APPENDIX
BOLLYWOODISATION OF PRAYER

Prayer, Religion, God. One of the most revered and profound truths of our existence in post modern age of spectacle, of commodification have been trivialized. Ludwig Feuerbach’s statement holds quite a firm ground in our age. He says

“But certainly for the present age, which prefers the sign to the thing signified, the copy to the original, fancy to reality, the appearance to the essence,...illusion only is sacred, truth profane. Nay, sacredness is held to be enhanced in proportion as truth decreases and illusion increases, so that the highest degree illusion comes to be the highest degree of sacredness.”

The structural shift to a society of the spectacle involves a commodification of previously non-colonized sectors of social life and the extension of bureaucratic control to the realms of leisure, desire, and everyday life. Religion has been reduced to a visual entertainment. The ritual, the prayer has lost its original significance. It is no longer about wisdom and intelligence, and bring with it none of the sense of sacredness and peace which a spiritual is supposed to be about.

In this paper we will discuss the change in the concept of prayer. How “Raghupati raghav raja ram” sung in the ashrams of Mahatma Gandhi has been remixed and we have a rap version of the same(as in the movie kuch kuch hota hai). It is transition in terms of vulgarization, trivialization that is ongoing since Zeenat Amaan portraying a hippie girl dopping sing “Hare Krishna Hare Ram” to Amitabh Bachchan who plays with the sanctity of Meera in the song “Ki pag ghungroo baandh meera nachi thi” , to present day where Akshay Kumar with scantily dressed models chanting “Hare Ram Hare Ram” in the movie bhool bhulaiya becomes a rage, a youth icon who takes the burden of bringing the youth close to God (doing much to instigate the very vulnerable and incendiary sentiments of the ultra rightist).

Much perturbed by this uncalled for lack of graveness. I am often reminded of Joan of Arc and Mahatma Gandhi and many others who were slaughtered for the so called ‘Misinterpretation’ of religion. And today the veritable and grave misinterpretation of religion leads to the marketability of ‘religion’. In the garb of secularism and freedom of expression, we are in a way de-escalating and de-intensifying the sacred. Dandiya which
concludes Navratras has now been stylized. The fast and feasting ladies busy themselves learning the racy steps of Dandiya, picking up ethnic Garba costumes and jewellery. Dolling up at the nearest beauty parlour, eating out the Navratri special thalis at restaurant and Falguni Pathak music is what has become synonymous to Navratras now. This is the moment when prayer changes in to noise. The sacred domain is smitten by the swanky bug of bollywood.

Entertainmentisation (Michael J Wolf, “Entertainment Economy”) becomes the watchword which leads to the adulteration of our culture. The Bollywoodisation of prayer has a very complex trajectory. Analysis of the change in the singing style and music revisiting Meera from M.S Subhalakshmi via Kishori Amonkar to Vani Jairam talks all about the huge brush off of bollywood in the holy sphere. This journey from classical to semi classical to popular though scales down the profundity of Meera but at the same time it scales up the marketability and the profit of the cassette producing company. And who doesn’t want money? And the Jagrans (specially conducted by the organization AMIL changing around 15-20 lakh of rupees) are the most credible and bone fide example of the Bollywoodisation of prayer.

The glitzy glamorous Jagrans are no less than filmfare award function adorned with star singers (bollywood discarded singers like Narendra Chanchal and the participants of talent hunt shows like “Indian idol” get a vocation here) with elaborate fireworks followed by a three course meal is the trend. The singers singing devotional songs on bollywood tunes and the swaying crowd in trance like state is a farce worth watching. The serious and staid look on the face of the devotees and their pretension is a sight to watch.

