bellies in Place of Traditional Varnashrama Dharma

Departure of the British in 1947 marks the beginning of the new age for India, but freedom for the masses is still a far-fetched dream. They are still in the clutches of the rich and the politician because they dominate over them in many ways. The avaricious animals called

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men are looting the country. Due to this, our contemporary country has been divided into two classes - Big Bellies and Small Bellies. The rich have converted our country into one of jungle law. As the novelist remarks: “the day the British left - the cage had been let open; and the animals had attacked and ripped each other apart and jungle law replaced zoo law. Those that were the most ferocious, the hungriest, had eaten everyone else up, and grown big bellies...these days, there are just two castes: Men with Big Bellies and Men with Small Bellies”. (TWT 64)

Masterji’s Principle

In his second novel Adiga projects the degradation of contemporary society and expresses his serious concern. In the novel, Masterji is the last man in the tower who refuses to vacate the apartment and he sacrifices his life for his age-old principle. His murder marks the end of traditional view toward human values and the beginning of the new generation that is totally against the traditional set up of society.

Changes in Younger Generation

The novelist is fully aware that the present society is changing rapidly. The wave of modernism is affecting every sphere of life. But the changes are tangible on our social institutions. The norms of our century old institution such as marriage, family, education, economy and so on are being replaced. And the changes in the norms of marriage are very significant. So the new generation does not pay much respect to the earlier ones. This mode of the new generation indicates a particular aspect of society and hints at how quickly society is advancing. As the novelist writes: “Among young people today, it is a common thing for boy and girl to live without marriage, ... there is no sense of shame in the modern way of life,... the modern, shame-free way of living counted for nothing”. (LMT 22)

To Conclude

A changing picture of rural and urban India is projected. It can be said that the prevalent corruption, decline of caste system, rise of materialism, advancement of technology, modernization, social mobility, law and legislator, cinema media, sense of cut throat competition, disloyalty, change in the norms of social institutions, alienation, extent of urbanization, globalization, consumerism and such are the same characteristics which constitute the mode of the new generation and cause the change in the psyche of the man of the new generation. Here the novelist wants to convey a message that it is the poison of casteism, communalism, regionalism, discrimination on social, economic basis etc. which are the obstacles in the way of progress. This mode of the new generation leads us to disharmonious perfection which prevents one from general perfection. Our stock notions and habits, “the want of sensitiveness of intellectual conscience, the disbelief in right reason, the dislike of authority” (Arnold x) take to the path of anarchy. These are not good signs for the coming generations of our country.

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Aravind Adiga as a Novelist of the New Generation

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