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## The Stylistic Modes in Aravind Adiga's *Last Man in Tower*

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### Abstract

Aravind Adiga's acute and microscopic observation and the technique of presentation make him an exceptional novelist of the contemporary period. The use of figurative and metaphorical language proves him to be an accomplished novelist. His third and vibrant novel *Last Man in Tower* is replete with a number of similes, metaphors and other figures of speech which throw light on his poetic heart even though his writings belong to the genre of fiction. The present paper is an attempt of throwing light on the literary style of Aravind Adiga in his novel *Last Man in Tower*.

**Keywords-** Novel, Humour, Style, Language, Pathos, Acquisition

### Introduction

Aravind Adiga, a very shining star of 21<sup>st</sup> century has cemented his place in Indian English literature with his thought provoking novels viz. the Booker prize winning novel *The White Tiger*, *Between the Assassinations*, *Last Man in Tower* and the latest one *The Selection Day*. The novel *Last Man in Tower* is a brilliant possession of Indian English fiction articulating the pain and suffering of the groaning middle class. Its strength lies in its satirical defiance and frank portrayal of the aspirations of the middle class which remains mute on the plea of decency. Adiga's strength as a novelist includes his astonishing power of observation, his ability to evoke humour and pathos, and his positive message of improvement and betterment. His novels are replete with the power of action, the richness of description and the strength of emotions. He is one of the pre eminent novelists of modern era whose readers are enthralled by his linguistic and narrative skills. Adiga's acute and microscopic observation and the technique of presentation have made even his critics appreciate his narrative techniques. Style can be considered the use of figures that embellish speech largely, the way of representing an expression of the person speaking or writing. In his *A Dictionary of Literary Terms*, A. J. Cudden has highlighted on a writer's own choice of expression and language. He observes:

The analysis and assessment of style involves examination of a writer's choice of words, his figures of speech, the devices (rhetorical and otherwise) the shape of his paragraphs- indeed of every conceivable aspect of his language and the way in which he uses it. (Cudden 663)

Regarding the style of writers, Marjorie Boulton's view in the book *The Anatomy of Prose* is worth quoting: "When we are studying the writer's choice of words, the questions that are of interest are: does he use, in general, everyday words or unusual words? Does the Latin or the Saxon element predominate in his vocabulary? Does he seem to use words consciously for their sound? Does he seem to prefer the abstract or the concrete? (Boulton 8)

Adiga's mastery of flawless language and writing skill is clearly discernible in his novels. As his style is lucid and transparent, it reaches directly to the heart of readers. He uses satire, irony and humour perfectly. He has the chiselling power to sharpen his language to give it a proper shape. The readers appreciate Adiga by calling him a master storyteller. His style is simply- the way it should be the way it is. Even his critics appreciate him by calling the perfect artist in terms of literary style. Sudhir K. Arora, one of the bitter critics of Adiga, praises Adiga in terms of his stylistic modes. In his book review *Aravind Adiga's The White Tiger: A Freakish Booker*, Sudhir K. Arora says:

"Adiga has succeeded in keeping everyone silent regarding his narrative configurations. Anyone who interrogates the relevance of the Booker prize for *The White Tiger* cannot help him without appreciating it for its narrative techniques." (Arora 176)

Adiga's novels have been penned with the satirical ink. He uses the indirect manner for his acerbic satires. *Last Man in Tower* makes a profound statement about hypocrisy and greed of people when the residents of Vakola, whether Muslim, Christian or Hindu do not let their religion come between them and their greed.

The novels of Adiga abound in the humour of all kinds, the humour of character, the humour of situation and wit and humour of the highest kind. His varied humour is skillfully blended with pathos and so its effect is further heightened by contrast. Defining humour and wit M.H. Abrams in *A Glossary of Literary Terms* puts, "Both 'wit' and humour now denote species of the comic: any element in literature that is designed to amuse or to excite mirth in the reader or audience." (Abrams 179)

The following expert from the novel *Last Man in Tower* can be taken as an example of his acerbic humour: "The temple was crowded, as it was at any hour of the day, yet the Lord Ganesha was receptive to free-market logic, and an 'express line' for anyone who could pay fifty rupees ahead, spend the three of them into the sanctum." (134)

Though Adiga has always studied in English schools and lived abroad for a long time, he still has a rare love for Hindi. In his works, he uses many words of Hindi which suggest the fragrance of

his Indian roots and make his characters appear natural in their action and speech. His use of Hindi words and songs gives a touch of authenticity to his novels about India. *Last Man in Tower* contains following Hindi words:

Saris (09, 327), salwar kameez (09, 360), Karma (16,290), Jihadies (17), khachada-wali (18,216), sansad (21), channa (22), Haiya (41), Maidan (51), Khaki (56, 58), gutka (57,62,394), chai (59), Baba (60), charpoy (62), chappals (62), Banians (63), dhotis (63), gulmohar (64), guru (191), nullah (325), biryani (68,242), goondas (243), bandookwala (261), karma (290), yogi (291), Bhendi bazaar (300), baksheesh (313), Samskara (320), burqa (322), sadhus (322) papajee, Mamajee (326), Jayanti (326), Gutka (346,394), goonda (347) Channa (355), Rum-pum-pum-pum (371), Dargah (406) Bhelpuri (412), Pucca (412, 418).

