



Last Man in Tower

By Aravind Adiga

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From the Booker Prize–winning author of *The White Tiger*, a stunning novel of greed and murder in contemporary Mumbai.

At the heart of this novel are two equally compelling men, poised for a showdown. Real estate developer Dharmen Shah rose from nothing to create an empire and hopes to seal his legacy with a luxury building named the Shanghai. Larger-than-life Shah is a dangerous man to refuse. But he meets his match in retired schoolteacher Masterji. Shah offers a generous buyout to Masterji and his neighbors in a once respectable, now crumbling apartment building on whose site Shah's high-rise would be built. They can't believe their good fortune. Except, that is, for Masterji, who refuses to abandon the building he has long called home. As the demolition deadline looms, desires mount; neighbors become enemies, and acquaintances turn into conspirators who risk losing their humanity to score their payday. Here is a richly told, suspense-fueled story of ordinary people pushed to their limits in a place that knows none: the new India as only Aravind Adiga could explore—and expose—it.

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Editorial Review

Review

A Best Book of the Year:

The Boston Globe

Richmond Times-Dispatch

The Daily Beast

“Brilliant. . . . If you loved the movie *Slumdog Millionaire*, you will inhale the novel *Last Man in Tower*. Adiga’s second novel is even better than the superb *White Tiger*. . . . First-rate. . . . You simply do not realize how anemic most contemporary fiction is until you read Adiga’s muscular prose. His plots don’t unwind, they surge.”

—*USA Today*

“Provocative and decadent. . . . The kind of novel that’s so richly insightful . . . it’s hard to know where to begin singing its praises. . . . Vain, shrewd and stubborn, [Masterji] is one of the most delightfully contradictory characters to appear in recent fiction.”

—*The Washington Post*

“Masterful. . . . With this gripping, amusing glimpse into the contradictions and perils of modern India, Adiga cements his reputation as the preeminent chronicler of his country’s messy present.”

—*Newsweek*

“Adiga has written the story of a New India. . . . This funny and poignant story is multidimensional, layered with many engaging stories and characters.”

—*The Seattle Times*

“A rare achievement. . . . Adiga captures with heartbreaking authenticity the real struggle in Indian cities, which is for dignity. A funny yet deeply melancholic work, *Last Man in Tower* is a brilliant, and remarkably mature, second novel.”

—*The Economist*

“With wit and observation, Adiga gives readers a well-rounded portrait of Mumbai in all of its teeming, bleating, inefficient glory. . . . Like any good novelist, Adiga’s story lingers because it nestles in the heart and the head.”

—*Christian Science Monitor*

“*Last Man in Tower* is a nuanced study of human nature in all of its complexity and mystery. (It is also humane and funny.) Nothing is quite as it seems in the novel, which makes for surprises both pleasant and disturbing.”

—*Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*

“Adiga populates his fiction with characters from all parts of India’s contemporary social spectrum, and the intensity of his anger at aspects of modern India is modulated by his impish wit.”

—*The Wall Street Journal*

“Adiga maps out in luminous prose India’s ambivalence toward its accelerated growth, while creating an engaging protagonist . . . a man whose ambition and independence have been tempered with an understanding of the important, if almost imperceptible, difference between development and progress.”
—*Entertainment Weekly*

“[An] adroit, ruthless and sobering novel. . . . Adiga peppers his universally relevant tour de force with brilliant touches, multiple ironies and an indictment of our nature.”
—*The Star Ledger*

“Adiga is an exceptionally talented novelist, and the subtlety with which he presents the battle between India’s aspirants and its left-behind poor is exceptional.”
—*Richmond Times-Dispatch*

“A brilliant examination of the power of money. . . . Ultimately *Last Man in Tower* is about how greed affects compassion. . . . Adiga skillfully unfolds a surprising conclusion that underscores what a great novel this is.”
—*Minneapolis Star-Tribune*

“[Full of] acute observations and sharp imagery. . . . Like all cautionary tales, it embodies more than a little truth about our times.”
—*Financial Times*

“Dickensian. . . . Well worth the time of any reader interested in the circumstances of life in a seemingly foreign place that turns out to be awfully familiar. . . . Readers above all else will find pleasure and pain in the ups and downs of the human family itself.”
—*San Francisco Chronicle*

About the Author

Aravind Adiga was born in India in 1974 and attended Columbia and Oxford universities. He is the author of *Selection Day*, the Booker Prize-winning novel *The White Tiger*, and the story collection *Between the Assassinations*. He lives in Mumbai, India.