This prayer is a parody of actual prayer and parody which is a post modern device rest on a medium and to cater to the taste of the masses what better medium than bollywood. Something as serious as prayer parodies a non serious medium i.e. bollywood. In the current scenario medium precedes the message. “Content is a juicy piece of meat carried by the burgular to distract the watchdog of mind” (Mc Luhan, “The Medium is the Message”) and bollywood the medium does the job pretty well as it distances rather makes the contents (lyrics) of negligible importance. Bollywood becomes our “Intimate Enemy”. One often wonders whether prayer has or will have any significance, an identity without bollywood. Can we imagine prayer without bollywood now? Is it the dearth of creativity, the reluctance to craft something original or the parasitic dependence on bollywood? Raymond Williams in
the essay “From Medium to Social Practice” asserts that it is social practices which govern the quality and quality of the medium. As market precedes everything else and profitability rules, bollywood will also rule in this domain, it being a sure shot capsule for success.

Baudrillard says: “The closer we approach the real time event, the more we fall in to the illusions of the virtual”. He pleads god to save us from illusions. But today, God is the biggest victim of the illusions of spectacle. He himself needs to be rescued. It is complete obfuscation of religion which was once Astha (faith), is now sheer display of excesses, of extravaganza. It is obscenity, a masquerade of the real. He posits this stage as “the end of transcendence” (a phrase borrowed from Marcuse) where individuals can neither perceive their own true needs or another way of life.

Jagran which conventionally was a gathering of people who stayed awake whole night and invoked god with acoustic instruments like tabla, harmonium etc now cannot be imagined without orchestra and loudspeakers. The intimacy of the Jagran is lost. The real message is lost. Prayer has become asymptomatic.

In this kind of secondary orality with no community participation, with the use of bollywood epithets and beats, one wonder if the people in those jagrans are invoking Durga Mata Karcena Mata. In the devotional songs on bollywood tunes, one instead of concentrating on the prayer is left deciphering the exact bollywood song on which it is based, the actors, actresses and the movie. Once this mystery is solved then there comes the time to pray or think about God. Such prayer I feel is twice removed from reality to put it in Plato’s words. After having researched and being an audience myself to various such mock prayers being telecast on various spiritual channels we get to see, the whole thing may be called what you like but not prayer. It has all the ingredients of a bollywood masala movie. Its aesthetics are kept intact. Huge magnificent sets, stage lightings, glamorous well dressed dolls, a dance number, song, elaborate melodrama and theatrical effects of the actors. You name it and we have it here. It calls for a super hit show and certainly it is. The thronging crowds are testimony to it. The Singers, their devices of involving the public and making them a part of the performance all make it more akin to a star night than a religious congregation. The huge set up, stadium like a space with all the life size statues of gods goddesses is turned in to a make believe world of a pilgrimage. The lightings, the laser beams, the latka jhatkas of the singers, their fashionable clothing. All this reminds of a disco with its lightings and ear blasting music. The signers would do anything to please the public even if it borders on some
obscenity. At times the singers don’t even bother changing the lyrics of the bollywood song. Just a minor word alteration here and there serves the purpose. “Beloved” being replaced by “Ma” does the job well. Prayer which is now synonymous to noise, religion which is now a spectacle, a performance and our fixation on noise and not in the signal is troubling. We drugged by the spectacle of known and revered faces, of glitz and glamour are lost. Lost in the wilderness of the exteriority, of the medium and have become so passive that we even forget to question the credibility of such a hollow, shaky kind of a prayer which can never lead to Hridangam. For Debord, the spectacle is a tool of pacification and depoliticization: it is a “permanent opium war” which stupifies social subjects and distracts them from the most urgent task of real life—recovering the full range of their human power through revolutionary change. But the questions remains, can religion exist sans bollywood? In this age of commercialization where we are driven by marketability we will have to accept this trivialization not meaning to turn a deaf ear and a blind eye to it but critically slaughter such practices with a hope that people might one day acknowledge the pettiness and trivialities they are so enthusiastically encouraging.

References:


CELEBRITY COLONIALISM AND CULTURAL STUDIES

Baudrillard, the post-modern French philosopher talks in this book *Simulations and Simulacra* of a stage of a third order simulations which produces “a generation of models of real without origin or reality” and in reverse order the model precedes the real but this doesn’t imply that there is a blurring distinction between reality and representations rather there is detachment from both of these whereby the reversal becomes irrelevant. He is of the view that this hyper reality is produced algorithmically like virtual reality of computer code, which is to to stay detached from the notions of mimesis and representations. The most disturbing point is that the hyper real doesn’t exist in the realm of good or evil but in terms of performativity, i.e. its demand in the market.

