

Living Space as a Reflection of Psychological space in Aravind Adiga's Novels

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Abstract

The 21st century journalist-writer Aravind Adiga has been listed by The New Indian Express as one of the 'Indian writers who made waves worldwide'. His novels and short stories try to portray the reality of life in India in its many facets. While telling his stories, Adiga makes ingenious use of space. The psychology and psychological transformations of his characters are often laid bare for his readers through a spacial reflection of them. My research paper attempts to relate physical space in the characters' lives to their psyche. For instance in the novel 'The White Tiger' Balram lives in separate room with cockroaches. Balram talks how people sleep in villages. In 'Between the Assassination' Adiga depicts the picture of tea shop where ziauddin and six other boys who wash dishes in Ramanna's shop sleep together in tent they had pitched behind the shop reflect their status in society. Shankar's father keeps his mistress in another house.

The housing system in 'The last Man in Tower' indicates the struggle for space in Mumbai. Keshava's mental situation can be read from the place where he sleeps at each stage of his life. Fredric Jameson says in his 1991 book, Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism, 'A certain spatial turn has often seemed to offer one or more productive ways of distinguishing postmodern from modernism proper.' Henri Lefebvre divides space into three – conceived space, lived space and perceived space. Urban planning is an example of conceived space, the mental construct with which ordinary people approach the physical world is lived space and perceived space is a social product. Edward Soja puts forward a theory of Thirdspace, where everything comes together: 'subjectivity and objectivity, the abstract and the concrete, the real and the imagined, the knowable and the unimaginable, the repetitive and the differential, structure and agency, mind and body, consciousness and the unconscious, the disciplined and the transdisciplinary, everyday life and unending history'. In this research paper, I will try to read how the living spaces each character consciously or unconsciously chooses at particular stages in his or her life represent the psychology of the person during that period.

Professor of Psychology at the University of Texas, Sam Gosling says that we express ourselves in our spaces in three ways – claiming our identity, choosing our thoughts and feelings, and traces of behaviour. The first reflects our attitudes, goals, values, roles and priorities. The second is made of things such as photographs of loved ones that are aimed at making us ‘think about certain things and feel a certain way’. The third way is subconscious and Gosling calls this ‘Behavioural Residue’. They are evidences of normal everyday behaviour.

In *The White Tiger* Balram prefer to sleep separately in a room which has cheap whitish plaster on the walls covered with cockroaches and a flimsy little bed, barely big enough for him. In the morning Balram thinks, ‘The room was full of roaches but it was mine and no one teased me. One disadvantage was that the electric bell did not penetrate this room – but that was a kind of advantage too, I discovered in time.’ (p-132). Balram says about the women in his house – ‘At night they sleep together, their legs falling one over the other, like one creature, a millipede’. This is followed by the information that the men and boys of the household sleep in a different corner. The spaces these people physically inhabit show how their lives are intertwined or separated. Men have a world of their own, while the lives of the women are interknitted and co-dependent.

In *Between the Assassinations* Adiga depicts the picture of tea shop of Rammana Shetty. Ziauddin and six other boys who wash dishes in Rammana’s shop sleep together in a tent they had pitched behind the shop. This reflects their inner contracted psyche like congested space where they live. One day Rammana blames Ziauddin for stealing samosa in the hotel, here Ziauddin defends himself to be a ‘Pathan’. His ancestors built Taj Mahal and Red fort. He tries to cover his weakness by the great deeds of his ancestors. Here his guilty conscious mind tries to console himself with the memory of the great past of his race. Once a man employs him to notice trains - how many of the trains had red cross marked on the sides of compartments and the number of trains with soldiers. Ziauddin understands why he is collecting the information about Indian Army and refuse to do work for him. The man says, ‘I’m a Muslim. The son of Muslim too.’ (p-19) ‘There are fifty thousand Muslims in this town who are ready for action but I was

offering this job for you out of pity.’ Ziauddin kicked back his chair and stood up and replied ‘Then get one of these fifty thousand fellows to do it’. It’s a common trick by agents of terrorists to use local boys to get information so that no one will suspect them. Although Ziauddin was illiterate he had loyalty to his country. His unconscious mind doesn’t allow him to do any activity which will harm his country, but he is caught in a crucial situation when the man ask him to repay and Ziauddin escaped from there and ‘Then he ran. He ran out of the hotel, ran around the train station to the Hindu side, ran all the way to Ramanna Shetty’s teashop and then ran around the back of the shop and in to the blue tent where the boys lived .There he sat with his mottled lips pressed together and his fingers laced tightly around his knees. ‘What’s got into you?’ the other boys asked. ‘You can’t stay here, you know .Shetty will throw you out.’ They hid him there that night for old times’sakes. When they woke up he was gone. Later in the day he was once again seen at the railway station, fighting with his customers and shouting at them: ‘-don’t do hanky panky!’(p-19-20). Here Adiga indicates the conflict between good and evil in the mind of a Muslim boy Ziauddin. He doesn’t want to compromise with terrorist for money at the cost of his country’s peace. He ran away to the boys who live in tent where he find himself safe in the company of innocent past which is not corrupted by greed. The spirit of patriotism gets mortal shape and Ziauddin consciously rejects the offer without falling prey to terrorism. Thus we get Ziauddin as smallest part of intelligible unit of the society which Fredrick Jamson stated as ‘ideologene’ who represents collective discourse of social classes.

