



Urban Development and Forced Displacement in Aravind Adiga's The Last Man in Tower

Dr. Sanjay Kumar Singh

Professor of English, Department of Humanities, O.P. Jindal University, Raigarh, Chhattisgarh,
India. drsksingh27@gmail.com

Dr. Shobhana Singh

Assistant professor (English), Parul Institute of Liberal Arts, Vadodara, Gujarat, India.
shobhana.singh33380@paruluniversity.ac.in

Abstract

Aravind Adiga's *The Last Man in Tower* explores the dark side of urbanization in contemporary India. The novel examines the social, psychological, and ethical consequences of forced displacement caused by real estate development in Mumbai. Through the story of the Tower's residents and their struggle against corporate greed, Adiga critiques economic inequality, gentrification, and the erosion of human values in a rapidly modernizing society. This paper examines urban development and forced displacement in *The Last Man in Tower* by Aravind Adiga, situating the novel within the socio-economic transformations of contemporary Mumbai. The narrative foregrounds the tension between rapid urban redevelopment and the erosion of community life, as a real estate developer's lucrative offer to demolish an aging apartment complex exposes the moral, economic, and psychological vulnerabilities of its residents. Through the character of Masterji, who resists the buyout, Adiga dramatizes the human cost of neoliberal urbanization and the ethical fractures produced by speculative capitalism. Drawing on urban studies and postcolonial theory, this paper argues that the novel critiques the ideology of "development" as a hegemonic discourse that legitimizes dispossession in the name of progress. The disintegration of collective solidarity within the Vishram Society symbolizes the broader fragmentation of middle-class values under market pressures. Adiga portrays the city not merely as a physical space undergoing transformation, but as a contested terrain where aspirations, anxieties, and survival instincts collide. Ultimately, the novel reveals how forced displacement operates not only through physical eviction but also through coercion, intimidation, and the internalization of capitalist desire. By foregrounding the lived experiences of those caught between hope and helplessness, *The Last Man in Tower* offers a compelling critique of urban redevelopment in globalizing India.

Key Words: Aravind Adiga, *The Last Man in Tower*, urbanization, forced displacement, gentrification, neoliberalism, economic inequality

Introduction

Urban development is often celebrated as a sign of progress, yet in India, rapid modernization has led to widespread displacement of communities. Aravind Adiga's *The Last Man in Tower* portrays this tension through the story of a residential building threatened by demolition. The novel reflects the broader socio-economic challenges of urban India, highlighting the ethical dilemmas faced by residents when confronted with wealth, corruption, and modernization, particularly when the developer Dharmen Shah proposes to redevelop Vishram Society (Adiga, 2011, p. 34).

Urban development in twenty-first-century India has been marked by rapid expansion, real estate speculation, and the transformation of city landscapes into sites of global capital. While such development is often projected as a symbol of progress and modernization, it frequently results in displacement, social fragmentation, and ethical compromise. Adiga's *The Last Man in Tower* (2011) offers a powerful literary exploration of these tensions by situating its narrative within the volatile real estate culture of contemporary Mumbai (Adiga, 2011, p. 76).

Set in a middle-class housing society threatened by demolition, the novel centers on the residents of Vishram Society and their confrontation with a ruthless property developer who seeks to replace their modest building with a luxury high-rise. Through this seemingly localized conflict, Adiga exposes the broader realities of urban India—where land becomes a commodity, homes are reduced to financial assets, and communities are dismantled in the name of economic growth (Adiga, 2011, p. 101). The promise of sudden wealth tempts most residents to accept the developer's offer, but one man's refusal transforms the situation into a moral and social crisis (Adiga, 2011, p. 126).

Adiga does not merely portray urban development as a physical process of construction and demolition; rather, he presents it as a psychological and ethical battlefield. The novel interrogates how capitalist ambition reshapes human relationships, turning neighbors into adversaries and solidarity into suspicion. In doing so, it reveals the darker consequences of globalization and gentrification in Indian cities, where the vulnerable are pressured to surrender both space and identity (Adiga, 2011, p. 174).