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If you are inquiring about Vishram Society, you will be told right away that it is pucca—absolutely, unimpeachably pucca. This is important to note, because something is not quite pucca about the neighbourhood—the toenail of Santa Cruz called Vakola. On a map of Mumbai, Vakola is a cluster of ambiguous dots that cling polyp-like to the underside of the domestic airport; on the ground, the polyps turn out to be slums, and spread out on every side of Vishram Society.

At each election, when Mumbai takes stock of herself, it is reported that one-fourth of the city’s slums are here, in the vicinity of the airport—and many older Bombaywallahs are sure anything in or around Vakola must be slummy. (They are not sure how you even pronounce it: Va-KHO-la, or VAA-k’-la?) In such a questionable neighbourhood, Vishram Society is anchored like a dreadnought of middle-class respectability, ready to fire on anyone who might impugn the pucca quality of its inhabitants. For years it was the only good building—which is to say, the only registered co-operative society—in the neighbourhood; it was erected as an experiment in gentrification back in the late 1950s, when Vakola was semi-swamp, a few bright mansions amidst mangroves and malarial clouds. Wild boar and bands of dacoits were rumoured to prowl the banyan

trees, and rickshaws and taxis refused to come here after sunset. In gratitude to Vishram Society's pioneers, who defied bandits and anopheles mosquitoes, braved the dirt lane on their cycles and Bajaj scooters, cut down the trees, built a thick compound wall and hung signs in English on it, the local politicians have decreed that the lane that winds down from the main road to the front gate of the building be called "Vishram Society Lane."

The mangroves are long gone. Other middle-class buildings have come up now—the best of these, so local real-estate brokers say, is Gold Coin Society, but Marigold, Hibiscus, and White Rose grow and grow in reputation—and with the recent arrival of the Grand Hyatt Hotel, a five-star, the area is on the verge of ripening into permanent middle-class propriety. Yet none of this would have been possible without Vishram Society, and the grandmotherly building is spoken of with reverence throughout the neighbourhood.

It is, strictly speaking, two distinct Societies enclosed within the same compound wall. Vishram Society Tower B, which was erected in the late 1970s, stands in the south-east corner of the original plot: seven storeys tall, it is the more desirable building to purchase or rent in, and many young executives who have found work in the nearby Bandra-Kurla financial complex live here with their families.

Tower A is what the neighbours think of as "Vishram Society." It stands in the centre of the compound, six storeys tall; a marble block set into the gate-post says in weathered lettering:

This plaque was unveiled by Shri Krishna Menon, the honourable defence minister of India, on 14 November 1959, birthday of our beloved prime minister, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru.

Here things become blurry; you must get down on your knees and peer to make out the last lines:

. . . has asked Menon to convey his fondest hope that Vishram Society should serve as an example of "good housing for good Indians."

Erected by:

Members of the Vishram Society Co-operative Housing Society Fully registered and incorporated in the city of Bombay 14-11-1959

The face of this tower, once pink, is now a rainwater-stained, fungus-licked grey, although veins of primordial pink show wherever the roofing has protected the walls from the monsoon rains. Every flat has iron grilles on the windows: geraniums, jasmines, and the spikes of cacti push through the rusty metal squares. Luxuriant ferns, green and reddish green, blur the corners of some windows, making them look like entrances to small caves.

