



Absurd Nihilism in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*

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Abstract

This paper contends Aravind Adiga's famous debut novel, *The White Tiger*, in the light of absurd nihilism, a kind of philosophy in which social existence seems to be irrational; ethical legitimacy becomes fragile; and one's own philosophy becomes violent and ironic. While absurdism searches for the meaning of life in its own unknown world, nihilism foregrounds the transcendental value of life. Adiga emphasizes the materialistic postcolonial life of India. So, the novel is dramatized mainly with the character of Balram Halwai, expressing the phenomenon of corruption and creating the perspectives of social corruption and alienations that are deeply embedded in institutional complexities. In course of discussing these attributions, this novel focuses on the matter that nihilism is really absurd. This matter, however, turns into political logic and proves that this world is not meaningless; rather, it harbors the silent proclamations of values in democracy, justice, and morality that are interpreted through the mask of satirical consciousness. To ground this matter into real, Adiga brings in this manner of modern literary practice relating to the downtrodden and their emancipations under the black umbrella of capitalism, which is unavoidable.

Keywords: Aravind Adiga, *The White Tiger*, Absurd Nihilism, Postmodernism, Neoliberalism, Ethics, Class, Subalternity

Introduction

This paper examines Aravind Adiga's famous debut novel, *The White Tiger*, in the light of absurd nihilism. It is a kind of philosophy in which social existence seems irrational, ethical legitimacy becomes fragile, and one's own philosophy becomes violent and ironic. While absurdism searches for the meaning of life in its own unknown world, nihilism foregrounds the transcendental value of life. Adiga emphasizes the materialistic

postcolonial life of India. The novel is dramatized mainly through the character of Balram Halwai, expressing the phenomenon of corruption and unethical acts and creating perspectives of social ills and alienations that are deeply embedded in institutional complexities. In course of discussing these attributions, the novel suggests that nihilism is itself absurd and nothing is significant. This matter, however, turns into political logic and indicates that this world is sometimes meaningless, and harbors false proclamations of values in democracy, justice, and morality interpreted through the mask of satirical consciousness. To ground this matter in reality, Adiga employs a mode of modern literary practice relating to the downtrodden and their emancipation under the ageist structure of capitalism.

Arvind Adiga's novel *The White Tiger* is considered one of the most fascinating contemporary novels because it upholds a world where morality, justice, and social discipline are in constant tension, reflecting postmodern trends that have deteriorated significantly. He portrays this through the characterization of Balram Halwai to define self-contradiction and satire, developing a theorization of nihilism. Nihilism is a way of thinking that suggests life is strange and unreal, where moral values bear no significant meaning. The novel is not only a critique of class discrimination and inequalities in India but also an intermingling of deeper philosophies of life. This article highlights the contrasting picture of "an India of Light" and "an India of Darkness." Many sarcastic elements appear in the novel through manifestations of nihilism while examined deeply. Thus, the study of Indian human life reflects a clear gap between what society professes and what reality is.

An Overview of the Screenplay

The White Tiger tells the story of Balram Halwai, who calls himself a "self-made entrepreneur." He is the son of a poor rickshaw driver and later becomes a driver and then a successful businessman. He writes his life story in a letter to the Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao to explain how business and success work in India. Balram writes from his rich office in Bangalore, but his story starts in his poor village, Laxmangarh. In his childhood, his family lived under four cruel landlords called "The Animals": The Raven, The Stork, The Buffalo, and The Wild Boar. Life is very hard, but Balram is a bright student. A school inspector notices him and calls him "*The White Tiger*," meaning he is rare and intelligent. His family wants him to study, but his grandmother takes him out of school so he can work. Later, he works in a teashop in Dhanbad with his brother, where he listens carefully to customers and learns about drivers who earn good money. He asks to learn to drive and becomes a driver. He gets a job with a rich family in Dhanbad, working for Mr. Ashok, whose family is very rich and corrupt and earns money illegally through bribery and politics. Later, Balram moves with Ashok to Delhi, where he sees both luxury and deep

