

**CHAPTER III**

**METROPOLITAN CULTURE IN  
ARAVIND ADIGA'S  
*LAST MAN IN TOWER***



example - Masterji's daughter, Sandhya has been on her way to college when someone has pushed her out of the train. She has fallen head first on to the tracks, and lain there like that. No one of her follow passengers stopped the train. They don't want to be late for their work. They have time for work but they don't have time to care for human beings. It shows inhumanity. They live only for themselves.

Dharmen Shah is a builder and he thinks for himself. He makes grand plans to get money and offers these plans to the people without thinking about their consequences. People of young generation live a very free kind of life. They are not ready to take any responsibility. They fail to maintain close and intimate relations with their parents. There is no intimacy between Satish and Dharmen Shah. Both live a sophisticated kind of life. They don't have time to talk to each other. Satish doesn't think about his father. He gets involved in bad things.

People are divided into higher class, middle class and low class people. Workers are totally dependent on the higher class people. To earn their livelihood they remained at the mercy of higher class people. The construction workers work for the builders and the builders like Dharmen Shah target middle class people by offering grand plans for getting money. All the residents of Vishram society are middle class people. They wish to become rich. So they change their attitude and forget neighbourly relations. They forget their culture under the influence of money. They become blind. They forget their friendly relations. Money becomes very important to them. Material progress at the cost of humanity is not acceptable in Indian culture.

In a big city like Mumbai, people are found involved in immoral sexual acts. They appear to violate cultural norms about sexuality. They enjoy family relations without marriage and in Indian culture it is a taboo to enjoy sex before marriage. The journalist is a modern woman. She doesn't think about culture and society and

keeps illicit relations with her boy friend without marriage. It is not acceptable to the society. Dharmen Shah, a builder, also forgets ethical principles. He violates all the moral values. He keeps illicit relationships with young women who are of his son's age. He doesn't feel guilty for such kind of relationship. Our Indian culture does not approve immoral behaviour of modern man.

In modern days no one believes in others. People are ready to deceive each other for the sake of money. So they don't trust anyone until they feel sure. For example - Kothari told Mr. Shah when he made generous offers for him, "I am grateful for any ... extra kindness you show me. But I cannot accept until I ask you this: what about everyone else in Vishram Society? Will you keep your word to them and pay each one his rightful share?"<sup>1</sup> A teacher is the most respectable person in Indian culture. So it is against Hindu Dharam to ill-treat a teacher but in modern culture people forget kindness and respect. They don't hesitate to harass a teacher. For example - Someone calls Masterji, "I have a lesson for you, old man: if you don't leave the flat, there will trouble for you." (P.233) Money becomes valuable for people. They forget cultural values due to attraction of money. Masterji lives alone in Vishram society because he sticks to his values and doesn't bend under pressure. So his neighbours boycott against him. Everyone turns against him. They forget truth. They forget what great men like Gandhiji and Nehruji have preached. They become blind and violent because they are interested in money.

In urban culture there are two types of people. Some stick to humanity and some are without humanity. The slum dwellers appear to be led by humanism. They show sympathy for others. For example – Mary, a woman from a slum said Masterji, "Don't worry, Masterji. God will protect us. They're trying to throw me out of my home too. I live by the nullah." (P.291) It shows her humanity. She is sympathetic towards Masterji. She supports Masterji morally but her neighbours

boycott against him. They don't have sympathy for old people or people from poor strata of society.

Some children in a big city like Mumbai take care of their parents. They have respect for their parents. For example- Miss. Swathi takes care of her parents. But some children don't care for their parents. They don't want any burden. For example – Gaurav, Masterji's son lives separately. He does not care for his responsibility of looking after the aged father. In city money is everything for most of the people.

### **Cosmopolitan Culture:**

Our culture teaches us to live in harmony with others. Caste is not important but harmony and equality are important. Some people live in harmony in metropolitan city. Vishram society is the example of cosmopolitan culture, where people from various castes and religion live together. They share their feelings and emotions. When the building first came up, there were no Hindus. After Masterji's residence in Vishram, Hindus were allowed to live there. Then there was no place for Muslims, but then some Muslims were permitted to live in the Vishram society. All the residents of Vishram society live together. It shows cosmopolitan culture of the residents.