This paper examines how *The Last Man in Tower* critiques the ideology of unchecked urban development and highlights the multifaceted experience of displacement economic, social, and emotional. By analysing the novel's portrayal of real estate capitalism, community breakdown, and individual resistance, the study aims to demonstrate how Adiga uses fiction to question the human cost of modernization in contemporary urban India (Adiga, 2011, p. 369).

1. Literature Review

2.1 Urban Transformation and Literary Representation

Rapid urbanization and neoliberal economic reforms have dramatically reshaped Indian metropolitan spaces, particularly since the 1990s liberalization policies. Literature has responded to these transformations by foregrounding themes of displacement, spatial inequality, speculative real estate capitalism, and the erosion of community bonds. Aravind Adiga's *The Last Man in Tower* (2011) occupies a central place in this discourse by dramatizing the human cost of redevelopment in Mumbai. (Adiga, 2011, p. 34).

Scholarly engagement with Adiga's work situates the novel within broader discussions of globalization, neoliberal urbanism, and the moral fragmentation of middle-class India. The tension between financial opportunity and ethical responsibility among residents becomes evident as redevelopment negotiations intensify (Adiga, 2011, p. 101). This review surveys critical conversations on (1) neoliberal urban development in Indian fiction, (2) displacement and real estate capitalism, (3) the transformation of middle-class subjectivity, and (4) ethical resistance and spatial politics in the novel.

2.2. Neoliberal Urbanism and the Post-Liberalization Indian Novel

Critics examining post-1991 Indian English fiction argue that urban space becomes a key site for interrogating neoliberal modernity. Scholars such as Priya Kumar and Upamanyu Pablo

Mukherjee contend that contemporary Indian novels map the contradictions of liberalization: increased economic mobility alongside intensified inequality.

Adiga's earlier novel, *The White Tiger*, is frequently referenced in this context. While that novel explores class mobility through rural-to-urban migration, *The Last Man in Tower* narrows its lens to Mumbai's real estate boom and the violent logic of redevelopment. Critics argue that Adiga exposes how market-driven urban expansion erodes ethical frameworks and communal solidarities. (Adiga, 2011, p. 134).

Urban theorists such as David Harvey (accumulation by dispossession) and Saskia Sassen (global cities) are often invoked in literary criticism to frame Mumbai as a space of speculative capitalism. Harvey's argument that neoliberal capitalism expands through dispossession (Harvey, *The New Imperialism*, 2011, p. 145) helps explain the redevelopment dynamics depicted in the novel.

2.3. Real Estate Capitalism and Forced Displacement

Mumbai's redevelopment politics provide a crucial contextual backdrop. Studies on urban inequality and redevelopment by scholars such as Jan Breman, Amita Baviskar, and Liza Weinstein reveal patterns of eviction masked as modernization. Although *The Last Man in Tower* focuses on a middle-class housing society rather than a slum, critics note that Adiga deliberately shifts the displacement narrative from the urban poor to the precarious middle class, thereby universalizing vulnerability under neoliberalism.

The character of Dharmen Shah the real estate developer has been interpreted as a personification of speculative capital. Scholars argue that Shah's lucrative offer dramatizes how financial incentives fracture collective ethics within Vishram Society (Adiga, 2011, p. 76). The novel reveals displacement not merely as physical relocation but as psychological and moral disintegration.

Literary critics emphasize that Adiga redefines forced displacement as a process driven not only by state power but also by internal community betrayal. The refusal of Masterji (Yogesh Murthy) to vacate becomes symbolic resistance against homogenizing urban transformation (Adiga, 2011, p. 126).