The more enterprising of the residents have paid for improvements to this shabby exterior—hands have scrubbed around some of the windows, creating aureoles on the façade, further complicating the patchwork of pink, mildew-grey, black, cement-grey, rust-brown, fern-green, and floral red, to which, by midday, are added the patterns of bedsheets and saris put out to dry on the grilles and balconies. An old-fashioned building, Vishram has no lobby; you walk into a dark square entranceway and turn to your left (if you are, or are visiting, Mrs. Saldanha of 0C), or climb the dingy stairwell to the homes on the higher floors. (An Otis lift exists, but unreliably so.) Perforated with eight-pointed stars, the wall along the stairwell resembles the screen of the women's zenana in an old haveli, and hints at secretive, even sinister, goings-on inside.

Outside, parked along the compound wall are a dozen scooters and motorbikes, three Maruti-Suzukis, two

Tata Indicas, a battered Toyota Qualis, and a few children's bicycles. The main feature of this compound is a three-foot-tall polished black-stone cross, set inside a shrine of glazed blue-and-white tiles and covered in fading flowers and wreaths—a reminder that the building was originally meant for Roman Catholics. Hindus were admitted in the late 1960s, and in the 1980s the better kind of Muslim—Bohra, Ismaili, college-educated. Vishram is now entirely “cosmopolitan” (i.e., ethnically and religiously mixed). Diagonally across from the black cross stands the guard's booth, on whose wall Ram Khare, the Hindu watchman, has stencilled in red a slogan adapted from the Bhagavad Gita:

I was never born and I will never die; I do not hurt and cannot be hurt; I am invincible, immortal, indestructible.

A blue register juts out of the open window of the guard's booth. A sign hangs from the roof:

All visitors must sign the log book

and provide correct address and mobile phone number before entry

by order—

The Secretary Vishram Co-operative Housing Society

A banyan tree has grown through the compound wall next to the booth. Painted umber like the wall, and speckled with dirt, the stem of the tree bulges from the masonry like a camouflaged leopard; it lends an air of solidity and reliability to Ram Khare's booth that it perhaps does not deserve.

The compound wall, which is set behind a gutter, has two dusty signs hanging from it:

Visit Speed-Tek Cyber-Café. Proprietor Ibrahim Kudwa

Renaissance Real Estate. Honest and reliable. Near Vakola Market

The evening cricket games of the children of Vishram have left most of the compound bare of any flowering plants, although a clump of hibiscus plants flourishes near the back wall to ward off the stench of raw meat from a beef shop somewhere behind the Society. At night, dark shapes shoot up and down the dim Vishram Society Lane; rats and bandicoots dart like billiard balls struck around the narrow alley, crazed by the mysterious smell of fresh blood.

On Sunday morning, the aroma is of fresh baking. There are Mangalorean stores here that cater to the Christian members of Vishram and other good Societies; on the morning of the Sabbath, ladies in long patterned dresses and girls with powdered faces and silk skirts returning from St. Antony Church will crowd these stores for bread and sunnas. In a little while, the smell of boiling broth and spicy chicken wafts out from the opened windows of Vishram Society into the neighbourhood. At such an hour of contentment, the spirit of Prime Minister Nehru, if it were to hover over the building, might well declare itself satisfied.

Yet Vishram's residents are the first to point out that this Society is nothing like paradise. You know a community by the luxuries it can live without. Those in Vishram dispense with the most basic: self-deception. To any inquiring outsider they will freely admit the humiliations of life in their Society—in their honest frustration, indeed, they may exaggerate these problems.

Number one. The Society, like most buildings in Vakola, does not receive a 24-hour supply of running water. Since it is on the poorer, eastern side of the train tracks, Vakola is blessed only twice a day by the Municipality: water flows in the taps four to six in the morning, and 7:30 p.m. to 9 p.m. The residents have fitted storage tanks above their bathrooms, but these can only hold so much (larger tanks threaten the stability of a building this ancient). By five in the evening the taps have usually run dry; the residents come out to talk. A few minutes after seven thirty, the reviving vascular system of Vishram Society ends all talk; water is coursing at high pressure up the pipes, and kitchens and bathrooms are busy places. The residents know that their evening washing, bathing, and cooking all have to be timed to this hour and a half when the pressure in the taps is the greatest; as do ancillary activities that rely on the easy availability of running water. If the children of Vishram Society could trace a path back to their conceptions, they would generally find that they occurred between half past six and a quarter to eight.