Though they belong to different castes and religion, they want to mix up with other communities. They try to know each other. Religion and caste hardly create problem in human relationship. Humanity is very important for them. For example – Ibrahmin Kudwa prefers to live with the old residents of Vishram society instead of with his Muslim family. He wants his children to mix with Hindus and Christians. It shows his cosmopolitan nature. In Vishram Society Hindus, Christian, Muslims and Parsi live together harmoniously. There is unity in diversity which is an important characteristic of Indian culture.

### **Clash between Tradition and Modernity:**

Old people stick to traditional values while youngsters behave quite opposite to them. Old people don't like violation of those values because they don't accept modern ways of life. Mr. Pinto is a traditional kind of a person. He sticks to his traditional values. He doesn't like youngster's ways of life. He said to his wife, "Among young people today, it is a common thing for a boy and a girl to live without marriage. There is no sense of shame in the modern way of life" (P.22). He doesn't like the journalist's behavior. In Indian culture people accept marital relationship. But the unmarried journalist has a love affair with a boy before her marriage. It is against Indian culture. So all the residents of Vishram Society take objection to the journalist's behavior. Masterji is an orthodoxy person. He also doesn't like modern culture. He sticks to tradition. When he sees Miss. Meenakshi, the journalist with her boy friend, he doesn't like it. He doesn't like her behaviour. So he becomes aggressive and pushed the boy aside out of discontent. Masterji is a traditional man. So he doesn't like the journalist's lover. It shows culture clash between traditional and modern culture. Old people are mostly orthodox. For example – Mr. Shah said Kothari, "Some older people oppose a redevelopment project because they are frightened of any kind of change. Some just want more money." (P.114)

Our culture teaches us to obey elders. Children follow their parents. They don't go against them. But Catherine, Mrs. Rego's sister disobeys her father's wish. She gets married to an American exchange student, a half-Jew against her father's wish. She is a modern woman so she goes against her father's wish and gets married with a boy who is a half-Jew. It shows the scandal in the community in those days but she didn't care about it. She revolts against tradition of caste.

### **Indian Parent's Sense of Responsibility towards their Children:**

Parents want to bring up their children as good and ideal citizens. They want to teach them good manners. They think they should be cultured. In the novel Mrs. Puri doesn't like the modern shame free way of living. She tells the Secretary, "I have a growing son. I don't want him living with the wrong kind of people." (P.22) She doesn't like the unmarried journalist's behavior. She thinks that it will spoil her child. It shows her careful nature and her responsibility for a child. The parents of the child think that their son should be good. So they avoid fighting and love-making in the presence of the child. They want to keep him away from bad people. They want to go to a civilized place. Thus, they create conducive atmosphere to make their son a cultured human being.

### **Familial Duties and Responsibilities:**

In Indian culture, parents are expected take care of their children in their childhood days and children are supposed to do so when their parents become old. But Gaurav, son of the Masterji lives separately and his father lives alone in Vishram Society. Gaurav is unable to take the responsibility of his father. In our culture daughter-in-law is expected to respect her in-laws but here Sonal, the daughter-in-law of Masterji, doesn't respect her father-in-law. She doesn't maintain good relation with him. She wants only money and gold. She tries to keep her son away from Masterji though Masterji loves his grandson. He wants to talk with him, tell him about his grandmother. He likes wandering with his grandson. He loves Ronak but his mother doesn't like it. She even returns the gift which Masterji gave Ronak on his birthday. Sonal wants to keep Ronak away from Masterji. She tells lies to her father-in-law because she thinks her husband should not meet his father. She likes to take care of her father and doesn't want her father-in-law who is also of her father's age. She fails to play her role as a daughter-in-law. Sonal and Gaurav are interested only in money but they neglect their

responsibility. They intend that Masterji should sign the paper so that they will get money. They don't think about Masterji's emotions. Masterji is not ready to sign the paper because he associates the memories of his late wife and daughter with the house so it is not an easy thing for him to pack up and leave. It is said that the son's behavior deviates from cultural norms. The son has no love, no intimacy, and no respect for his father.