In the same vein Baudrillard talks of the role of media, of market of consumption and production of news and gossip about the lives of celebrities the socialites and the page three which has become page one now. When Jean Baudrillard scandalized the art world by denouncing that art was backed by conspiracy, he wasn’t’ attacking art because art had ceased to exist but its claim to privilege no longer remained. Spiraling from aesthetic nullity of commercial frenzy, art has entered a” transaesthetic” state i.e. it is an age of cultural nihilism where everything is the same, nothing means anything and nothing has a purpose. He is remorseful of the culture’s complicit dance with politics, economics and media.

In early times people derived a mythic national character by focusing on military heroes, romantic fictional protagonists, and eminent statesmen who embodied the ideals of virtue and self-reliance. By mid-twentieth century, this pedestal was taken over not by politicians or generals but by cricket players and movie stars. The trajectory of change in the aesthetics of drawing room is worth noticing. The photographs of Gods were replaced by photographs of the national heroes whose place has now been taken over by our modern celebrities, the demi gods and goddesses. This shift reflecting in part the vast cultural changes wrought by the communication revolution of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries says a great deal about the nation’s continuing need for self-definition and about the culture which contributed to his search. These cultural icons of celebrity personalities are celebrated as Daniel Boorstin defined them, “not for achievement but simply for “ well-knowingness”.

“Our age has produced a new kind of eminence”, he wrote “This new kind of eminence is celebrity”. (The image: A Guide to Pseudo-events in America 57) For Boorstin, “heroes"
were admired for greatness in some achievement but today the celebrity is created by the media.

In this paper, we are discussing a war zone of media monsters and million-dollar spin. It is a different, hyped-up, star-obsessed, more intense and more artificial post-modern reality. With cable TV, the Internet and the ballooning size of the media, there is more need of content and airtime to fill. This results in information filtered of meaning and rarity. Politics is often served up as scandal. News is more and more centered on the latest sensational drama. Stars edge out coverage of world events with breathless reports about their latest deals and endorsements. We get scoops on who is behaving badly with whom and who wore what designer’s dress and jewelry to transform her into human billboard on the red carpet. Such culture addresses a society governed by subliminal message about money, consumption, and seemingly unattainable lifestyle. One need not look further than page one of the distinguished The Times of India or The Hindustan Times to see how far celebrity coverage has come and how much it dominates our lives. In the last year or so, page one of the The Times of India has featured such previously unthinkable stories like an analysis of the career of Britney Spears. The burgeoning readership of the entertainment section vouches for the growing demand and supply of the news of the tinsel town.

Why did so much about Bill Clinton’s sex life overshadow the fact that the Americans were in increasing danger from terrorists? When we look for information about public figures today, we get trends, clothes, pets, marriage partners, the details of plastic surgery and rehabilitation, an endless parade of lifestyle and process. So if you are a star, your life or some reasonable reproduction of it is your greatest performance replayed endlessly in videos and news shows. Shopping, clinging on crowded dance floors, appearing at awards ceremonies: all of these photo opportunities keep the celebrities visible and marketable and frequently overshadow whatever talent or skill they may possess.

It has been observed and argued that deal making and profit making has become a true art form. Now, however, the values (earlier associated with tinsel town) are pervasive and the art form is spinning a lifestyle that get stars and all sorts of celebrities in the media and keeps them in demand. The work itself is a pretty low priority, particularly considering time spent at the gym and plastic surgeons. Today, a personality wanting in scandal and ‘forced difference in opinion’ is not worth talking about. With mainstream media going down
market to meet the tabs whose format an style increasingly set the pace, it is the lifestyles of the richer and more famous that have become the art form.