corruption, while Ashok's wife leaves him after an accident, and Ashok himself becomes more involved in nightlife and corruption. Balram becomes unhappy because he realizes that even though Ashok is kind sometimes, he will never help him escape poverty, and he feels trapped in a system called the "Rooster Coop," where poor people cannot break free. Finally, Balram decides to kill Ashok using a broken bottle and steals the money meant for bribes, then escapes to Bangalore with his young cousin Dharam, fearing revenge from Ashok's family. In Bangalore, he starts a taxi business called White Tiger Drivers, which becomes successful by serving call center workers, and although he becomes rich, he lives in fear of being discovered. At the end, he says he does not regret his crime because it gave him freedom from slavery and allowed him to become his own master.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it examines *The White Tiger* not only as a social and political novel but also as a philosophical text shaped by absurd nihilism. While many critics focus on class struggle, corruption, and social mobility, this study highlights how the novel also reflects the collapse of moral meaning in a deeply unequal society.

The study is also important because it connects the novel's themes with postmodern literary techniques such as irony, fragmentation, and unreliable narration. It shows that Balram's story is not merely about success, but about how oppression reshapes morality, identity, and the meaning of freedom.

Problem Statement

Although *The White Tiger* has often been studied as a critique of social inequality and corruption, less attention has been given to its philosophical dimension. The novel does not simply portray poverty and oppression; it also presents a world in which values such as justice, honesty, and morality lose their real significance.

This study addresses that gap by examining how absurdity and nihilism operate in the novel as products of class domination, institutional corruption, and postmodern instability. It aims to show that Balram's transformation reflects not only social struggle but also a deeper collapse of ethical meaning.

Objectives of the Study

The study is guided by both general and specific objectives. The general objective is to analyze Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* as a postmodern novel shaped by absurd nihilism. More specifically, it aims to examine how the novel represents absurdity through social inequality and contradiction, to analyze how nihilism appears through the collapse

of moral values, and to explore the significance of the “Rooster Coop” as a symbol of oppression and internalized captivity. It also seeks to study Balram’s unreliable narration as a postmodern technique and to show how the novel presents freedom as morally compromised under capitalism.

Research Questions

1. How does *The White Tiger* portray absurdity in social and economic life?
2. How is nihilism reflected through the collapse of morality in the novel?
3. What does the “Rooster Coop” symbolize in relation to oppression and servitude?
4. How does Balram’s narration contribute to the novel’s postmodern character?
5. Does the novel present Balram’s rise as liberation, or as complicity with corruption?

Hypotheses

This study hypothesizes that *The White Tiger* is a postmodern novel of absurd nihilism in which social inequality, corruption, and hypocrisy create a world that appears both irrational and morally empty. It further argues that Balram’s rise is not a purely liberating act, but one shaped by violence, ethical collapse, and complicity with the very system he seeks to escape.

Literature Review

Critical studies on *The White Tiger* mainly focus on inequality, corruption, and moral problems in modern India. Many scholars say the novel shows a divided society through “Light” and “Darkness.” This is not only about place, but also about moral and social inequality, where rich and poor do not have the same access to justice or ethical choices (Shingavi, 2014). Some researchers connect the novel with global capitalism and modern development ideas. The novel is seen as a criticism of development and business success stories (Al-Dagamseh, 2018). Balram’s journey from servant to businessman looks like success, but it also shows that people sometimes need to break moral rules to move ahead. It is also described as a shift from slavery to “amoral entrepreneurship,” where money and morality do not always match (Booker Prize Foundation, n.d.).

A key idea in criticism is the “Rooster Coop.” This is explained as a system where poor people are trapped not only by fear but also by emotions like responsibility and anxiety. Even when they understand their situation, they cannot escape easily (Das & Das, 2025). Philosophical studies use ideas like nihilism and rational thinking to explain the

novel. Moral anti-realism means there are no fixed moral truths (Joyce, 2022). Instrumental rationality means people act in ways that help them achieve goals. This helps explain Balram, who starts thinking survival is more important than right or wrong. Modern thinking also often values success more than ethics. Some scholars also compare the novel with Nietzsche's ideas about power and morality. Moral rules are seen as tools that support the powerful. This matches Balram's belief that moral systems help the rich control the poor. But this is also complicated because Balram uses the same system to become successful (Shingavi, 2014).