Being a teacher, Masterji has some expectations from his son. He thinks that his son should learn French and also become a scientist or a lawyer. But he doesn't fulfill his father's wish. Gaurav thinks that his father treats him like a servant and not like a son. He has remote relation with his father. He thinks that his father doesn't think of his grandson. He lives only for himself. He has no love for his son also. Gaurav behaves rudely with his father. He forgets humanity and also father-son relation. He doesn't have respect for his father. He becomes loveless because he has interest only for money. He blames his father for many things. He told his father that he didn't take proper care of his children. He is responsible for his sister's death. He thinks that he is not a loving father like other fathers.

Through Mr. and Mrs. Pinto Adiga shows intimate relationship between man and woman relationship. Mr. Pinto is a typical Indian husband. He takes care of his wife. He is aware of his responsibilities in view of man-woman relationship. There is equality and uninhabited intermingling between them. On the other hand Rukmini and Mr. Shah are completely opposite to them. Rukmini is not happy because Mr. Shah has love only for construction. Rukmini is very simple. She is an orthodox woman. She has interest in household work. She is against violence. But her husband always threatens people for getting his work done. She is a woman of conscience. One day she said to her husband, "If you keep threatening other people and their children, one day something might happen to your own child" (P.290). She doesn't like her husband's violent nature. So she leaves him. It



shows clash between violence and non-violence. Man-woman relationship fails here. Mr. Shah and his son Satish both live free life and don't have love for each other. It is an example of a family which goes away from cultural norms laid down by Indian culture.

**Teachers' community:**

In Indian culture a teacher occupies an important position. Teaching profession is a noble profession. A teacher is expected to give knowledge to the children to make them good citizens. Here Yogesh Murthy, Masterji, after his retirement starts teaching the children. Everyone respects him and takes his advice. He is a respected person in Vishram Society. Masterji is one of the first Hindus allowed into Vishram Society on account of his noble profession and dignity and dignified bearing. He is a typical representative of the earlier generation. He is good at languages. He has love for books and he is passionate about education. He is an adornment to his society. He is a typical Indian teacher. People think that any society with a man like Masterji in it is a good society.

Masterji at the age of sixteen, when other boys his age were playing cricket in the maidan or chasing college girls, engaged himself in performing exercises and teaching himself Sanskrit. He never wastes his time like other boys. He spent his afternoons reading Dr. Radhakrishnan on Hindu and Buddhist philosophy. After his father's death he came to Mumbai to become a new man. He has spent his forty four years in Bombay exactly in the manner prescribed by the Hindu philosophers: 'like a lotus in a dry pond, be in the world but not of it' (p.160).

It is believed that a teacher doesn't show partiality when he treats students. All the students are equal to the teacher. Masterji follows the same rule. He doesn't spare his son when he wants to punish him. But because of this event, father and son relation is disturbed as the son misunderstood his father's intention. A teacher loves reading. Masterji also has love for reading. He expects that his

son and grandson should read books. He tells Gaurav, "Reading is life's greatest joy and power, the ability to learn" (P.193). He thinks that this has been a city where a free man can keep his dignity. He has some principles of life. He is an orthodox teacher. So he doesn't like change. He has old memories of his wife and daughter in Vishram so he is not ready to leave the flat. He never makes a difference between the rich and the poor. All are equal before him. He teaches Ram Khare's daughter even though he is a guard. He thinks that his daughter is like everyone else.

Masterji is a typical teacher. He doesn't change his mind. He does what he believes to be right. He is a man of conscience. He doesn't bother about what people said to him or did to him. He never betrays his conscience. After his murder, some of the neighbours remember trait of nobility in his character. They pay homage to him.

#### **Love for Animals:**

Indian people have love for animals. They associate animals with God. They protect animals like a cow, cat and dog etc. because they see God in animals. They like to feed stray dogs. Mrs. Puri also feeds stray dogs that wandered in the society. She has love for dogs. It shows her kindness towards animals. That shows her typical Indian attitude.