Few moths back rumors of Saif Ali Khan and Kareena’s marriage made the headlines. Then it was Sanjay Dutt’s wadding with Manyata which hogged the limelight. TV channels especially have been playing up this news with an eye on TRPs. The times of India carried both stories and this annoyed several readers. Interestingly, the response to both stories was tremendous. This leads us to the question: Do we like to peep into the private lives of the rich and famous even as we think we don’t really care what or celebrities are up to? Are we plagued by voyeurism?

Jean Baudrillard suggests that the ‘Cut of Celebrity’ is part of a larger trend towards living in the ecstasy of communication. We are bombarded by a succession of surface images in the media that do not connect with reality. As a result, the destination between what is real and what is imaginary disintegrates. In effect, the beauty portrayed in images of celebrities becomes more real than real in our consumer culture. This is echoed by the cultural critic John Fiske when he writes that fantasy can be as ‘real’ an experience as any other.

False appearances are rampant in contemporary culture. He argued that celebrities are counterfeit people whose identities are staged and scripted to create an illusion of reality. A study shows that the sale products endorsed by celebrities rose by 10 per cent per annum, between 1960 and 1980 in America. In other words, we aspire to resemble images of celebrities despite awareness of their unreality. Wherefore the role of media becomes important and questionable.

Celebrities, according to Marshall in his book, *Celebrity and Power: Fame in Contemporary Culture*, manifest the tendency of culture industries of control the construction of individuality in subordinate populations, variously known as the mob, the mass, and the crowd but celebrities might also be appropriated and repositioned by their audiences in efforts to resist such assertions of cultural power. Celebrities as Boorstin emphasises seem to be conspicuously and essentially enabled and constructed by modern technologies and organisations of cultural production.

These widely circulated commercial images i.e. of the cleveite may indeed be better understood as something like what Horkheimer and Adorno have called “mass deception”, as highly finished charged, false promises of opportunity represent and perpetuate the
ideologically products of industries that very successfully represent and perpetuate the ideologically charged, false promises of opportunity. Under modern capitalisms promise that help to stabilize extant relations of power.

Baudrillard very rightly questions and raises doubts regarding our society, our existence which according to him rest in simulations and hyper reality. For Baudrillard, postmodern world and reality and world are characterized by a commercial frenzy were consumerism becomes the watchword. It is consumerism which guides, anchors and drives the postmodern reality. An image becomes so potent, so powerful that it slips the reality which after sometime again becomes a copy. Wherefore our life is dominated by images which are surreal. We live a plagiarist, a pseudo kind of existence of superfluitics, of surfaces and of images. In other words, our life is marked by “simulacra and simulations”. Paparazzi, celebrities, the big shots, the who is who of tinsel town wherefore becomes an indispensable and imminent part this whole discourse. Whence people like Paris, Hilton, Britney spears, Rakhi sawant and events like Abhishek-Aiswariya wedding the tiff between John-Bipasha, Sarkozi Bruni marriage becomes a thing of paramount importance, as this is what sells. Functionality has taken predominance in our lives and culture. According to Baudrillard, we live in an age of simulation. It is no longer a question of imitation or of reduplication nor even of parody. It is rather a question of substituting signs of the real of the real itself. Our world then is built from simulacra and our pleasure and business in it consist of moving endlessly among the unrealities constructed for us. Now clearly it would be possible to understand any given celebrity as one of Baudrillard’s simulacra, as existing in an inescapable system that facilitates the pleasures of consumption. But we would still want to understand how and to what extent consumers and audiences negotiate the commercially produced realities around them or at least to what end they we are produced. Baudrillard, in other words does not provide us with much connection between playing with simulacra and the impacts of such play upon the creation of meanings in the social world.