Empirical studies also support what the novel shows. Education systems have problems like teacher absence. Healthcare systems also have weaknesses. Corruption is defined as the misuse of power for personal gain, which matches the novel's world. These studies show that the novel reflects real social problems (Transparency International, 2008). The author also confirms that the novel is based on real social conditions like poverty and lack of resources. This suggests Balram's actions are not just personal choices but are shaped by society.

A gap in existing research is that most studies look at corruption, inequality, and moral problems separately. They do not clearly connect them as one big idea. This study tries to fill that gap by using an absurd nihilistic approach. From this view, *The White Tiger* is not only about social injustice, but also about a deeper loss of moral meaning. People expect fairness and justice, but they repeatedly see the opposite. This creates an "absurd" situation where moral rules exist in theory but fail in real life. At the same time, nihilism explains how moral values slowly lose importance, and survival becomes more important than right or wrong. So, Balram's world is not just corrupt, but also a world where moral meaning is weak and unstable. This study combines these ideas to show that the novel presents life as stuck between the need for justice and the reality of its absence.

Research Methodology

This study uses a qualitative approach and a close reading of Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*. It focuses only on the novel. It looks at how the story shows class differences, pain, slavery, power, violence, and self-growth. These ideas are studied through small details in the language and narration of the text.

This paper does not treat the novel as real-life social evidence. Instead, it reads as a literary work that creates its own meaning. Through its images, symbols, irony, and storytelling style, *The White Tiger* shows absurd nihilism, where moral rules seem unclear and the meaning of life is always questioned inside the story.

Scope, Focus, and Analytical Lens

This study is limited to Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* and examines it through close textual analysis. Its focus is on how the novel presents absurd nihilism through class oppression, moral collapse, violence, and self-fashioning. Rather than reading the text only as a social document, the paper approaches it as a postmodern literary work in which meaning is shaped by irony, symbolism, and unreliable narration. The analytical lens is qualitative and interpretive, using close reading and postmodern theory to show how Adiga turns social inequality into an existential and ethical crisis.

Theoretical Framework: Absurdity, Nihilism

In this paper, the word "absurd" does not only mean that life has no meaning. It also refers to the gap between what people want and what they actually experience. Balram lives in a world that talks about freedom, democracy, and development, but in reality, shows slavery, corruption, fear, and violence. Nihilism here means that moral values lose their strong power and importance. Ideas like family, religion, honesty, and law still exist, but they slowly lose value because they often work as tools of control instead of justice.

Postmodernism also helps to explain this situation. It shows that ideas like national progress, social mobility, and moral order are often presented as stories rather than the real truth. In *The White Tiger*, the story is told by Balram, who is not fully reliable because he is at the same time a victim, a criminal, a thinker, and a businessman and, because of this, the novel does not give fixed answers. It keeps the meaning uncertain and open for all. Balram's voice challenges all clear ideas exposed in it, even the idea of whether he is innocent or guilty. This uncertainty is important since it asserts the novel's deeper nihilistic meaning.

Discussion

The Social Production of the Absurd

Aravind Adiga has something good in this novel because he has shown the matter, 'absurdity', in every aspect of modern Indian life. Balram is fighting not only with himself, but also with the outer hostile world around him, just to get rid of extreme poverty and misery. There is no proper justice, equality, or the thought of democracy. For this reason, Adiga has taken the weapon of satirization and upheld the matter of absurdity, which seems to be the meaninglessness of life.

Adiga has also shown that exploitation not only stays outside but also inside of once own mind and body. Poverty, negligence, social disorders and many others create these adversities, making the people, like Balram, very much suffering, which generates

the matter of absurdity, and their activities nihilistic.

To a nihilist, these situations seem to be more acute and dark. In fact, nihilism is a philosophical idea that holds the idea that life is meaningless because it is full of injustice and has no particular boundaries. There is no possibility of receiving rewards from heaven to make life meaningful; rather, reality is that thoughts which make the world callous, and it is found in this novel's characters, especially in the bodies of Balram's father and mother. A poor man's body is like that onto which misfortunes are written in the ink of ill fate. In fact, morality and justice are very rare for poor persons and in reality, this phenomenon does not fit. Reality goes oppositely, and life becomes vulnerable.