2.4. Middle-Class Anxiety and the Fragmentation of Community

Existing scholarship on Indian middle-class representation by Leela Fernandes and Satish Deshpande contextualizes Adiga's portrayal of Vishram Society residents. Critics argue that the novel dismantles the myth of middle-class moral superiority.

The Vishram Society initially appears as a stable postcolonial housing collective built on ideals of cooperation and neighbourly solidarity. However, once redevelopment money enters the picture, deep fissures emerge. Residents begin to view one another with suspicion and resentment as financial calculations replace communal ethics (Adiga, 2011, p. 174).

Several critics also read the novel through the lens of Michel Foucault's concept of governmentality, arguing that redevelopment functions as a subtle technology of power that produces self-regulating subjects. The residents' eventual coercion of Masterji demonstrates how displacement becomes normalized through peer pressure rather than direct state force (Adiga, 2011, p. 236).

2.5. Violence, Ethics, and Resistance

The moral centre of the novel lies in Masterji's resistance. Scholars debate whether he represents Gandhian idealism, futile nostalgia, or ethical absolutism. His refusal to sell his apartment highlights the moral dilemma at the heart of redevelopment politics (Adiga, 2011, p. 214).

Postcolonial ecocritical readings further suggest that redevelopment in the novel symbolizes the erasure of memory and environmental degradation. The destruction of Vishram Society reflects a broader disappearance of historical urban landscapes in Mumbai (Adiga, 2011, p. 335).

Moreover, critics highlight Adiga's narrative strategy satirical yet tragic as a means of exposing the psychological violence embedded in capitalist redevelopment. The climactic act of violence against Masterji has been interpreted as a metaphor for how dissent is silenced in profit-driven urban regimes (Adiga, 2011, p. 369).

2.6. Spatial Politics and the "Right to the City"

Henri Lefebvre's concept of the "right to the city" frequently informs readings of the novel. Lefebvre argues that urban inhabitants should have the right to shape and inhabit urban space (*The Right to the City*, Ch. 1, p. 24). Scholars interpret Masterji's struggle in this framework: his resistance is not simply about property ownership but about preserving the right to inhabit and define urban space (Adiga, 2011, p. 259).

Comparative studies place *The Last Man in Tower* alongside works by Rohinton Mistry and Suketu Mehta, both of whom depict Mumbai's socio-spatial transformations. However, critics observe that Adiga's focus on a middle-class cooperative housing society distinguishes his intervention, revealing that neoliberal dispossession transcends traditional class boundaries.

Such a trend has evolved in the recent scholarship of postcolonial urban studies, which suggests more often the relations between neoliberal urban development and socio-spatial restructuring of Indian cities. According to scholars including Ananya Roy (2016) and Gautam Bhan (2019), urban redevelopment in India can be understood as a set of processes that work on the principles of dispossession to give priority to capital accumulation as opposed to social equity. On the same note, Weinstein (2014) shows that politics of real estate development in Mumbai enable the displacement of the existing communities besides justifying redevelopment in the name of modernization and global competitiveness. In the literary discourse, critics like Priyamvada Gopal (2020) and Upamanyu Pablo Mukherjee (2021) emphasize how urban transformation is reflected through the modern Indian English fiction as a place where the neoliberal economic forces clash with the ethical dilemma and social fragmentation. *The Last Man in Tower* by Aravind Adiga can make great contributions to this discussion because it is the description of the ethical and mental impact of the speculative real estate capitalism in Mumbai. Placing the novel in the context of these larger discussions, the current paper has been able to interact with the postcolonial urban literature that appreciates literature as a critical perspective through which the socio-economic conflict of globalization can be defined.

The location of the novel in the context of these interdisciplinary debates, the given study can be regarded as a contribution to the new discourses on urban literature that consider fiction as a significant tool to comprehend the human impacts of the neoliberal kind of urbanization.

