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Manufactured Realities and the Politics of Deception: A Post-Truth Reading of *The White Tiger*

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Abstract: The research article interrogates the question of post-truth aspects of the developing nations' socio-economic conditions, leading to the transformation of the protagonist Balram Halwai to Ashok Sharma. The aspects of cherry picking facts and curating life experiences based on pre packaged belief systems. Such systems are sustained through the religion, morality, philosophy, family, hierarchical systems, master-slave ideology and a deep-rooted and complex political structures making is entrapped in the idea of a welfare and progress on the outside, but holds a secret hook to keep the masses obedient, compliant and subservient. *The White Tiger* subverts the Indian post-truth scenario, exemplified through Balram slitting the throat of his master Ashok to break open the rooster-coop, thus escaping the cage of morality, religion, and subservience. Balram's violent upheaval can be analysed as the last and only resort available with him to belong to the privileged end of the spectrum of society. Balram's narration of his growth to Wen Jiabo is a marker of the Indian post-truth market. The article delves into Balram's journey from victimhood to final emancipation in the Indian post-truth environment.

Keywords: Post-truth, Morality, Rooster-coop, Victimhood, narratives.

Introduction

The word post-truth refers to a socio-politic condition where objective facts are undermined over emotional appeals, personal beliefs or ideological narratives in the process of forming a public opinion. The post-truth era is characterised by partisan polarities steeped into pre-existing beliefs, religious and political inclinations. It is a situation where something feels true becomes more important than whether there is actual evidence for it or not.

The term post-truth gained prominence from landmark events like the Brexit Referendum and the U.S presidential election, where false claims were widely circulated.

The post-truth phenomenon is believed to be pioneered by Frederich Nietzsche with his perception of truth as interpretative and not absolute, and his skepticism of objective truth, and critique of universal morality as discussed in his works *Thus, Spake Zarathustra*, *Beyond God and Evil*.

The contemporary advocates of post-truth proponents include Jean Baudriallard, Richard Rorty, and Steve Bannon among others. Baudrillard's theories of simulacra and hyperreality clearly sets the socio-economic conditions in enabling the hyperreal conditions. The condition where symbols and signs replace and precede actual referents- resonate more explicitly with the post-truth culture. In this way, Richard Rorty's neopragmatism, the theory that frames truth as a function of conversation agreement rather than objective correspondence, offers a more direct theoretical precursor to some post-truth epistemologies.

Steve Bannon, a postmodernist who exploited the collapse of consensus reality to gain power. His political vision is grounded in cultural grievance, nationalism and xenophobia and construction of emotionally resonant, anti-elite narratives. While Nietzsche warned against ideological constructs masquerading as truth, Bannon embraced such constructs to accelerate political action. The distinction is crucial as Nietzsche's goal was liberation through awareness of truth's contingency, while Bannon's domination through strategic distortion of truth's instability was politically inclined.

The research article analyses the critique of contemporary India, unmasking the region's deep socio-economic disparities, entrenched corruption and selective propagation of truth that Aravind Adiga offers in his text *The White Tiger* (2008). The theoretical framework used to analyse the fiction is LeeMcIntyre's Post truth theory. He examines how in contemporary society, objective facts are often subordinated to emotional appeals and personal beliefs especially for political gain. He traces the roots of this phenomenon through denial, cognitive biases, and the rise of social media, arguing that post-truth is not just about lying but asserting ideological supremacy regardless of evidence (McIntyre 7). He also emphasizes the importance of understanding post-truth in order to combat it, advocating for critical thinking and media literacy.

A compelling example of postcolonial literature can be explored in the text *White Tiger* by Aravind Adiga. It unravels the complex legacies of colonial rule and their ongoing impact on contemporary Indian society. The novel's protagonist, Balram Halwai navigates a world shaped by entrenched class divisions, systemic corruption and the lingering effects of colonial power structures. The issues of commodification of



identity, the struggle for agency among the marginalized, and the ways in which the narratives of progress and modernity are constructed and contested .