The recurring theme of Baudrillard’s work is that we live in a world in which representation and simulations have come to dominate over what was once thought of as reality to the extent that our reality now often is our simulation of it. That’s why it in now not only possible to be “famous for being famous”, but it’s what many young people actively have as an ambition to be a roadie or to get gorgeous. Because of thinkers like Baudrillard, we have come to think better and deeper about such issues as the reminds us of the contemporary culture which is rotting as the mirror and reflection have given way to a screen
and parody. There is no longer any transcendence or depth by only the immanent surface of operations unfolding the smooth and functional surface of communication. The sheer power of celebrities to move and change the world, current events, political votes, and fundraising campaigns is alarming. The technological and media changes that have occurred so quickly with such force which has given birth to our celebrity culture in a relatively short period of time are for many like us disheartening.

References:

THE QUESTIONED ‘REALITY’ OF REALITY TELEVISION

A BAUDRILLARDIAN PERSPECTIVE

Real, reality and realism are no settled notions or constructs. The struggle for the expression of real has undergone many changes. The traditional binary of appearance versus real does not enable us to reach the truth as both real and appearance defy definitions. With the coming of virtual systems, we have become numb to reality. The virtual systems have been able to mimic the full range of our textures and we are witnessing a journey and not simply indulging them into passive consumption is the masses by impressing and not of this new technology. This simulated reality is the most lethal variant of realism. Realism in television can refer to an adequate relationship between what television realism is a flexible category. It is a matter of both content and of the convention or codes which structure the representation but can be a medium in which the beginnings of a true state of affairs could occur. In this context, realism is no longer a reflection of exterior reality but one of the forms in which audience and representation connect with each other.

Reality television is a genre of television programming which presents purportedly unscripted dramatic or humorous situations, documents actual events, and usually features ordinary people instead of professional actors. Although the genre has existed in some form or another since the early years of television, the term reality television is most commonly used to describe programs of this genre produced since 2000. Reality television covers a wide range of programming formats, from game or quiz shows to dating shows and talent hunt shows. Such shows frequently portray a modified and highly influenced form of reality, with participants put act in certain ways by off-screen handlers, and with events on screen sometimes manipulated through ending and other post production techniques. Reality television saw an explosion of global popularity starting in the early 2000s. Two reality series, Survivor and American Idol have been the top-rated series on Americans television for an entire season. Currently there are at least two television channels devoted exclusively to reality television: Fox Reality in the United States, launched in 2005, and Zone Reality in the UK, launched in 2002.

The era of soaps and family dramas on Indian television is coming to an end. People prefer a reality show to a prolonged television drama. The times are changing and the
buzzword today is reality shows. These shows provide television programme producers a huge opportunity in India for them. KBC and Indian Idol have made history in terms of people’s participation and have been great revenue generators as well. The popularity has been so widespread that Aastha, the leading religious television network in India, is to introduce a reality TV show, based on the global Idol formula, in an attempt to reach out to a younger audience. The show, tentatively named Religious Indian Idol, will be an interactive musical talent contest between teenagers from devotional songs from the Hindu, Buddhist, Sikh and Jain faiths.

In the sixties, Andy Warhol, the cultural icon responsible for contemporary pop art-forms that merge high and low art predicted that in the future, everyone will be famous for 15 minutes. It was in reference to how society tends to make celebrities out of ordinary people for brief periods of time. Some people have speculated that reality TV is the manifestation of Warhol’s 15 minutes of fame because it elevates mass numbers of ordinary people to celebrity status, if only for a short time. The reality television becomes a true simulation, of pure re-appropriation and copying. In an interview with Francis Gillard in 1990, Baudrillard remarked that simulation is:

...kind of a short circuit between reality and its image, between reality and its representation. In the end they are the same elements that once served to constitute the reality principle except that they collide and cancel each other out. somewhat like matter and anti matter. What comes out of it the universe of simulation is fascinating and phantasmorgic. (Baudrillard, The Conspiracy of Art 48)

The same simulation of the reality television appears so convincing that people believe in them per se becoming indifferent to the conniving unreality of it all. Talking about the reality shows, he maintained that they are dust breeding grounds where the whole idea is to raise the dust of gossip, of unreality and of seduction. He calls them the “synthetic banality manufactured in the closed circuit on control screen” (The Conspiracy of Art 182). Jean Baudrillard’s concept of simulacrum, the destabilization of any form of reality caused by new reproduction technologies is evident in the proliferation of our lives with reality shows in spite of being highly any antecedent ‘real’. These shows in spite of being highly constructed
and edited still give impression of being more real than other programs. Nothing provokes more existential crisis than ones inability to distinguish real from non real or manufactured.