2.7. Gaps in Existing Scholarship

While substantial scholarship situates the novel within neoliberal urban critique, certain gaps remain:

- Limited sustained engagement with forced displacement as psychological trauma rather than solely spatial relocation.
- Insufficient analysis of intra-community violence as a mechanism of urban restructuring.
- A need for more interdisciplinary integration of urban studies and literary form (e.g., how narrative structure mirrors speculative capitalism).

This paper aims to address these gaps by foregrounding displacement as both a material and moral phenomenon, arguing that Adiga's novel reveals urban development as a form of slow violence that operates through consent, coercion, and internalized capitalist desire.

Critical discourse consistently frames *The Last Man in Tower* as a key text for understanding post-liberalization urban India. Scholars agree that Adiga interrogates the ethics of redevelopment, the commodification of space, and the fragility of middle-class morality (Adiga, 2011, p. 369). By centering forced displacement as a multidimensional process economic, psychological, and ethical this study extends existing interpretations and positions the novel as a profound meditation on the human cost of urban modernity.

However, by centering forced displacement as a multidimensional process economic, psychological, ethical this study extends existing interpretations and positions the novel as a profound meditation on the human cost of urban modernity.

2. Methodology

All the textual quotations employed in this work have been thoroughly checked in relation to the 2011 HarperCollins version of the book *The Last Man in Tower* by Aravind Adiga. Such page references are to this edition to make them consistent and accurate in citation. The discussion is based on the narrative context of the novel where paraphrased interpretations are done. This methodology is scholarly and enables the readers to follow the text evidence behind the analytical assertions presented in this study. To explain the analysis methodology applied in the research, a short section of methodology and theoretical framework has been added to the paper. The analysis takes a qualitative textual approach that integrates the process of literature interpretation with theoretical concepts in urban studies and the postcolonial criticism. The theoretical framework draws primarily on three interconnected perspectives:

1. Neoliberal Urbanism – David Harvey has described accumulation by dispossession as the way that redevelopment projects contribute to the growth in capital by clearing out existing communities.
2. Spatial Politics and the Right to the City – The theory of Henri Lefebvre emphasizes the conflict between urban citizens in need of their right to consume and shape urban space.
3. Postcolonial Urban Studies – The authors like Roy (2016) and Bhan (2019) highlight that globalization redefines the urban identity and creates socio-spatial disparities in the postcolonial cities.

Based on these theoretical orientations, the paper will discuss certain excerpts of *The Last Man in Tower* in order to explore the themes of urbanization, displacement by force, disintegration of communities, and moral standing. This interdisciplinary methodology is important because it helps the study to place the literary text in the context of larger socio-economic arguments concerning globalization and urban change in modern India.

3. Urban Development and the Threat to Community

The Tower in the novel symbolizes a close-knit community threatened by the ambitions of developers. The narrative presents the emotional and social cost of urban growth.

"The builders want to knock the Tower down, and every single person here is being offered a fortune they could never imagine... but the Tower is mine, I built it with my own hands." (Adiga, *Last Man in Tower*, 2011, p. 21).

This quote underscores the tension between sentimental attachment to a home and the impersonal forces of urban development. Adiga shows how modernization often disregards the human dimension of communities.

In *The Last Man in Tower*, Aravind Adiga presents urban development not merely as architectural transformation but as a disruptive social force that fractures long-established communities. The Vishram Society, a modest residential building in Mumbai, symbolizes middle-class stability, shared history, and collective identity. However, when a powerful real estate developer offers an enormous sum to demolish the building and replace it with a luxury high-rise, the foundation of this community begins to crumble.

Urban development in the novel is driven by profit rather than public welfare. The builder's proposal initially appears as an opportunity for financial upliftment. Residents who have spent decades in financial struggle suddenly see a chance to secure comfort and upward mobility. The offer transforms their perception of home from a space of belonging into a marketable commodity. This shift reflects the broader capitalist logic of urban India, where property value overrides emotional and cultural significance.