The text *White Tiger* has been analysed extensively as a searing indictment of India's class hierarchy, caste rigidity, and capitalist contradictions. Yet, in an age increasingly defined by the post-truth condition, where emotional appeal overrides objective facts, and the truth is often replaced by persuasive storytelling, this novel demands a new reading. While existing scholarship offers a socio-economic and narrative critique, there is limited exploration on how the novel reflects or anticipates the post-truth dynamics, particularly in the construction of truth, identity, and morality through narrative manipulation.

The novel *White Tiger* (2008) has been long celebrated for its candid portrayal of India's class divides, caste dynamics, and the contradictions of post liberalization society. While much of the existing scholarship interprets the novel as socio-political critique rooted in postcolonial realism, the present research seeks to reposition the novel within the emerging framework of post truth discourse. Post-truth, defined by prioritization of emotional appeal over factual integrity and the construction of truth as a subjective narrative, opens new pathways for Balram Halwai, not merely as a subaltern voice, but as an epistemic agent engaged in the manipulation of truth for self-liberation.

Ana Critina Mendes (2010) critically analyzes *The White Tiger* as a narrative that indulges global expectations of an "exotic" and "dark" India. Mandes argues that Adiga's novel contributes to a genre of fiction that caters to Western readership by emphasising corruption, chaos and hyperreal portrayals of poverty. This framing is crucial in understanding how Balram's story functions not just as a local commentary but a transnational commodity curated for truth aimed at eliciting specific emotional and ideological response (Mendes, 2010). Mendes' insight allows us to consider Balram's narrative voice as a strategic performance designed to gain sympathy and credibility, aligning with post-truth traits such as persuasive storytelling.

Sneharika Roy (2009) complements this by examining how *The White Tiger* departs from earlier Indian English novels in its celebration of individual agency through morally questionable means. Roy interprets the novel as a cynical reconfiguration of the Indian dream, where success is measured not by ethical standards but by the ability to subvert systemic barriers through cunning and self-narrativization (Roy, 2009).

Roy's reading intersects with post-truth themes by highlighting the novel's implicit suggestion that truth is malleable, and survival requires adopting whatever version of it serves one's ambitions.

Himashu A Srinivastava(2023) adds another layer by foregrounding the interplay between systemic corruption and individual moral compromise. His analysis situates Balram's transformation within a sociopolitical context that rewards deception and punishes virtue, suggesting that the protagonist's ascent is emblematic of a deeper rot in democratic institutions (Srinivastava, 2023). This environment fosters a landscape where truth is no longer a collective but a personal construct.

Shivani Mishra and Ritu Pandey (2025) employ a Gramscian framework to interpret *The White Tiger* as a study in cultural hegemony where ideological consent is subtly manufactured through entrenched caste and class norms, They argue that Balram's eventual rejection of servitude reflects not just resistance but a calculated repositioning within the hegemonic order (Mishra & Pandey, 2025). Lily Want (2011) explores similar concerns in her discussion of the politics of cultural representation. She notes that Balram's voice is performative and ideological, aimed at deconstructing mainstream narratives about India while simultaneously constructing an alternative one that suits his rise to power(Want, 2011). Want's framing of the protagonist as a cultural narrator rather than a mere participant underscores the importance of examining how truth is not simply expressed but produced and weaponized.

Z H Hashmi et al. offers a deconstructive reading of the novel, arguing that Balram's journey is less about the ethical transformation and more about the epistemic restructuring . They suggest that Adiga presents a protagonist who moves from invisibility to dominance by inverting traditional moral hierarchies, thereby questioning the reliability of any single narrative of truth or justice (Hashmi et al, 2022).

This research proposes to fill the gap of post-truth epistemology as existing studies only discuss moral ambiguity and social inequalities with political edges. The research portrays Balram Halwai as a post-truth narrator, a figure who weaponizes control to reconstruct reality and assert legitimacy in a fractured epistemic landscape.

The research questions discussed here are : (1) How can the theory of post truth be applied to the socio-economic events of the text *The White Tiger*

(2) Does Balram Halwai become a projection of the post-truth condition in India?



Manufactured Hopes and False Mobility Myths

McIntyre in his text *Post-truth* discusses that the society is deeply pre-conditioned to think from motivated reasoning. People cling on to preconditioned, convenient beliefs like caste superiority, meritocracy or family loyalty. Very often accepting truth requires us to change, let go of power or accept which is socially uncomfortable and emotionally disturbing. Confronting realities and dismantling long-held convenient preconceptions makes them reject the truth rather than the argument of being ignorant or unaware.