In Indian culture people consider a cow as a holy animal. They worship a cow like God. They touch it for blessings and for good luck. When Dharmen Shah sees a cow, he touches its forehead three times for good luck and touches his own. Masterji talks to the cow and tells his woes to her. He has no one to share his feelings and emotions so he turns to the cow. Some city people thought that he was a mad man, but those who had come from the villages knew better and recognise the piety in his act.

### **Religious Customs and Faith:**

Indian people worship God and have faith in God. When they are in difficulty, they pray God. So as He should show them right paths. Ramu, Mrs. Puri's son has brain problem. She consults with foreign trained specialists. She does everything but all are in vain. When a man becomes helpless in life, he turns to God. Mrs. Puri also turns to God when all her efforts go in vain. For her son's recovery she makes trip to holy shrines to seek divine favour to solve a problem of slow working of the brain of Ramu. She thinks that some miracle might take place and her son will recover. It shows her religious attitude. When she goes to temples, she prays God and offers a rupee to fulfill her wish. She does it for her son's recovery. She said, "Move it, God. The stone that blocks Ramu's mind. That was how she has always pictured it: a bolder had locked her Ramu's mind inside a cave. At least stop it from rolling backwards and pushing him deeper into the cave. Who will take care of him when she grows old?" (P. 73) It shows her typical attitude as she is born and brought in Indian culture.

Before starting a new work, people mostly go to God for blessings and good luck. Dharmen Shah goes to the shrine of Ganesha before starting a new building. He also has faith in an astrologer. When the astrologer gives him a green signal, he starts his work of construction. He also gives a donation of one lakh and one rupee as a petition to God to improve his son's behavior and to start a new construction. Before starting a new work, people find out an auspicious moment. Mr. Shah also takes an auspicious date to start the demolition.

Christian people like to help the poor. Mrs. Rego being a Christian woman cares for the poor and beggars. It shows her helpful nature. Indian people think that they should get relief means '*Mukti*' after their death. So they follow some kind of religious rituals. When Masterji's daughter and wife died, Masterji called a

priest to perform the last rites, to offer coconuts and incense for the relief, of her soul. Every year, Masterji performs the rites on the death anniversary of his wife. It shows his religious attitude. In the old age people turn towards the religious activities. They feel comfortable when they perform religious activities. Ram Khare spends his morning in rituals. He takes a string of black rudraksha beads in his left hand, and keeps a finger on page 23:

“What are the marks by which a soul may be known?

Listen to the words of our Lord Krishna. The soul  
is not born and it does not ...” (P. 206)

Indian people turn to their God when they face any calamity. For example – Mrs. Puri prayed to the Lord Ganesha for her wrong behavior. She said, “We said we were going to temples but we went to see new homes. We were afraid of the Evil eye but we forgot about you. And you punish us by placing a stone in everyone’s path. Now move the stone which only you, God, with your elephant’s strength can do” (P. 248).

Indian people consider water as a holy thing. It is the symbol of purity. It is used in all Hindu religious ceremonies. The Christians used it too. Muslims gurgled and cleaned themselves before their namaaz. When a person dies, his last rites are performed in Hindu religion. People put rice balls on a leaf for the crows. If the crow touches it, the person will get ‘*Mukti*’ that is the religious belief among Indian people. On the day of death anniversary people give food to the people in memory of died one. Masterji gives a sweet-box to the old women in memory of his departed wife, Purnima, who died a year ago.

### **Neighbourly Relation:**

‘Love thy neighbour!’ is a typical advice given to people of different cultures. Indian people like to co-operate with each other. They help each other when they are in difficulty. They share their feelings and emotions with each other.

Masterji lives alone in Vishram society because of his wife's death. His son lives away from him. So there was no one to feed him. But in Vishram Society people maintain good neighbourly relations. They take care of each other. Mr. and Mrs. Pinto say to Masterji: "You will eat with us from now on." (P. 46) They eat with Masterji. It shows typical Indian attitude. They set new trends to maintain good relations with neighbours.

In Vishram Society they celebrate festivals together. When Mr. Shah a builder, offers a generous offer to the residents of Vishram Society, they think about everyone. Mr. Pinto said, "... If one person says no, you can't tear down the society. That's the whole idea of a co-operative Housing Society. One for all, all for one." (P. 95) Though Pinto's children are settled in America- one in Michigan, the other in Buffalo, they feel comfortable with the company of the neighbours.