Abbasi is surprised when Income tax department officers come to his factory and claim that ‘You are making a lot more money than you have declared to us’(p-34). He offers two shirts to each officer with fawning smile and also money but Abaasi guesses that the two men were doing this for the first time and tricks them by offering boost and red label and also liquor. They drink too much and bolt the office door and fall heavily against it. Abbasi closes the door and confidently says ‘Any man is free to come here of his own will, but he can only leave with the permission of the locals’(p-36). Abbasi frighten them with the receiver of telephone as weapon and tries to get them to sign a confession of what they were trying to do. He warns them that if he snaps his finger now they will both be dead and floating in the Kaliamma river. Abbasi’s annoyance comes out and he revolts against the authority to make his way, but he wonders what

he has done. Any moment he was expecting that electricity would be cut off, the income tax official would return, with more men and arrest warrant, but after an hour nothing of the sort happens. Abbasi was familiar with the city for years and so he made himself competent to take vengeance. 'Corruption', Abbasi said, 'Corruption it's like a demon sitting on my brain and eating it with a fork and knife'. This brief monologue shows the depressed consciousness of a businessman of the city. He was pleased with himself that he has beaten the Income tax office. He raised the voice against corrupted government officials who tormented him throughout the journey of reopening the factory. Adiga promotes the idea of rebellion against the corruption.

Shankara's father, plastic surgeon Kinni had kept a mistress in another part of the town—a Hoyaka girl, and also he was leading a life of ease and luxury in the gulf, fixing the noses and lips of rich Arab women. But Shankara isn't annoyed with his father and thinks his father is better than the hypocritic society, 'Fellows like his father belonged to no caste or religion or race; they lived for themselves. They were the only real men in this world.' (p-61). Shankara is acquainted with the mentality of caste-based society.

Keshava, son of Laxminarayana with his brother Vittal came to Kittur from his village in search of their relative and work too. On the first day they understand the perspective of an auto rikshaw driver when he said, 'Of course this is not a village, it's a city. Everything is a long distance from everything else' (p-114). Both of them realized the 'distance' of heart and mind when the autorikshaw driver brought him to the same place where the bus driver had set them down. Only for a few feet distance he had charged seven twenty five rupees. They found themselves cheated by the autorikshaw driver and distant with city people. At night Janardhana, a shopkeeper and their relative led the boys to an alley behind the market 'Men and women and children were sleeping in a long line all the way down the alley. Keshava and Vittal stood back as the store owner began negotiations with one of the sleepers. 'If they sleep here, they will have to pay the boss,' the sleeper complained. 'What do I do with them, they have to sleep somewhere!' 'Well you are taking a risk, but if you have to leave them here try for the end.' The alley ended in a wall that leaked continuously; the drainage pipes had been badly fitted. A large rubbish bin at this end of the alley emitted a horrible stench.' Here we can see the obvious struggle for space even in an

alley and the fearful mind of the sleeper who doesn't want intrusion in his space. Keshava observed once again the 'distance' when Janardhan, his uncle, take them to an alley instead of his home.

Keshav and Vittal were lying side by side by side, wrapped in their bedding, next to the garbage bin. Vittal entirely covered himself in his sheet and lay inside like a cocoon adjusting himself with space. 'Keshava could not believe he was expected to sleep here –and on an empty stomach. However bad things had been at home,atleast there had always been something to eat.Now all the frustrations of the evening, fatigue and the confusion combined and he kicked the shrouded figure hard. His brother, as if he had been waiting for just such a provocation,tore the blanket off; caught Keshava's head in his hands and slammed it twice against the ground'(p-121) Here state of mind reflects the frustration, fatigue and depression of living place. Leo Tolstoy in his short story 'How Much Land Does A Man Need?' specified the space of living and the two different views of inhabitants where 'The elder sister began to boast of advantages of town life: saying how comfortably they lived there, how well they dressed, what fine clothes her children wore,what good things they ate and drank, and how she went to the theatre,promenades and entertainments'. The younger sister was piqued, and in turn disparaged the life of a tradesman, and stood up for that of peasant. 'I would not change my way of life for yours,' said she. 'We may live roughly, but at least we are free from anxiety. You live in better style than we do, but though you often earn than more you need, you are very likely to lose all you have. You know the proverb, 'lose and gain are brothers twain.' It often happens that people who are wealthy one day are begging their bread the next. Our way is safer. Though a peasant's life not a fat one,it is a long one. We shall never grow rich,but we shall always have enough to eat.' When an individual live at a particular place his mind is made up by the milieu and it becomes a sheer reality, ingredients of living space effect a mentality.