In *Last Man in Tower*, Adiga also refers Hindi songs. Shah hums his favourite Kishore Kumar song- *Aa chal ke tujhe mein...* (LMIT91) Masterji hums his favourite film song-....*geet amar kar do* (311) Shanmungham hears a Hindi song... *ek aise gagan ke tale* (394). Mr. Pinto hears children rehearsing a Hindi patriotic song:

*Sarey Jahan se Accha*

*Yeh Hindustan Hamara*

*Hum bulbule hai iski*

*Yeh gulistan hamara.* (LMIT 251)

Adiga uses not only Hindi words in his novels but at some places provides an Indian aroma when he tells about habits and things common in India. Instead of using the term Mumbaians, he uses 'Bombaywallahs' (LMIT 01). Masterji's wife Purnima used to stick her used bindis on the mirror which is a very common practice of Indian ladies.

Use of questions or question tags is also the strategy of Adiga's narrative technique which he uses to get his readers indulged with his characters. Through this technique, he seems to be talking to his audience. Following are the instances of question tags and questions. A few instances of question tags can be extracted from the novel *Last Man in Tower*:

"She was a wonderful woman, wasn't she?" (44)

"*But what about you, Dharmen, the pulverized animal asked. You are next, aren't you?*" (57)

"But a man's rubbish is not the truth about him, is it?" (225)

"I told you what Mr Shah said, didn't I?" (318)

"Masterji talked to the Mumbai sun, didn't he?" (327)

"He wants Mrs Puri to clean it herself for the rest of her life, doesn't he?" ( 327)

“It’s a statement, isn’t it?” (355)

Repetition of some words and phrase is yet another stylistic device Adiga employs in the novel for emphasis or emotional effect. The novel the *Last man in Tower* contains many words and phrases which have been repeated twice or thrice:

Oy-3(19, 363), slowly-2 (19), lazy-2 (31), enough-2 (55), all of us-3 (75), rum-pum-pum (75, 371), not me-2 (112), money-3 (123), came at once-2 (125), Africa-3 (129), take it-2 (141), hot-4 (226), all right-2 (291) ticket-2 (335), Bye-law-2 (339), heard you-2 (358), Masterji-2 (359),

“Oh, I do hope so, Sangeeta. I do hope so.” (316)

Adiga has the knack to write in an uncomplicated and graphic style which lends a potential to his writings. He describes the place and its people so vividly that the readers really feel that they are the eyewitness of the places and characters. His novels appeal to the colours, the smell, and the utter vastness, compactness and diversity of the human man that contribute to making up India. The detailed and graphic description of his scenes and character makes them come alive. In the novel *Last man in Tower*, the colourful description of Mumbai, the rubbish, the majesty, the fragrance, the stink makes the readers feel as if the events are taking place before their eyes. He is dexterous in writing in a vivid and lucid style and build, the milieu for his novels. With few words, he sets the scene of poverty and grime in the slums in sharp contrast to the new fold riches. In a review about Aravind Adiga, Tim Adams remarks in a magazine *The Observer*: “It is Adiga's nearsightedness that brings his writing to life. His eyes move among the crowd with a restless precision, alert to the realities of each unremarkable existence”. (Tim Adams, The Observer)

In the *Last man in Tower* we get many instances of Adiga’s graphic style. One of the examples of his graphic and ornamental style is his making the graphic description of the building of Vakola after rainy season: “A drop of rainwater was hanging from the ceiling. Vishram’s old walls glistened with bright seepage; moisture was snuggling into cracks in the paint, licking steel rods, and chewing on mortar.” (LMIT139)

Another instance of his vivid and graphic description is of "a local market a row of blue wooden stalls, lit by white tube-lights or naked yellow bulbs, in which the most disparate trades were conducted side by side a chicken shop smelling of poultry shit and raw meat, a sugarcane vendors stall haloed in raw sucrose, a Xerox machine in a stationery shop yawning flashes of blinding light, a barber's salon, busy even at this hour stinking of shaving cream and gossip" (LMIT 69).