Philosopher Albert Camus said that absurdity means finding out the meaning of life and spreading that thought throughout the imagination of the whole universe. The absurdity in this novel is not only existential but also social and political. Poverty, exploitation and extreme class discrimination create that kind of world where life seems to be so cruel and meaningless. Here, the pale body of a poor man is like a page of sorrow that remains as a witness to the illogicality of society. Some people enjoy privileges and the rest remain in misery, not because they are guilty but because of the social structures are set up that some people, especially the rich, can always avail themselves of the comfort and ease of life. In fact, nihilism and absurdity burden human life and increase the thought of nothingness. In fact, Adiga's writing is a medium where society keeps writing its dark truths, which have no air of justice, meaning or freedom.

The "Rooster Coop" and Internalized Captivity

In Aravind Adiga's novel, the term 'Rooster Coop' opens the reality of longer-lasting slavery, into which institutional oppressions are very much entrenched. Through the portrayal of Balram, it is obvious that social discrimination snatches his freedom and stops his daily attempts. Exploitation not only exists in the marginal class but also in the outer strengths of the rich, embedded in their mental and emotional trends. Running in the way of torture and slavery for a long time, the poor become used to these forms of slavery and dominating-based policies by thinking that these are the safeguards for them in society. Fear of being punished and the oppressions over their families stop their willpower. So, 'Rooster Coop' is not a symbol of physical captivation; it is a mental jail that restrains the poor from coming outside and keeps them in permanent suppression forever.

In this novel, we also see that familial love often becomes the harpoon of control that works as internal mental suppression. As a result, the ways of defending or freeing oneself become distorted day after day. The fear of the loss or damage of a family member stupefies everything. So, it can be said that the Rooster Coop is a mental cage that forces the confinement of poor human beings instead of being a protector. It shows the insidious effects of social conditioning and that oppressive systems are upheld not only by those in

power but also by the internalized belief systems of the oppressed.

Ethical Collapse and Instrumental Nihilism

The moment when Balram kills Mr. Asoka gives us the view of nihilism because Balram not only thinks to kill but does so in reality, which is a consequence of nihilistic thought. He feels that the moralities or policies around him are deeply discriminatory and fragile. The masters demand servitudes, but they themselves are sunk into corruptions, and injustices embezzle the rights of the poor and give much priority to their own wealth and protection than to respecting law and order. As a result, the thoughts of morality do not seem to be universal or sacred, rather they turn into the relative rules of power and classifications. In fact, it is the illegal declaration of his own freedom: “Yet even if all my chandeliers come crashing down to the floor-even if they throw me in jail and have all the other prisoners dip their beaks into me-even if they make me walk the wooden stairs to the hangman’s noose- I’ll never say I made a mistake that night in Delhi when I slit my master’s throat” (Adiga, p. 320). This excerpt addresses the concern that, for Balram, there is no ultimate truth of morality. His own logic and experience are the real truths.

In this situation, this logic does not seem to be sacred and universal; rather, they are the part of power and class. This matter becomes a total symbol of nihilism because he has built his own mental pandemonium with all his self-built corrupted thoughts, which is absurd in real life. It is very legal to kill Mr. Ashok and is an inevitable decision, he thinks. Even he thinks that no certain belief or law will be able to deviate him from doing so. In fact, it is the manifestation of his own mental state. Here, there is no universal truth of morality. His personal experience and reality are considered as the ultimate truth. He is thinking that he is right to kill Mr. Ashok, and he will always be right in this act, even if he is caught by the police and given the death penalty by the judge.

These words by Balram - “All I wanted was the chance to be a man- and for that, one murder was enough” (Adiga, 2008: p. 319)- stuck the readers inevitably, and they are caught in a deep nihilistic logic. Firstly, it is inseparably connected to the ability of considering others as perfect men with freedom and power, which is taken away from the poor very systematically. Second, this murder is not depicted as absolute evil but as an honest means for Balram to overcome the problems of his life and gain success. Adiga does not support this kind of moral logic, but he may have thought that, in the case of Balram, this may be logical - murdering his master. Balram has lost his moral values and mental freedom. As a result, nihilistic thoughts have gripped his whole mind. Indeed, the thought of nihilism here is not abstract or inactive; it is sarcastically a realistic one, breaking the conventional thought of absolute truth.