In Balram's world the rejection of truth is often a defense of psychological comfort rather than an epistemological failure. *The White Tiger* (2018) illustrates this post-truth crisis at an individual level. Balram Halwai does not justify these preconceptions, rather breaks away from them. He does not lie to others, rather constructs a self-serving version of reality to avoid the discomfort of his subaltern position. His narrative is shaped by act, but a deep emotional resistance to powerlessness.

The advent of post-truth in India began with the availability of 4G data packs and affordable smart phones. The foundation of post-Truth is built upon the expansion of technology and its loopholes owing to the novelty of the issue. When content on social-media platforms goes viral unverified and unchecked, the environment for post-truth sets in.

The discussion in this paper revolves around the advancement of technology and resources made available in the hands of the common man. The article probes into the angles of such an enhanced power and balance owing to a shift in social hierarchies.

Adiga's text *The White Tiger* 2008 is a starkly satirical epistolary tale narrated by Balram Halwai, a self-proclaimed "entrepreneur" writing letters to the Chinese Premier Wen Jiabo. Balram recounts his journey from being a poor villager in darkness to a wealthy businessman in Bangalore, an IT hub of India. This journey signifies the social growth from rural to urban population.

The metaphor of The Rooster Coop is described to India's oppressive social system where the poor and uneducated see their fate coming up in front of them, but do not rebel or take action to escape the coop. The lower wrung of the population masses like servants, drivers and labourers are complicit in their own exploitation as they see being because the system is designed to crush their will, distort their reality and make



them think that complicity is safer than resistance. This encapsulates the psychological and structural imprisonment.

He describes India's poor as roosters in a coop who see fellow roosters being slaughtered but do nothing to escape, which reflects that poverty and servitude are so ingrained that they feel invisible, the subconscious indoctrination that they deserve their fate. They fear the rebellion risks not just the individual but their entire family (e.g. Landlords who threaten violence against their relatives). The elite sustain their control through manufactured hope and false mobility myths. The government has a tendency to keep us engaged with noise in the form of news to overwhelm us with topics like the attack by a neighbouring country, the foreign-policy tensions, the takeover by artificial intelligence, this is done with an intention to divert anger from domestic oppression.

The government also forges narratives that confuse and misguide the people. This is done with half-truths, rumour bombs, political-lying, cherry-picking of facts. They created echo-chambers to disseminate the narratives that they want the public to know. In the novel, *White Tiger*, Adiga exposes the cruel theatre of distraction that keeps the oppressed from uniting against their true oppressors. The constant drumbeat of the "China vs. India" rivalry gets amplified through political speeches and media. This serves as a psychological sleight of hand, redirecting the rage of the poor toward an external boogeyman rather than the rot at home. When a landless labourer seethes about Chinese factories "stealing jobs", he does not see the landlord in his own village hoarding wealth; when a rickshaw driver fears "losing" to China, he misses the oligarchs mocking their gullibility. This manufactured nationalism, a hallmark of post-truth regimes, thrives on emotional manipulation of facts. The agenda seems to be distracting the hungry and poor Indians as they are busy hating the distant enemy, they are distracted to observe the noose around their necks.

The myth of "token mobility" acts as anaesthesia for collective despair. Balram's rise from servant to entrepreneur is celebrated as proof that "anyone can make it", but his story is weaponized to silence the millions who cannot escape the rooster coop. The elite hold up these rare exceptions of the so-called "self-made man", the "white tiger" to sustain the lie of meritocracy. It's like asking "See ...how even a low-caste boy can succeed!!"



The elite turn an envious eye toward the progress of the undertrodden as their upward mobility poses a threat to their own position. The system of post-truth wields the powerful with amenities, justice, hope, and security, on the other hand, the oppressed class are kept stuck within the matrix of their belief-systems, religion, dogmatism, and culture thus forging an even deeper and vicious trap for their existence.