With reality television one needs to understand how the concept of real has been challenged and revitalized in the age of technological reproduction. In the book, Jean Baudrillard: Live Theory, the author Paul Hegarty upholds that “Reality television, as presence of cameras distorts reality and as in early 2000’s the shows have shown that reality is too dull, so needs spicing up with adventurous tasks. As a result medium prevents the real from ever occurring” (295). It becomes a genre of television as storyline is created from people interacting or competing with one another in so created from called unscripted, unrehearsed situations. Reality TV is actually comprised of highly controlled and predetermined situations that produce social drama that has been specifically fabricated for the cameras and the television advertisers.

Drama makes for a good show. Even if one interacts normally with people, producers will find a way to highlight the most interesting parts and it might come across on television as being excessively dramatic. Ultimately reality show creators just want to entertain their audience. Whether it is a dance show or the Big Brother house in which racial slurs and catfights are a part of the process, much goes into presenting a reality as real. The basic recipe remains the same as soaps: Flirtation, betrayal, tears, bitching and scheming. The only difference is that it is presented as reality. Baba Sehgal, who was voted out of the show “Big Boss” is of the opinion that “most of the reality shows case in on the emotional drama of the participants and the viewers. The drama quotient is unrealistic in these shows. It is the work of clever editing that does wonders for the reality shows producers. They always show whatever is dramatic, to retain the audience’s interest” (As qtd. in an editorial in “The Times of India “How real are Reality Shows?” dated 26 January 2007).

In the reality show Big Boss the participants establish a space where ordinary behavior is not only recorded but also dramatized. Despite the shows attempts to dramatize the situation it is the banality that is interesting to the public and existence is reduced to the realness eluded by the control and manipulation. The coverage of the series shows that that certain character types and stock characters are built up. The participants attempt to play roles that would stop other participants from voting them out and which would encash them audience support. The realism of such reality shows is a performance. An especially good example of this can be found in Manigault-Stallworth, a star of Donald Troop’s “The
“apprentice”. She has been called “the most hated women on television” because of the behavior and attitude people see her with. But how much of her on-screen persona is real and how much is creation of shows editors? Quite a lot of the latter, according to mangiest - stallworth in an email quoted by MSNBC: “what you see on the show is a gross misrepresentation of who I am. For instance they never show me smiling, it is just not consistent with the negative portrayal of me that they want to present. Lest week they portrayed me as lazy and pretending be hurt to get out of working, when in fact I had a concussion due to my serious injury on the set and spent nearly... 10 hour in the emergency room. It is all in the editing!” (As qtd. in “Ethics and reality TV” by Elizabeth Larkin.).

Baudrillard rightly calls for such a case where the distinction becomes blurred. He argues that we can do longer distinguish between imitation and reality, we are lost in a world of simulacra created and presented as “real” by the mass media, and we sometimes prefer the imitations because they seem more real than life. This state of what Baudrillard called “hyperreality” explains why we are swamped by TV reality shows which are anything but reality. The reality of the genre in discussion gravitate us towards Baudrillard that the reality television gives: “the illusion of a real world is the exact image of the other” (Dust Breeding” in Jean Baudrillard: The Conspiracy of Art 181). By using the words “illusion” and “exact image,” Baudrillard points to reality TV programs are mere simulacra of the real word.