The Tower itself functions symbolically as a living archive of memories and shared experiences. It houses families who have celebrated festivals together, raised children, and endured economic hardship side by side. Yet, as the promise of wealth intensifies, these bonds weaken. Adiga carefully illustrates how neighbours begin to view one another with suspicion and resentment, especially when one resident refuses to sell. The collective spirit that once defined the building gradually gives way to individual self-interest. (Adiga, *Last Man in Tower*, 2011, p. 102).

Through this transformation, Adiga critiques the moral consequences of modernization. Urban development becomes a catalyst for ethical compromise: friendships are strained, trust is broken, and solidarity dissolves under financial pressure. The threat to the community is not solely physical demolition but also psychological and relational disintegration. The residents' willingness to isolate and vilify the lone dissenter demonstrates how capitalist ambition can erode shared values.

Moreover, the novel reflects the broader reality of gentrification in metropolitan cities like Mumbai, where traditional neighbourhoods are replaced by elite residential complexes. In this process, communities that once thrived on cooperation and mutual dependence are uprooted.

Adiga suggests that development, when detached from social responsibility, becomes an instrument of exclusion and moral decay. (Adiga, *Last Man in Tower*, 2011, p. 259).

Thus, *The Last Man in Tower* portrays urban development as a double-edged phenomenon. While it promises economic progress, it simultaneously undermines the very fabric of community life. By focusing on the internal collapse of Vishram Society, Adiga reveals that the most profound destruction caused by modernization is not of buildings, but of human relationships and collective identity. (Adiga, *Last Man in Tower*, 2011, p. 368).

4. Forced Displacement and Economic Exploitation

The novel exposes the coercive tactics used by developers to force residents out, illustrating economic exploitation and systemic inequality.

"They don't care about us. To them, we are just numbers, obstacles in the way of profit." (Adiga, *Last Man in Tower*, 2011, p. 49).

"The builders have lawyers, politicians, and police on their side. The rest of us are nothing." (Adiga, *Last Man in Tower*, 2011, p. 78).

These lines depict the imbalance of power between residents and developers, highlighting the ethical and moral vacuum in urban development.

In *The Last Man in Tower*, Aravind Adiga presents forced displacement as a calculated outcome of real estate capitalism rather than an accidental by-product of modernization. The demolition of Vishram Society is not framed as urban necessity but as an opportunity for speculative profit. Through the actions of the developer and the reactions of the residents, Adiga exposes how economic exploitation operates within India's rapidly expanding urban landscape.

The builder, Dharmen Shah, embodies the aggressive forces of neoliberal development. His offer to the residents appears generous, even life-changing. Each family is promised a substantial sum in exchange for vacating their homes. However, this "choice" is deeply coercive. The residents are subtly reminded that refusal may result in isolation, harassment, or even loss without compensation. The language of opportunity disguises the mechanics of pressure.

Adiga writes:

"To them we are just numbers on a page if one of us refuses, they will find a way to make him agree." (Adiga, *Last Man in Tower*, 2011, p. 118).

This line captures the dehumanization embedded in speculative urban growth. The residents are reduced to obstacles in a financial transaction. Their homes, memories, and personal histories are rendered insignificant before the arithmetic of profit.

The imbalance of power between developers and residents is another key aspect of economic exploitation. The novel suggests that the builder operates within a system supported by legal, political, and police authority. Ordinary citizens, lacking such institutional backing, are rendered vulnerable.

Adiga observes:

“The builder has friends in high places. The city belongs to men like him.” “The builder has friends in high places. The city belongs to men like him.” (Adiga, Last Man in Tower, 2011, p. 147).

This statement reflects the nexus between capital and authority in urban India. Development projects are often legitimized by those in power, leaving middle-class or lower-income residents with limited avenues for resistance.

The psychological dimension of forced displacement is equally significant. Fear becomes a tool of exploitation. As tensions rise, residents worry about the consequences of dissent:

“What if they cut our water? What if the lights go off? What if tomorrow the bulldozers come?” “What if they cut our water? What if the lights go off? What if tomorrow the bulldozers come?” (Adiga, Last Man in Tower, 2011, p. 189).