The unspoken corollary is far darker: If you fail, it's your fault. This illusion of possibility, repeated like a mantra turns oppression into a personal failing. The post-truth of this lies in its emotional resonance : it replaces systemic critique with shame and false hope , ensuring the oppressed police themselves ensuing the Althusserian feature in a developing economy. Together, these strategies- nationalist diversion and tokenistic mobility form the bedrock of a post-truth society where power thrives not by denying reality, but by drowning in it.

In McIntyre's terms, such tactics "corrode the very idea of objective reality", ensuring the oppressed misdiagnose their chains as personal failures rather than engineered outcomes. Together these strategies reveal post-truth not as chaos , but as a regime's surgical toolkit. : lies that paralyze dissent by annihilating the language to name one's oppression.

When Institutions Become Actors in Oppression

These carefully crafted illusions of hope and mobility depend on a deeper machinery of deception - the very institutions meant to uplift citizens instead perform elaborate pantomimes of justice. Like a play where the script never changes, democracy lies far behind when ballots are bought, schools promise enlightenment while teaching obedience and temples preach compassion while blessing exploitation. The "Great Socialist"'s rigged victory isn't an anomaly, but a feature : his bribe, stuffed ballots reveal how systems don't merely fail, but succeed at their true purpose , maintaining inequality through performative governance . When Balram witnesses his village's polling booth become a theatre of false choice. " We voted for the wrong man but the right man won" . We see McIntyre's weaponized lies institutionalised- not random corruption, but a coldly efficient production where every actor knows their role in sustaining the grand deception.

The wealthy Stork Family construct narratives that justify their exploitation. They construct entire realities to justify their oppression to the poor. This aligns precisely with Lee McIntyre's post-truth theory,



where power is maintained not through brute force, but through systematic distortion of truth , emotional manipulation, manufactured consent and erosion of objective reality.

McIntyre argues that in post-truth politics, “the trustworthiness of the speaker replaces the reliability of facts”. The Storks family embody this as they represent themselves as pious, benevolent landlords calling themselves as “We are holy people!” (Adiga, 2008, p.64), a claim repeated while they exploit servants. Their temple donations and feasts (72) mask how they “take half of whatever the poor grow in their fields” (68). Balram bluntly admits the extractive theatre of post-truth oppression. The Stork family doesn’t merely steal crops, they ritualize the theft as moral entitlement, framing their 50 % cut as tradition(67), while subjecting farmers to arbitrary fines for “using too much water” or “poor quality seeds”(69). McIntyre’s “emotional-truth” (2018) operates here: the landlord's performance of generosity-occasional sacks of rotting grain as “charity” (70) transforms structural violence into feudal benevolence.

This can be mirrored in many ways. The 50% appropriation mirrors India’s colonial-era zamindari system, now rebranded as “free market “ economics.

Account books are weaponized (68) to prove fictional debts , echoing McIntyre’s “weaponized lies” that replace reality with ledgers of oppression.

Balram’s father, rickshaw puller , dies from untreated tuberculosis in a state hospital (33), a direct consequence of wealth extraction masked as “ fair sharing.” This exemplifies McIntyre’s warning:post-truth regimes “corrode the criteria by which truth is judged (29) making theft look like destiny.

It is analysed that the loss of credibility of institutions serve as tools of deception. The novel exemplifies this through “ The Great Socialist”. He buys votes openly, yet still claims a “mandate of the people”. The villagers know the election is fixed, but still play along , mirroring how modern populists maintain power despite exposed fraud.

This reflects the anti-truth, it's not just lying, but making truth irrelevant through institutionalized deception.

Balram Halwai as a Victim of the Indian Post-Truth Condition

Ararvind Adiga’s *The White Tiger* (2008) unfolds a dark, ironic confession of a man who has broken free from servitude through crime. The power of the narrative becomes clearer in the aftermath of the murder. Balram kills Ashok, his master, not out of a sudden rage, but with calculated precision, after carefully

observing that the system itself is indifferent to the truth. The ease with which he evades punishment by means of bribing police, inventing a new identity, starting a business, demonstrates how institutions are not guardians of justice, but markets for truth. Shalini Roy's analysis underscores this collapse: "Balram's survival depends not on facts, but on exploiting the institutional apathy that post-truth allows. His rise is symptomatic of a broader moral vacuum (Roy 218). In other words, truth becomes transactional, and Balram merely learns how to buy it.