The second problem is the one that all of Santa Cruz, even the good part west of the railway line, is notorious for. Acute at night, it also becomes an issue on Sundays between 7 and 8 a.m. You open your window and there it is: a Boeing 747, flying right over your building. The residents insist that after the first month, the phrase “noise pollution” means nothing to you—and this is probably true—yet rental prices for Vishram Society and its neighbours are at least a fourth lower because of the domestic airport’s proximity.

The final problem, existential in nature, is spelled out by the glass-faced noticeboard:

NOTICE

Vishram Co-operative Hsg Society Ltd, Tower A Minutes of the special meeting held on Saturday, 28 April

Theme: Emergency nature of repairs is recognized

As the quorum was insufficient, even on such an urgent issue, the meeting had to be adjourned for half an hour; the adjourned meeting commenced at about 7:30 p.m.

ITEM NO. 1 OF THE AGENDA:

Mr. Yogesh Murthy, “Masterji,” (3A), suggested that the minutes of the last meeting of “A” Building be taken as read as the copy of the minutes had already been circulated to all members. It was unanimously agreed that the said minutes be taken as read.

ITEM NO. 2 OF THE AGENDA:

At the outset, Masterji (3A as above) expressed serious concern about the condition of the Society Building and emphasized the need to start repair work immediately in the interest of the members’ safety and the safety of their children; most of the members gathered expressed similar . . .

. . . meeting was finally concluded about 8:30 p.m. with a vote of thanks to the chair.

Copy (1) To Members of Vishram Co-op Hsg Society Ltd, Tower A

Copy (2) To Mr. A. Kothari, Secretary, Vishram Co-op Hsg Society Ltd, Tower A

Pinned behind this notice are older notices of a similar nature. After more than four decades of monsoons, erosion, wind-weathering, air pollution, and the gentle but continual vibrations caused by the low-flying

planes, Tower A stands in reasonable chance of complete collapse in the next monsoon.

And yet no one, either in Vishram Society or in the neighbourhood at large, really believes that it will fall.

Vishram is a building like the people living in it, middle class to its core. Improvement or failure, it is incapable of either extremity. The men have modest paunches, wear checked polyester shirts over white banians, and keep their hair oiled and short. The older women wear saris, salwar kameez, or skirts, and the younger ones wear jeans. All of them pay taxes, support charities, and vote in local and general elections.

Just one glance at Vishram in the evening, as its residents sit in white plastic chairs in the compound, chit-chatting, fanning themselves with the Times of India, and you know that this Society is—what else?—pucca.

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From the Hardcover edition.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Chris Robertson:

Now a day individuals who Living in the era exactly where everything reachable by interact with the internet and the resources inside can be true or not require people to be aware of each facts they get. How individuals to be smart in getting any information nowadays? Of course the solution is reading a book. Looking at a book can help folks out of this uncertainty Information particularly this Last Man in Tower book since this book offers you rich information and knowledge. Of course the data in this book hundred per cent guarantees there is no doubt in it everybody knows.

James Lindberg:

The book Last Man in Tower has a lot details on it. So when you check out this book you can get a lot of gain. The book was written by the very famous author. Mcdougal makes some research ahead of write this book. This particular book very easy to read you can obtain the point easily after scanning this book.

Fred Martinez:

People live in this new morning of lifestyle always try to and must have the time or they will get great deal of stress from both day to day life and work. So , whenever we ask do people have spare time, we will say absolutely sure. People is human not really a robot. Then we ask again, what kind of activity do you have when the spare time coming to anyone of course your answer will certainly unlimited right. Then ever try this one, reading ebooks. It can be your alternative with spending your spare time, often the book you have

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Paula Royce:

Last Man in Tower can be one of your nice books that are good idea. All of us recommend that straight away because this guide has good vocabulary which could increase your knowledge in vocabulary, easy to understand, bit entertaining however delivering the information. The writer giving his/her effort that will put every word into satisfaction arrangement in writing Last Man in Tower but doesn't forget the main stage, giving the reader the hottest along with based confirm resource facts that maybe you can be one of it. This great information can easily drawn you into new stage of crucial imagining.

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