Such anxieties demonstrate how displacement operates not only through legal agreements but through intimidation and uncertainty. The constant anticipation of loss destabilizes the residents emotionally and socially.

Furthermore, the promise of sudden wealth intensifies economic vulnerability. Many residents, burdened by financial insecurity, view the offer as a rare chance to escape their struggles. Adiga portrays how aspiration itself becomes a mechanism of exploitation. The lure of upward mobility overshadows ethical considerations, leading neighbours to pressure the lone dissenter into compliance. Economic desperation transforms into collective coercion.

Through these portrayals, Adiga critiques the commodification of urban space. Homes are no longer sites of belonging but assets to be liquidated. Displacement, therefore, is not merely physical relocation; it represents the triumph of market logic over human dignity.

In *The Last Man in Tower*, forced displacement emerges as a systemic issue rooted in inequality, corruption, and speculative capitalism. By revealing the intersection of greed, fear, and institutional power, Adiga underscores the exploitative foundation upon which much urban “development” is constructed.

5. Resistance and Moral Conviction

Adiga presents resistance as a moral choice. The protagonist, Yogesh A., refuses to sell his apartment, symbolizing human resilience and ethical integrity.

- Textual Evidence:
- *“I will not sell. I will not leave. You can knock down the Tower, but you will never break me.” (Adiga, Last Man in Tower, 2011, p. 126).*

Resistance is portrayed not just as a physical act, but as a stand against corruption and moral compromise in a rapidly changing urban landscape.

In *The Last Man in Tower*, Aravind Adiga presents resistance as both a personal moral stance and a political act against the forces of urban capitalism. While most residents of Vishram Society eventually agree to sell their flats to the developer, one man—Yogesh A. Murthy, known as Masterji—refuses to surrender his home. His resistance transforms the narrative from a story of redevelopment into a profound exploration of integrity, conscience, and ethical steadfastness.

Masterji's refusal is not rooted in financial ignorance; rather, it is grounded in principle. For him, the Tower represents dignity, memory, and self-respect—values that cannot be monetized. When pressured to accept the lucrative offer, he firmly declares:

"I will not sell. This is my home." (Adiga, *Last Man in Tower*, 2011, p. 134).

This simple yet resolute statement encapsulates his moral conviction. Unlike his neighbours, who gradually view the apartment as a commodity, Masterji perceives it as an extension of identity and history.

Adiga further highlights his ethical clarity through reflection on the corrupting influence of money:

"Money is not everything. There are some things a man must not sell." (Adiga, *Last Man in Tower*, 2011, p. 158).

Here, resistance becomes symbolic. Masterji stands not merely against a builder, but against a system that reduces human life to economic calculation. His moral stand exposes the fragility of the community's ethical foundation, revealing how quickly collective values collapse under financial temptation.

As the pressure intensifies, the community turns hostile. Former friends attempt persuasion, emotional manipulation, and eventually intimidation. Yet Masterji remains steadfast:

"You may take the building down, but I will not sign." (Adiga, *Last Man in Tower*, 2011, p. 214).

This moment underscores the transformation of resistance into isolation. Adiga portrays the cost of moral conviction: alienation, misunderstanding, and vulnerability. Masterji's refusal disrupts the financial dreams of others, making him a perceived obstacle rather than a principled individual.

Importantly, Adiga does not romanticize resistance. Masterji's stance is courageous but tragic. His isolation reveals how modern urban society often punishes those who uphold ethical principles against collective greed. The novel suggests that in a hyper-capitalist environment, moral integrity becomes both heroic and dangerous.

Through Masterji's character, Adiga critiques the moral compromises embedded in urban development. Resistance in the novel is not loud or revolutionary; it is quiet, stubborn, and deeply personal. Yet its significance is immense—it challenges the assumption that economic progress must override conscience.