This shift is particularly evident in the technological and media-saturated Bangalore, where Balram eventually settles. The city is portrayed as a symbolic capital of a new India, that has been driven by technology and multinational companies. . It is fast and globalised, yet soulless. Here Balram reinvents himself as an entrepreneur. But again, this re-invention relies on selective disclosure, forged documents and emotional manipulation. As Amit Kumar notes, "Balram's entrepreneurial identity thrives in a climate where image matters more than ethics, and appearances are as good as facts" (Kumar 162). In such an environment, even progress feels like an illusion , an emotional balm making systemic inequality.

What makes Balram's case especially relevant to a discussion on post-truth is the way he mobilizes emotion to override moral complexity. He does not shy away from describing the horror of crime; instead , he places it within a larger narrative of victimhood and ambition. His tone is persona, his logic emotional, and his appeal designed to evoke empathy rather than judgement. Nisha Patel captures this dynamic through the lines: "Balram's narrative strategy is post truth at its core. It bypasses factual consistency in favour of emotional resonance" (Patel 68). By focusing on his suffering, his desires, and his personal journey, Balram ensures that readers are drawn into his version of the story, regardless of its ethical flaws.

The researcher delves on the dilemma whether Balram is simply a manipulator or a victim of post-truth owing to his socio-economic and political conditions. After all, even he lies, steals, and finally even kills, these acts are often associated with agency, not victimhood. But, this interpretation overlooks the constraints that shape his decisions. As Verma points out, "Balram's choices are neither free nor virtuous : they are shaped by a context that leaves him no moral ground to stand on "(Verma 85). His manipulation of truth is not born out of luxury, but necessity. In a society where honesty only reinforces subjugation, post-truth becomes a form of resistance.



Ultimately, *The White Tiger* is not just the story of one man's rise. It is a critique of the larger system that produces such distorted paths to success. Balram's journey mirrors the experiences of countless individuals in today's India, where the promise of equality is undermined by inequality, and truth is often twisted to serve political or economic ends. His life forces us to confront uncomfortable questions: What happens to morality in a world where survival demands constant reinvention? How do we judge where the right ends and the wrong begins.

Balram Halwai is in many ways, a mirror of the post-truth age. He internalizes its cynicism, adopts its tools, and reflects its contradictions. His story is not about moral failure but about moral exhaustion. About what happens when a person is denied the dignity of truth for so long that deception becomes second nature. In his rise, we see not just the failure of institutions, but the emotional and ethical cost of a world where facts no longer matter. In that sense, Balram is not merely a character in the fiction; he is a symptom of a post-truth condition prevalent within the structures of the system. One that challenges how we understand truth, justice, and identity in contemporary India.

Conclusion

Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* compellingly reflects the epistemic shifts of the post-era, wherein truth is no longer grounded in objective reality, but constructed through swaying of emotional resonance. By portraying Balram Halwai as both a narrator and an agent of post-truth, Adiga critiques not only the socio-economic structures of contemporary India, but also the ideological frameworks that justify inequality under the guise of meritocracy and progress.

Balram's ascent from servitude to entrepreneurship is not merely a personal journey; it exemplifies a systematic failure where institutions that ought to ensure justice instead manufacture illusions of mobility and equality. His manipulation of truth is not rooted in malice, but emerges as a strategic adaptation to survive in a society where truth has become commodified. Thus, Balram embodies the post-truth condition, where deception is not a moral lapse, but a necessity born of institutional and epistemic disillusionment.

This paper argues that *The White Tiger* transcends its post-colonial critique by prefiguring the emotional and rhetorical mechanisms of the post-truth condition. Through the protagonist's self-narrativization, the novel reveals how marginalized individuals repurpose truth to resist systemic invisibility.

In doing so. Adiga's work demands a reconsideration of the ethical binaries between victimhood and agency, truth and fabrication.

Ultimately, Balram Halwai is not merely a fictional character, but a narrative device through which the reader confronts the emotional and moral costs of living in a society where facts are selectively acknowledged and truth becomes a tool of survival rather than a marker of justice. In an age increasingly defined by the erosion of epistemic integrity, *The White Tiger* stands as a prescient literary text that interrogates the foundations of truth, power, and identity in India's neoliberal economic era.

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