At the same time, the novel does not simplify Balram into a nice hero. Adiga shows that Balram is an honest man in the disguise of a diabolical character. At the same time,

the novel does not simplify Balram into a nice hero. Adiga shows that Balram is an honest man in the disguise of a diabolical character. This novel, however, clearly shows that it is not worthwhile to pursue personal freedom in a corrupt society, as Balram attempts to do. Logically, we can explain his works, but they are not morally right. Adiga shows that Balram is a person of both injustice and autonomy in his actions. This novel upholds that, in a corrupt society, achieving power and freedom is not a positive thing. It is very much related to moral and ethical negotiations. As a result, moral decay and applied nihilism become the consequences of a social decorum. His novel represents such a society, which is divided into two- 'Light' and 'Dark' into which moral life is not allocated equally. This contradiction shows that morality is not universal; it depends on the socio-economic conditions of a society.

In this novel, nihilism denotes the practical and morally complex issues where achieving the truth is the ultimate goal. Besides, nihilism does not mean any eternal ideological existence. In the character of Balram, we see that Balram does not totally abandon his morality, but rather keeps it as a psychological weapon, where existence becomes a measurable thing to live in a utilitarian way. Moral nihilism means there is no real moral truth (Mackie, 1977).

This is like Horkheimer's (1974/2004) instrumental reason, where thinking is focused only on achieving goals, not on moral value. In *The White Tiger*, success and wealth become the ultimate goals. Killing can be justified if it helps achieve success. So, morality is lost, and survival becomes more intrinsic than the matters of right or wrong. The "Light" and "Darkness" manifest that the term morality relies on social activities. Leading a moral life is possible where the system of law, education, and healthcare works in full swing, but where they have no impact, it becomes fragile and vulnerable to carry on. It is a common phenomenon that vulnerable systems increase lawlessness and criminality, and make it hard for the impoverished people to obey the rules. Corruption prevails everywhere, such as in politics, police, education, healthcare and so on and so forth. In fact, Balram's life shows this, as poor schooling and the lack of healthcare are not supported by studies on teacher absenteeism (Kremer et al., 2005) and weak health systems (Das et al., 2016). The "Rooster Coop" evinces the matter that the poor people remain trapped through fear, loyalty, and social pressure. Values like obedience also control them, and the author Das (2025) names it "affective entrapment."

Balram pursues one goal: freedom. He uses any method he thinks is effective, even doing crime. His success, however, comes not from moral values but from manipulation and calculation (Shingavi, 2014). Philosophically, Balram's sense has an alliance with Friedrich Nietzsche's tactical exposition of morality as a categorical record of power and wit. (Nietzsche, 1887/1998). But the novel makes the view complicated by ascertaining how such a logic may explain brutality and propagate dominance. Balram's demand for freedom jeopardizes becoming a *casus belli* for exploitation, uncovering the ethical non-

teleology of his success.

The novel's ending does not resolve this ethical question. Balram finds economic success, whereas by the same evil logic he learned to despise. His reinvention as an entrepreneur stands as part of what critics call the subsumption of antagonism into neoliberal forms of authority. (Al-Dagamseh, 2018). Ultimately, the novel *The White Tiger* indicates that ethical collapse and instrumental nihilism are only made possible through social inequality, which is absurd. While the credibility of an institution is destroyed, and the faith in human morality decreases, they start behaving in such a way that they have authority over themselves.

Nihilistic approaches of the writer came to light when he straightforwardly satirized the role of the almighty Creator. To him, the almighty God is tentatively very greedy and the prayers of the poor might not be acknowledged to Him because the rich are contributing or offering very costly things and sacrificing the richest products. Here, the writer might be very thwarted with the acts of God towards the very poor people because, being a man of a deprived society, Balram had a contented life and he had to unfulfill many dreams in his life. To him, the prayers of the very poor people are really inconsequential than that of the rich and the almighty God or goddesses always remain on behalf of the rich, might be because they are well mannered or well cultured- "I thought there was no need to offer a prayer to the gods for him, because his family would be offering very expensive prayers all along the Ganga for his soul. What can a poor man's prayers mean to the 36,000,004 gods in comparison with those of the rich?" (Adiga, p.317).