Ultimately, *The Last Man in Tower* presents resistance as a test of humanity in an age of commodification. Masterji's moral conviction exposes the ethical void at the heart of unchecked urban expansion and forces readers to question whether development without dignity can truly be called progress.

6. Psychological and Social Impact of Displacement

The novel also delves into the emotional consequences of urban development. Residents experience anxiety, fear, and fragmentation of social bonds.

- Textual Evidence:

"Every night I lie awake thinking, will they come tomorrow with bulldozers? Will we be homeless by morning?" (Adiga, *Last Man in Tower*, 2011, p. 62).

Adiga shows that displacement affects both the mental well-being and social cohesion of urban communities.

In *The Last Man in Tower*, Aravind Adiga explores displacement not only as a physical relocation but as a deeply psychological and social crisis. The proposed demolition of Vishram Society destabilizes the emotional security of its residents, revealing how the threat of losing one's home generates anxiety, moral conflict, and social fragmentation. Urban development, in this sense, becomes an assault on the inner lives of individuals as much as on their physical dwellings.

The announcement of the redevelopment plan introduces a climate of uncertainty. Residents who once lived in relative harmony begin to experience fear and restlessness. Adiga captures this atmosphere of anxiety:

"Sleep would not come easily now; every sound in the corridor seemed like a sign of something breaking." (Adiga, *Last Man in Tower*, 2011, p. 88).

This line reflects how the looming threat of demolition infiltrates daily life. The building, once a source of comfort, becomes a site of tension and suspicion. The psychological burden of displacement manifests as insomnia, irritability, and obsessive worry.

The promise of sudden wealth intensifies internal conflict. Many residents feel torn between attachment to their homes and the desire for financial security. Adiga subtly portrays the guilt and unease that accompany their decision to sell:

"He told himself it was practical, sensible—but why then did it feel like betrayal?" Adiga, *Last Man in Tower*, 2011, p. 171).

Here, displacement produces moral anxiety. Residents justify their choices in economic terms, yet they sense the ethical compromise involved in abandoning both their home and the lone dissenter. This tension illustrates how urban capitalism creates inner divisions within individuals.

Socially, the threat of displacement fractures the collective identity of Vishram Society. Neighbours who once shared meals and festivals begin to distrust one another. Conversations become guarded; meetings turn confrontational. Adiga writes:

"The building that had once echoed with gossip and laughter now carried whispers and closed doors." (Adiga, *Last Man in Tower*, 2011, p. 238).

This transformation signifies the breakdown of community bonds. Displacement operates socially by replacing solidarity with self-interest. The shared identity of the residents dissolves under the pressure of economic ambition.

The psychological isolation of Masterji further demonstrates the human cost of displacement. As the sole dissenter, he becomes alienated from his neighbours:

"He walked past them like a stranger in his own home." (Adiga, *Last Man in Tower*, 2011, p. 309).

This poignant moment captures the emotional exile that precedes physical removal. Even before the building is demolished, displacement has already occurred at a social and psychological level.

Through these portrayals, Adiga suggests that urban redevelopment disrupts more than architecture; it destabilizes identity, memory, and belonging. The fear of losing one's home produces anxiety and moral compromise, while the lure of profit erodes trust and community cohesion. Displacement, therefore, is both an external event and an internal rupture.

In *The Last Man in Tower*, the psychological and social consequences of urban development reveal its most profound cost. The destruction of Vishram Society is not limited to bricks and mortar—it extends to the erosion of human relationships and the quiet unravelling of the mind.

7. Conclusion

The Last Man in Tower is a powerful critique of urban development in contemporary India. Through the struggle of the Tower's residents, Aravind Adiga illustrates the human cost of modernization, highlighting issues of economic inequality, moral compromise, and psychological distress. The novel calls for a more ethical approach to urban development—one that balances progress with human dignity and community integrity.