One Sunday he was free afternoon .He explored Central Market from the vegetable sellers at one end, to cloth sellers at the other end. 'He learned to spit; not like he had in the past, simply to clear his throat or nose, but with some arrogance –some style. When rains failed again, and more fresh faces arrived at the market from villages,he mocked them: 'O,you hicks!' He came to

master life in the market; learned how to cross the road despite the continuous traffic, simply by holding his hand as a stop sign and moving briskly, ignoring the loud honks from the irritated drivers.’(p-131) Here Keshava copes with the order of town, and enlarges his consciousness with the living space.

Once, after a political rally Keshava comes back drunk and his brother Vittal said ‘You’re drunk?’ Keshava thumped his chest and replied, ‘Who are you, my father?’ Now Keshava is losing all sense of morality in the city. He hangs out with drunks and thugs. He left his brother Vittal and went live with his boss whom everyone called Brother. Keshava altered himself from Innocent village boy to an urbanised man with wide-ranging practical knowledge as well as swapping his inexperienced village brother for the sophisticated urbanized Brother. He even complained about Vittal that he threw him out of the lane. Brother went into a building with Keshava which, he explained, was a hostel he ran for the best workers at the bus station. He opened the door; inside were rows of beds, and on each bed lay a boy. Brother tore the cover of one bed. A boy was lying asleep with his hands. Brother slapped the boy and sent him out of the hostel for not working efficiently. ‘Keshava felt sorry for the crouching figure, and he wanted to shout out: no, don’t throw him out, Brother! But he understood: it was either this boy or him in this bed tonight.’ Keshava acquired the living space where no one knows when they will be thrown out. He gained knowledge of cut throat competition for making room in the place where ‘Along clothesline had been fixed between two of the crossbeams of the ceiling, and the white cotton sarongs of the boys hung from it, overlapping each other like ghosts stuck together. Posters of film actresses and the god Ayappa, sitting on his peacock covered the walls. The boys were clustered around the beds, staring at him and taunting him.’(p-138-139). Another boy of the hostel asked Keshava, when he was lie in bed and cry in to pillow ‘Are you Hoyaka?’ Keshava said yes. ‘Me too’ the boy said. ‘The rest of these boys are Bunts. They look down on us. You and I, we should stick together.’ Here the marginalized psyche of the boy seeks space in the heart of Keshava. The boy seeks a companion of his caste to be able to spare himself from the humiliations.

Brother promoted Keshava as if he had won a wrestling match and announced as ‘The first Hoyaka conductor in our company! He is a pride of his people!’(p-140).Keshava’s dream to become a conductor came true and also Brother offered him a bike to travel in style. ‘Keshava pulled the bike to his bed;that night, to the amusement of the other boys,he went to sleep with bike next to him.’(p-141) He wants to show his superiority and take for granted himself as the center. But when he came across the dark reality behind it that, a conductor had fallen from the bus crushing his legs under the passing lorry and had to have an amputation. The bike used to belong to him. His heart sinks.

Adiga peeps in to the mind of the working hostel boys and perceive hollowness of individual psyche for the struggle of basic instinct when one morning keshava’s neighbors found him lying in bed, starring at the picture of film actresses and refusing to move. ‘He’s being morose again’, his neighbors said, ‘Hey, why don’t you jerk off,it’ll make e you feel better?’ ‘This fellow’s been morose for daysnow. It’s time for him to be taken to a woman’(p-143)

One evening Keshava slapped a cleaning boy who spit on the ground as he was cleaning the bus ‘Don’t spit anywhere near the bus, understood?’ That was the first time he ever slapped anyone. It made him feel good. From then on, he regularly hit the cleaning boys, like all other conductors did.(p-143) Keshava’s despair shifts into action when he punishes cleaning boys. He seeks fulfillment in other’s dissatisfaction.

One day Keshava was hanging from the metal bar fell from the speeding bus, hit the road, rolled and slammed his head in to the side of the kerb. Brother doesn’t want to take care of Keshava now and ordered to inform the boy’s family. ‘We can’t keep him here if he’s not working’ (p-147). One evening Keshava found someone else was sitting on his bed. But he felt no desire to fight to get his bed back.He simply wandered away and sat by the close doors of the Central Market that night, and some of the street-side sellers recognized him and fed him .He did not thank them. This went on few days finally one of them said to him: ‘In this world, a fellow who doesn’t work doesn’t eat. It’s not too late; go to Brother and apologize and beg him to give you your old job back. You know he thinks of you as family.’(p-148).Keshava acts like insane wandering, swinging his hands and shouting, sometimes like a rational man crossing the road

carefully and waiting for leftover food with the other homeless. Here Keshava's living space opposed against feelings and directly reflects the state of mind. That is consciously an open physical space when he feels crushed in an effort to make himself feel better. Sometimes he feels crushed and confined himself to a small corner which makes him physically experience what he is mentally going through. Sometimes he shout or run because he want to break away from his agony, but sometimes because he feel liberated.

The novel Last Man In Tower opens with the living space of the major characters- 'Vishram Society is anchored like a dreadnaught of middle-class respectability, ready to fire on anyone who might impugn the *pucca* quality of it's inhabitants' (p-1). Kaur and Agrawal says, Adiga weaves a tale of a how rapid re-development can turn friendly neighbors into strange ,and sometimes enemies in the space between these opposing forces.

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