Postmodern Self-Fashioning and Absurd Nihilism

In *The White Tiger*, postmodern self-fashioning and absurd nihilism are not opposed strands; they work together to account for the way that identity and morality crumble under conditions of structural inequality. Balram's identity is an essential thing, but it has been constructed through narrative, performance, and strategic adaptation as inhuman. At the same time, his ethical outlook crosses a nihilistic divulgence showing that morality is neither a universal nor a dependable entity, and these two intersect strategies in revealing ways that show how the disintegration of ethical laws makes way for selfhood. Through the postmodern lens, the supreme entity of Balram is not an absolute truth; instead, it has been deconstructed through an epistolary narrative form. According to Jean-François Lyotard (1984), postmodernity denies universally grand portrayals. Balram's story is of the kind that challenges the conventional ideologies of justice and meritocracy. But, this process of making this narrative does not give him the full freedom, but rather makes him stand before the deep uncertainties of life. If truth itself is a construction of ideology, then ethics no longer has an underpinning to stand on. Here, it blends postmodern self-fashioning into nihilism.

Balam makes his own identity through several letters to Mr. Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao. Thus, he presents himself as a successful entrepreneur. He harnesses his moral weakness, falsehood, cheating and violence to make his position in Indian society. So, he starts his own immorality and unethical works, and cannot stop it until the last moment. This moral decay becomes obvious when it is framed as Instrumental Nihilism. Balam never fully abandons morality, but she takes the advantages of situations and forms a new way. His decision-making depends on 'aim vs media' where the result of his actions is more considered than his moral worth. It is the reflection of Max Horkheimer's (1974/2004) Instrumental Reason where all rationalities become the subordination of achieving the aim. In this situation, the conventional rules become faint to be able to survive and achieve the richness of mind that sustains the thoughts of nihilism up to the end, where no earthly work is considered as justice or injustice.

The central metaphors of this novel, such as 'the Rooster coop', contrasts between 'Light' and 'Darkness', personality building - self-fashioning- and Nihilism, form the base of the society. These metaphors indicate that these are not abstract ideas but create social hindrances. The "Rooster Coop" illustrates how people come to accept their self-oppression, while the "two Indias" metaphor highlights a divided reality in which moral standards do not remain universal but vary from one social class to another. In this context, it becomes harder and impossible for poor people to work as totally moral human beings, and then, they become instrumental nihilists, which is very much absurd in reality. As a result, Balam's self-emergence and personality-building are not only selected as personal ambitions, but they are also strongly influenced by them, which ruins their moral balance. Balam's recognition as a 'white tiger' is the result of a long process, from a servant to a master. He builds his own identity in such a way that his activities are unprecedented, and they get validation in the long run. This reflects Stephen Greenblatt's (1980) concept of self-fashioning or the idea of self-deconstruction that generally occurs within various limitations, and lots of self-contradictions prevail within them as well. This demand of Balam - to be like a killing monster - defines himself to see this vandalism as a creative action, more importantly, gives the chance to think that this is an action of becoming free from social unrest. This matter is revealed as a very specific one when it comes to his killing of Ashok. From a nihilistic vantage point, this act of violence may not be a total collapse of the moral order: killing is no longer seen as transgressing ethical law but as a tactical move in achieving self-actualization. As Friedrich Nietzsche (1887/1998) argues, morality is inherently political, and it follows the lines of power. In Balam's case, this insight is but evidence that he should adopt the logic of domination.

However, it is true that Balam has been successful economically and has a high position in society, but this position is vulnerable and fragile. Critics like Shingavi (2014) and Das (2025) opine that Balam's rise as a wealthy person is nothing but the emergence of an existing corrupt system in society. So, what happens here is a postmodern self-

fashioning which is attached to nihilistic perspectives. Balram breaks the rooster coop but becomes the leader of his own made coop, where exploitation and injustice keep going on, but at a different pace. Indeed, it portrays the self-indulgence and the intense limitations of the social system.

At the end, this novel reminds us that Absurd Nihilism and Postmodern self-fashioning are profoundly connected and entwined. The collapse of ethical values brings forth nothing but absurdity, as happened to Balram here. His moral values break down and rise up, do not stand still; rather, shows that desires for freedom and selfhood are compounded and saturated with violence, contradiction and ethical inexactness. Balram is an absurd nihilist here because he does not have a good interest in life. He likes to be a free-will person, but society does not let him be so. He was a sadist and later became a brutalist as well as an absurdist. We see a similar picture here regarding the observation of his own Hindu religion. He may have lost faith in his religion and its gods and goddesses, who seem to be almost a burden on his life-

“These are the kinds of gods they have foisted on us, Mr. Jiabao. Understand, now, how hard it is for a man to win his freedom in India” (Adiga, p. 19).