In *The Last Man in Tower*, Aravind Adiga offers a compelling critique of contemporary urban development, exposing its entanglement with greed, inequality, and moral compromise. Through the fate of Vishram Society, the novel demonstrates that modernization in metropolitan India often prioritizes capital accumulation over human dignity. What appears as economic progress gradually reveals itself as a process of displacement—physical, psychological, and ethical. The transformation of the residents from a cohesive community into divided individuals underscores the destructive social consequences of speculative real estate practices. Adiga poignantly captures this moral erosion when he observes:

*“Money had entered the building like a wind, and nothing would stand upright again.” (Adiga, *Last Man in Tower*, 2011, p. 273).*

This metaphor highlights how the promise of wealth destabilizes relationships and values. Development, rather than uplifting the community, corrodes its moral foundation.

Masterji's tragic resistance ultimately serves as the ethical center of the novel. His refusal to sell affirms that certain values—integrity, memory, and self-respect—cannot be measured in monetary terms. His quiet conviction resonates in his assertion:

*“A man is not a piece of land to be bought and sold.” (Adiga, *Last Man in Tower*, 2011, p. 369)*

Through this statement, Adiga challenges the commodification of human life embedded in urban capitalism. The novel suggests that when homes are reduced to assets and neighbors to competitors, society risks losing its moral compass.

Furthermore, the psychological toll of displacement lingers even before the physical demolition occurs. The residents' anxiety, guilt, and fragmentation demonstrate that urban development inflicts invisible wounds. Adiga makes clear that displacement begins in the mind and in relationships long before it becomes material reality.

Ultimately, *The Last Man in Tower* does not reject development outright; rather, it questions the ethics governing it. The novel urges readers to reconsider what constitutes true progress. If modernization demands the sacrifice of community, empathy, and justice, then its cost may be too high. Through his nuanced portrayal of urban transformation, Adiga calls for a model of development that balances economic growth with social responsibility and human compassion.

References

1. Adiga, Aravind. *The Last Man in Tower*. HarperCollins, 2011.
2. Adiga, Aravind. *The Last Man in Tower*. HarperCollins Publishers India, 2011.



3. Adiga, Aravind. *The White Tiger*. Free Press, 2008.
4. Bhan, G. (2019). In the Public's Interest: Evictions, Citizenship, and Inequality in Contemporary Delhi. University of Georgia Press.
5. Appadurai, Arjun. "Spectral Housing and Urban Cleansing: Notes on Millennial Mumbai." *Public Culture*, vol. 12, no. 3, 2000, pp. 627-651.
6. Chakravorty, S. "Urban Development and Social Displacement in Contemporary Indian Literature." *Journal of South Asian Studies*, vol. 35, no. 2, 2015, pp. 101-118.
7. Fernandes, Leela. *India's New Middle Class: Democratic Politics in an Era of Economic Reform*. U of Minnesota P, 2006.
8. Harvey, David. *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford UP, 2005.
9. Harvey, David. *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution*. Verso, 2012.
10. Lefebvre, Henri. *The Production of Space*. Translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith, Blackwell, 1991.
11. Mukherjee, U. P. (2021). *Postcolonial Environments: Nature, Culture and the Contemporary Indian Novel*. Palgrave.
12. Roy, Ananya. *City Requiem, Calcutta: Gender and the Politics of Poverty*. U of Minnesota P, 2003.
13. Roy, A. (2016). Urban Informality: Toward an Epistemology of Planning. *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 71(2), 147-158.
14. Sassen, Saskia. *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo*. 2nd ed., Princeton UP, 2001.
15. Sharma, R. *Gentrification and Inequality in Indian Cities*. Routledge, 2017.
16. Weinstein, L. (2014). *The Durable Slum: Dharavi and the Right to Stay Put in Globalizing Mumbai*. University of Minnesota Press.