Though he writes in a simple style yet it is an ornamental one. He produces pithy bleak images such as a retired accountant, Mr. Pinto as “a small, slow, white-haired man, refined by age

into a humanoid sparrow, lowered himself into a chair with a direct view of the TV through Mrs Saldanha's torn curtain (the prime chair)" (21) etc.

We find the idea of grating sounds in the novels of Adiga. He uses onomatopoeia, a figure of speech where the sound echoes the sense. His use of onomatopoeia creates the auditory effect and impresses the readers. In the novel, we hear the 'tuck' of driving the nail into the wooden board (LMIT14).

Alliteration is also one of the devices used by Adiga to provide a rhetoric effect. Stress and strain (53), Slogging, skimping and sacrificing (133), ambiguous, ambivalent, and ambidextrous law (144), low-lying area (148), feminine fullness (151), Evil Eye (208) Cricket Club (365) are few examples of alliteration in *Last Man in Tower*.

Adiga has used metonymy, a figure of speech where one word is used with the intention that it will suggest another. He has used 'the Hand of God' (75) for blessings of God. At some places, Adiga uses synecdoche, a figure of speech by which a part is put for the whole, the whole for the part, the species for the genus, the genus for the species, the name of the material for the thing made. Adiga writes 'his shoulders grew' instead of 'he grew': "Contempt was born in Gaurav, the contempt of a son who has been hit by a weak father. As his shoulders grew, the contempt grew with them." (191) 'She had married a pair of muscled arms' is yet another use of synecdoche.

Litotes, a figure of speech where two negatives are used to express one positive, can also be found in Adiga's prose. "Differences of wealth among the members did not go unnoticed" (22) is an example of litotes.

Adiga is the master of prose of his own literary style. His style can be commended for the flow of pure idiom of command of subtle melodies. He lends warmth and colour to his style and shows a keen sense of analogy by giving illustrations everywhere. Some of the metaphors and similes have a poetical quality. Adiga distinguishes himself by the ingenuity and even the audacity of his metaphors and the aptness of his illustrations. Adiga's narrative style brings in the uncommon and unique comparisons and figures from all over the world to serve his purpose. We can see one instance of comparison with the word 'like' i.e. simile when Masterji is boycotted and scorned by his own neighbours:

"So this is what they mean by the word: boycott. Even in his bed, he felt it, their contempt, like the heat radiating from a brick wall on a summer night. (LMIT218)

"Man is like a goat tied to a pole" (44)

"Bombay, like a practitioner of yoga, was folding in on itself, as its centre moved from the south, where there was no room to grow, to this swampland near the airport." (37).

"Spots twinkled in the darkness, like mica in a slab of granite." (47)

“The blows of the axe came with metronomic regularity, like the hour hand in a grandfather clock: underneath them, he heard the nervous ticking of his own wristwatch, like splinters flying from the log.” (47).

"Like an abdominal muscle, the human mass in the train contracted." (47).

"A stunted Gulmohar tree stood here with crisscrossing branches, like a man who has got his arms in a tangle by pointing in every direction at once." (64)

“Shanmugham saw, like first rain on the ground, red dots speckling the white scum of toothpaste on the ground.”(119).

“He knows all kinds of things. He's like one of these lizards, going up every wall.” (183).

“In the university library he looked up from his textbooks of finance and thought of something his father had done or said the previous day: like a common stock on the Bombay Sensex, the value of Yogesh Murthy's reputation was recalculated daily in his son's mind, and daily it fell.” (191)

“Even in his bed he felt it, their contempt, like the heat radiating from a brick wall on a summer night.” (218)

“Masterji realized he had become one of those things, like good cabbage, ripe chikoos, or rosy apples from the United States, that people came to the market looking for.” (324)

“The security grilles, removed from what used to be Vishram Tower B, had left rusty ghost-shadows around the windows and balconies, like eyebrows plucked in a painful ceremony.” (331)

“Now a ray of sun entered the compartment and their varied faces glowed like a single human light refracted into colours.” (341)

"Thick, blackened wicks emerged from the melting candles like a bone from a wound."(353)

“Soon, catching the angle of the setting sun, the buildings would flash like side-by-side comets.” (370).

Not only similes, Adiga excels in the use of metaphor also. In all his novels we can see a variety of metaphors. Adiga uses a beautiful and unique metaphor of top-up to describe the extra science classes, "It was not a 'class', though conducted with such dignity, an after class science 'top-up' - meant to do to a normal schoolchild what a steroidal injection does to a merely healthy athlete." (LMIT25).