These lines can be addressed as the expression of Existentialist Nihilist Satire that represent the socio-political-religious practices and meaninglessness of India. The phrase “These are the kinds of gods they have foisted on us” is a shining criticism of the conventionally imposed social norms and structures over any individual. This satire shows that every effort of man may go in vain. Man is searching for the truth in such a society, which may be empty. This reminds us about the absurd nihilist thought into which there is no certain real purpose of human life, and every effort to search for the absolute truth becomes a failed attempt.

Absurd Nihilism and the Hollow Satire

Adiga’s acumen is revealed here again. Simply in his imagination, Adiga compares a man in a wet Khaki dress with the Devil of the almighty Creator. It is similar here because that imaginative man in a khaki dress has gone to offer his prayers to God in the temple, but he has to reach there by walking through the nearby water. That man became angry thinking of God because he thought that God could have made this way comfortably. To reach there, that man has to get wet. Out of restlessness, that man starts shaking that khaki uniform and expresses bad temper for that uneasy situation. He was so angry that he could not offer his worship at the last time; rather, he thought that the Creator should create the world in some easy ways before creating all other things in nature. This particular expression of Balram in this fiction may have touched the thought of atheism because there

has come out abhorrence of the bad way of human life. Like Satan, this man, Balram, has already watched, his heart was just acting and throwing some nihilistic thoughts;

“And then I see this small black man in the wet khaki uniform start to shake, as if he has gone mad with anger, before delivering to the Almighty a gesture of thanks for having created the world this particular way, instead of all the other ways it could have been created” (Adiga, p. 88).

“I see the little man in the khaki uniform spitting at God again and again, as I watch the black blades of the midget fan slice the light from the chandelier again and again” (Adiga, p. 88).

However, Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* (2008) builds a continuous Juvenalian satire that reveals the structural emptiness of modern institutions while at the same time affording an experience of socially produced absurd nihilism. The narrative's bitter, furious tone isn't just a critique of corruption; it exposes and holds up for scrutiny a deeper collapse in which meaning, justice and morality no longer have functional sovereignty. This resembles Albert Camus' notion of the absurd, in which human beings search for coherence in a world devoid of it. Adiga, however, goes deeper into this existential abstraction by nesting absurdity into institutional social systems to grant life a concrete absurd potency that is far from the naturalized absurdity of living in an unjust world; institutions themselves are agents agitating violence (Rathore, 2024).

“The story of a poor man's life is written on his body, in a sharp pen”- for a poor man like Balram's father, this line is an extreme and brutal truth. Generally, we think that the story of human life is made with his dreams and wishes, but in this absurd earth, a poor man has no right to his own body. He does not write the story of his own life; rather, society does it on a history of wounds and sufferings like a 'sharp pen'. This is a nihilist thought, because it shows that the honesty and hard work of Balram's father had no value on this earth. In the long run, his pale body becomes like a piece of paper where the signs of hard work and negligence remain in silence. This proves that in this cruel system of human society, a poor man of flesh and blood is not a human but a lifeless target of exploitation. This is a nihilist thought, because it shows that the honesty and hard work of Balram's father had no value on this earth. In the long run, his pale body becomes like a piece of paper, with the signs of hard work and neglect still visible. This matter brings the real face of social exploitation before us. It also shows how much more a person is to pay for social justice. Through this, it is revealed how big the situation is in fighting for the right to live with the real hindrances of a society. (Roy, 2023).

When Balram understands that he will only be exploited for being a good man - “the chance to be a man”- he willingly sacrifices his own morality. This is his nihilistic approach. In fact, honesty is the best policy to be a good and simple man, but Balram has

to be a murderer for this. It indicates inebriation in social systems. Paradoxically, to get free from the 'rooster coop', Balram has become the master of that rooster coop, and this is the most absurdity of the system.