After Masterji's wife, it is Mrs. Puri who remains close to Gaurav. She becomes Gaurav's surrogate mother. Everyone in Vishram Society knows her closeness to the boy. It is one of the triumphs of their communal life: one of the crossbeams of affection that is meant to grow in any co-operative society. Even after Gaurav's move to Marine Lines for his work, Mrs. Puri stays in touch with him. She sends him packages of peanut-chikki and other sweets. Her attachment to the boy shows her typical Indian attitude. They try to share each other's emotion and feelings. They support each other in their critical events also. But the neighbourly relations get disturbed because of money they get from the builder. All the residents of Vishram society go against Masterji, once who was the most respectful person in the society. No one speaks with him. There are neither smiles nor apologies. They treat him like an untouchable. Even at the thought of his shadow falling on them, his neighbours cringed and withdrew. They boycott Masterji for the sake of money. They forget forty-four years' friendly relations. They start to avoid him. But Masterji doesn't behave like them. He said to Mr.

and Mrs. Pinto, “We mustn’t think badly of our neighbours.” (P. 228) He remembers his wife’s words about a man, “Man being like a goat tied to a pole? There is a radius of freedom, but the circumference of our actions is set. People should be judged lightly.” (P. 228)

For money all the residents of Vishram become violent. They forget fellow-feeling and sensibility. Some of them don’t hesitate to murder old Masterji. They killed him for money. They violate the cultural norms and ethics. They forget the principle of honesty and kindness. They turn their back to the values cherished by Indian culture.

**Occupation:**

**Broker:**

The culture of a broker is to deal with sellers and clients. It is a good work to help people. The broker has to give accurate information to the clients. He has to remain honest. But here the broker, Mr. Ajwani pretends to be an honest person. He said to his clients, “I will not do what every other broker in this city does. I will not lie to you. Will not say a building is “virtually new” if it is forty years old; will not gloss over peculiarities in the neighbours, seepages and leakages in roof or walls. I believe in accurate information-for myself and for my clients.” (P.71) He displays some photos of Gods on the wall to show that he is a cultured human being.

A broker is a fatherly figure for the clients. Clients come to him in search of flats. Women also come to him for help. But he takes advantage of it and gets involved in immoral things. He violates the cultural norms which a good broker is supposed to follow in his behaviour.

**Builder:**

It is the culture of a good builder to make generous offers to people. Builders are expected to make good complexes and apartments with all kinds of

facilities for the people. People have believe in them. Here Mr. Shah MD of the Confidence Group pretends to be a truthful person. He offers generous plans for the residents of Mumbai in living mostly slum areas. In his book it is said that he is the recipient of numerous gold medals and paper- based awards for excellence. He has been cited by the Rotary Club for his charitable contributions and philanthropic vision of humanity. Ideally a builder is a family man by heart; he should avoid the high society and glamorous life and concentrate on the quality of his work and accomplishments. But in reality Shah lives a very glamorous life. He takes interest in immoral things. He fails to become a good father. He is a showy person and dreams only to be a rich person.

A builder has love for cement and steel. The human being was his clay to squeeze poorer human beings, to begin with. Mr. Shah enters the business of redeveloping chawls and slums buying out the tenants of aging structures so that skyscrapers and shopping malls could take their place, a task requiring brutality and charm in equal measure, and which proved too subtle for most builders. He learns from smuggling to ally himself with politicians, policemen, and thugs to bribe and bounce people out of their homes. He earns a reputation as a man who makes other men rich. In reality he is devoid of humanity. He has love only for money. He is interested in plump young girls. One important principle of a builder is, "When it comes to work-hurry, hurry, hurry. When it comes to payment- delay, delay, delay. Caste, religion, family background nothing. Talent everything. Be 10 percent more generous to people than you feel like being." (P. 94) Mr. Shah follows this principle. They celebrate small occasions also. "The builder is the one man in Bombay who never loses a fight," says Mr. Shah (P. 115) Mr. Shah shows people that he is generous and honourable. He says to Kothari about the old and new builders. He pretends that the builder is changed in modern days. He thinks about people. He doesn't cheat people like old builders. It shows his showy nature.