Adiga describes the journey of the soul in a very beautiful and metaphorical language:

"In its first year out of the body, the soul travels slowly and at a low altitude, burdened by the sins of its worldly existence. It flies over green fields, ploughed fields, and small dams and dykes. It has wings like an eagle's at this stage of its voyage. In the second year, it

begins to ascend over the oceans. This flight will take it all of the second year, and a part of the third year too. It will see the ocean change colour, from blue to dark blue, until it is almost a kind of black. The darkening of the colour of the ocean will alert the soul to its entry into the third year of its long flight." (41)

"The experience of Shanghai being to a middle aged Indian businessman what the experience of sex is to teenager." (55)

"They treat me like they would treat an untouchable in the old days" (217)

How metaphorically Adiga depicts the condition of Masterji after his breakup from pintos:

"Mr. Pinto did not understand why the man did it, but each time parliament met down there to gossip about him, Masterji stood by the window, and sent down aerial roots to suck up slander and abuse. That must be his new diet, Mr Pinto thought. He is chewing their thorns for lunch and nails for supper. From mockery he is making his protein." (265)

Very metaphorically, Ajwani uses an analogy to compare the behaviour of Masterji with that of a cow,

You have seen how a cow turns its eyes to the side when it shits, and pretends not to know what it's doing? Masterji knows exactly what he's doing to us, and he's enjoying it. Repressed, depressed, and dangerous: that's your beloved Master ji in a nutshell. (267)

The personality of Ibrahim Kudwa has been compared to a cockroach: "Instead of a man's soul, he had developed a cockroach's antennae inside him." (269)

Adiga personifies death in a very ornamental language by describing falling one drop of water on Masterji's fingertip:

The iridescent drop spoke to him saying: I am what you are made of. And in the end I am what you return to. In between there were puzzling things a man had to do. Marry. Teach. Have children. And then his obligations were done and he would become drops of water again, free of life and its rainbow of restrictions. Death said to Masterji: Fear me not. Purnima your wife is more beautiful than ever, she is a drop of shining water. And Sandhya your daughter is right by her side. (368)

Shah compares the love of Rosie for him to banyan tree growing from a seed of gutter pipe:

How there is nothing small, nothing ignoble in life. A man may not find love in the sacrament of marriage but he has found it with a woman he coupled with on his sofa: just as a seed spat out by the gutter pipe, sucking on sewage, can grow into a great banyan. (408).

Figures of speech flow from the pen of Adiga as if it were not the pen of a novelist but of a poet. Adiga's awareness of contemporary life and the recent developments in science and technology is reflected in his various similes, metaphors and analogies related to Science, especially Physics.

Adiga uses 'as if' as a hypothesis very frequently in his novels. Use of 'as if' and other figures of speech lend a dignity, potential and suggestive aura to his fiction. The following examples of 'as if' can be quoted from the novel:

"The visitor looked up from his notepad, as if he were surprised." (16)

"At once the boy seemed frightened, as if his grandfather's power, which lay in naming these animals, had ended." (43)

"The other man in uniform had a hand on Satish, his son, and was admonishing the boy with his index finger, as if putting on a dumb show for his father's sake." (58)

"Instead of the image of his wife's soul, Masterji saw himself, with the body of an eagle, flying over an ocean: as if his own death, and subsequent trial, had already begun." (78)

"Those who had tried to attack him in his room the previous night now gaped at him from down there, as if he were a thing to fear." (349)

Yet another notable eminence of Adiga's style is its terseness i.e. expressing the most in the fewest words. He displays a great talent for condensation. Many of his sentences appear to be proverbial sayings by virtue of their gems of thoughts expressed in a pithy manner. His novels contain many aphorisms expressing a truth in the fewest possible words. An aphorism is like a proverb which has quotable quality. The examples of his figurative & epigrammatic style are:

"Men with gold rings are the biggest thieves in the world." (20)

"Man is like a goat tied to a pole." (44)

"A Man has to bend his rules a little to enjoy life in Mumbai." (68)

"In a socialist economy, the small businessman has to be a thief to prosper." (88)

"The facts of life do not change: high tide is followed by low tide, and the equinox is still the equinox." (123)

"A broker is first cousin to a builder." (128)

"Ingratitude is the worst of sins." (334)

"I am just a comedian in my own movie." (347)

"Life is good. It is not perfect but it is better with money." (412)

"Nothing can stop a living thing that wants to be free" (419)

Thus, it can be concluded that Adiga is the master of aphoristic style i.e. a compact, condensed and epigrammatic style of writing. His narrative technique is marked with keen observations and sharp imagery. His language is rich, fragrant and ornamental. The use of figurative and metaphorical language proves Adiga to be an accomplished novelist. His writings are the morality and eye-opening tales for the modern man. They are as true to life as they are entertaining. After

reading Adiga's vigorous and magnificent prose we realize how anaemic and impoverished most of the contemporary writing is.

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