Findings

In this study, it is argued that *The White Tiger* introduces absurd nihilism as a stance adopted in response to social conditions of class oppression, corruption and institutional failure. The novel demonstrates that it is not the grotesque circumstances of poverty and servitude that defy the laws of reason, but rather it is absurdity that stems from the disconnect between democratic promise and lived experience. It also identifies the "Rooster Coop" as an embodiment of internalized oppression, while Balram's ascent illustrates that liberation in the midst of a corrupt system is wrought through violence, compromise and moral dissolution. Through irony, satire and unreliable narration, the novel also positions itself as a postmodern critique of neoliberal society.

Absurd nihilism here can be read as a psychological condition where the mind constantly seeks meaning, but the world repeatedly denies it, and finally meaning itself starts to lose value. At the beginning, Balram's mind expects a normal moral order. He believes effort, intelligence, and honesty should lead to a better life. This is a basic psychological need for coherence, the need to see life as logically structured. But his lived reality keeps breaking this structure. Poverty remains despite hard work, education does not change social position, and power decides justice. Psychologically, this creates a repeated "meaning failure," where expected outcomes and real outcomes do not match.

This repeated failure produces the "absurd" condition. The mind still searches for justice and fairness, but every experience contradicts it. So Balram is trapped between two things: his need to believe in moral order and the evidence that moral order does not function. At this point, nihilism enters. Psychologically, nihilism is not emotional collapse but a slow weakening of belief in moral meaning. Balram does not stop thinking; he stops trusting that moral values control outcomes. Right and wrong become weak concepts in his decision-making process.

The "Rooster Coop" strengthens this absurd nihilism. People understand their oppression clearly, but fear and social bonds prevent action. So, there is full awareness without freedom. This creates a deep psychological contradiction: knowing the truth but being unable to act on it. Balram's murder of Ashok is the final psychological shift. It is not just rebellion; it is the collapse of moral expectation. He replaces ethical thinking with survival thinking. If morality does not protect him, it is no longer treated as binding.

Even after success, the absurd condition does not end. He gains freedom, but lives with fear and instability. This shows that once the mind accepts a world without reliable moral order, psychological insecurity remains. So, in absurd nihilism, as shown in the

novel, the human mind is trapped between the need for meaning and the experience of meaninglessness, until it slowly stops trusting moral structure and begins to function through survival logic instead.

Implications of the Study

By reading *The White Tiger* through the prism of absurdism and nihilism, this study lays the battle grid between class in India as a self-repeating cycle, and thus lends deeper a understanding to its socio-political critique. It shows how postmodern narrative techniques buttress the novel's critique of morality, justice and social mobility. It also hints that personal achievement in an unbalanced society may be made possible at the expense of ethical integrity.

Limitations of the Study

This study does not compare the novel with other texts, and is limited to a close-reading of *The White Tiger*. It adopts a qualitative interpretive methodology; thus, its arguments stay textual and theoretical. Likewise, it concentrates primarily on absurd nihilism and postmodernism, with little exploration of other frameworks like Marxism or feminism or even subaltern studies.

Future Research Directions

Future studies might further study *The White Tiger* against other postcolonial or South Asian novels concerned with issues of class and violence and moral crisis. Or, scholars might approach the novel as a Marxist or feminist or subaltern text. Another useful point of departure would be to consider how gender, capitalism and entrepreneurship continue to shape the novel's ethical and philosophical concerns.

Conclusion

Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* emerges as a powerful postmodern novel of absurd nihilism, revealing a world in which social institutions have lost moral authority, ethical values function as empty performances, and survival depends upon irony, violence, and self-invention. Through Balram Halwai's journey from servant to entrepreneur, the novel shows that liberation in a corrupt social order is never pure, but is instead shaped by complicity with the very structures one seeks to escape. The text's major images—India as “two countries in one,” the poor man's story “written on his body,” and the Rooster Coop “guarded from the inside”—demonstrate that oppression in the novel is not only economic

and political but also psychological and existential. Balram's eventual belief that "one murder was enough" completes this moral collapse, showing how nihilism becomes a practical logic of survival rather than a purely abstract philosophy. Taken together, these elements confirm that *The White Tiger* does not merely depict corruption in modern India; it constructs a disturbing vision of a society in which absurdity is socially produced, morality is emptied of meaning, and freedom itself is attained only through ethically catastrophic transformation.

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