Sometimes Mr. Shah observes norms of culture. For example – Mr. Shah, on his way back from the beach offers a hundred rupee note to the horse-keeper. He tells the boy about life and successful people. It shows his generous nature. But on the other hand most of the times his servants violate cultural norms. For example – Shanmugham exchanged a hundred rupee note for a ten-rupee note which Shah gave the horse keeper. When the boy shook his head he pressed his face into his horse's neck. He threatens the boy for money.

Mr. Shah has love only for his work. He thinks that his construction should be complete before the rain. So to impress the workers he offers them high wages. His principle is heat or no heat, humidity or no humidity only the work should be done at any cost. A builder needs a person who will help in every situation. This person has no business card to hand out, no title, he had not even on the company payroll. But he is the builder's left hand. He does what the builder's right hand does not want to know about. Shanmugham is the person who helps Mr. Shah in his work. If there is trouble he contacts the police or the mafia. If there is money to be paid to a politician, he carries the bag. If someone's knuckles have to be broken, he breaks them.

Mr. Shah forgets Christianity. He forgets humanity. He thinks only about construction. He is a fraud that gives only promise but doesn't complete them. He gives generous offers to the residents of Vishram Society so that people become brutal and lose humanity. They even murder a respectful person for the sake of money. But he doesn't keep his word. He only gives them first installment then nothing. He cheats people. He doesn't keep his promise.

**Lawyer:**

A lawyer is a person who helps people in getting justice. It is the culture of a lawyer to find out truth. But in urban culture lawyers become corrupt and selfish. They have love for money only. They forget humanity. Instead of helping people,



they take disadvantage of them. Masterji, an old teacher goes to the lawyer for help, but he doesn't get any help from them. They join the politicians and police.

**Secretary:**

It is the culture of secretary to help people, to make records and to solve problems. Kothari, secretary of Vishram society remains faithful to the residents of Vishram. All the residents of Vishram believe in him. He keeps all the records. When Mrs. Puri and other residents ask him for the duplicate key of Masterji's flat, he doesn't give them the key. He thinks that to deceive anyone is against culture. He doesn't want to cheat Masterji. But he also doesn't remain away from money and becomes ready to give the duplicate key of Masterji's flat to Mrs. Puri. He becomes selfish and forgets cultural principles.

**Superstitious Practices:**

Some Indian people are superstitious. They believe in good and bad omens. Mrs. Puri is not free from such blind beliefs. When she was pregnant, she had bragged to her friends that it was going to be a boy for sure. She thinks that the evil eye heard her and punished her son. A man has his will power but people think that there are dark powers operating all around us. Mr. Shah also thinks like this. So he seeks protection from an astrologer. He always depends on the astrologer for his good luck. It is the result of his superstitious nature.

**Treating a woman with dignity:**

In Indian culture man and woman relationship is restricted at some levels. A man can't pressure a woman. A woman is treated with dignity in Indian culture. But a male has some restrictions. Mr. Ajwani doesn't talk with Mrs. Rego about the generous offer. He goes to Mrs. Puri for her help to turn Mrs. Rego to think about Mr. Shah's offer because he can't talk with her beyond a certain limit. He can't pressure her. Ajwani takes the responsibility to convince his neighbours

about the builder's offer but he fails. He said, "A man can't put pressure on a woman beyond a certain point. A *man* can't." (P.180)

**Service through social work:**

In Indian culture many people do something for the sake of society. People like social work. People have sympathy for the poor and the needy. Even they feel sympathetic towards stray animals. They want to do something for their betterment. Mrs. Puri thinks that if she gets money, she will use it for her son and will use rest of the money for the injured dogs. She will open a clinic for them. It shows her generous attitude towards animals. Her husband always wants to give alms to the beggars because he has sympathy for them. It shows their typical attitude based on Indian culture.

In this way Aravind Adiga throws light on the metropolitan culture through urban ways of life, cosmopolitan culture, tradition, modernity, family, teachers' community, religion, professions, love for animals, superstitious practices, dignity for women and through social service.

## References Cited:

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