Baudrillard claimed that Disneyland was created to disguise the unreality of the rest of USA. We can confer the same in case of reality television as the fabrication alibi for the non falsity of the real world. We are all so actively involved in this game in terms of our voting and our enthusiasm that stage comes when reality becomes a screen and the screens become our total reality. A VHI expose, “Reality TV Secrets Revealed” divulges many of the techniques used by the producers of these shows to get the story they want including recreating actions that were not originally caught on tape, combining audio and video from separate times together, and acting out pre-planned story lines. Though the audience is allowed to observe the cast members of each reality TV show, but can only see a small group of images selected from many hours of footage. Through editing techniques, the producers can exaggerate elements from an individual’s personality to construct a persona that audiences can rapidly identify. Each episode of these shows is culled from as much as72 hours of footage from multiple cameras. They can make anyone look bad and they can make anyone look good. In short they have the power to dictate our likes and dislikes as well to control us. Arlid Fetveit in his book Reality TV in the Digital Era: A Pardox in Visual
Culture? to this situation maintains that: “Reality TV comes with a unique promise of contact with reality, but at the same time it promises a secure distance” (130).

Reality television might be praised for democratizing but for Baudrillard this high exposure for high ordinary highlights the bankruptcy of democracy where the main stance is too meaningless to be thought as real. With the coming up of such shows we see a marked shift in ideologies of media from a liberal enterprise emphasizing on personal empowerment and public service and their concern with larger social issues to an aggressive surveillance of an individual subject and engaging not only him but the audience in to this vicious circle. Such programs connote entrapment, restriction and control and the contestants are just like the rats trapped in a laboratory maze. Rules are imposed by production team and tasks are set which further provides the contestants with rewards just as in laboratory animals are trained to undertake tasks to gain food. Besides giving the audience the thrill and excitement of live and un-edited action, reality television allows the audience to be a part of the show. Take for example Indian Idol, Sa Re Ga Ma Pa or Big Boss and many others which allow the audience to choose the winner through a voting system. Although the credibility of these voting systems is debated about forever, the interactivity factor definitely fetches the show a lot of viewership. Hasan Suroor of The Hindu reported from London as to how phone-in TV shows are a big scandal in Britain. This included respected channels like BBC, ITV and Channel 4. Winners for phone-in competitions were “fixed”. Viewers were encouraged to continue the premium rate phone calls even after the contest had been closed. Hasan says: “There were cases of winners being chosen even before the voting started: votes being rigged; studio guests being persuaded to pose as callers when technical glitch prevented genuine viewers from calling; and producers resorting to gimmicks to create ‘tension’”. According to him, the industry insiders feel that “such malpractices are inevitable in a climate of cut-throat competition with TV channels prepared to do anything to pull in views and attract advertising. Even the BBC, which doesn’t depend on commercial advertising, has been accused of chasing ratings to justify its license fee”. (As qtd. in “Phone in TV shows are scandal.”)

Actually, the term “Reality TV” is a misnomer. All these shows involve a lot of inputs that modify reality beyond recognition. Rehearsals, artificial props and simulated situations rob the shows of reality. It has been admitted that participants have to do rigorous late-night rehearsals. They are even told what jokes to crack and what and how to speak in front of the camera, thus robbing the proceedings of spontaneity and hence reality. Then, there are
attempts to spice up the proceedings through faux controversies. Take the instance of UK’s infamous Big Brother. Jade Goody’s racist remarks against Shilpa Shetty were clearly prompted by commercial interests. The two made up after the desired publicity was achieved. So, while Big Brother’s TRP’s shot up, Shilpa Shetty’s flagging career perked up too. Big Brother’s Indian avatar Big Boss also tried the controversy route to fame. It could be the excessive emotional drama played by Amit Roy in season one or the so called romance between Rahul Mahajan and Payal Rohatgi in season 2. What is ultimately wanted is TRP’s; it can be by adding the sob quotient or the emotional quotient.

In the easy “Dust Breeding” in the book *Conspiracy of Art*, Baudrillard airs his views about the reality shows. He is of the view that the purpose of reality shows is just to earn commercial value. For him our reality has become experimental. The ongoing experimentation on human beings who voluntarily remain captive in the houses of programs like big boss, MTV roadies is “a condensed version of human zoo” (*The Conspiracy of Art*, 181). But unlike animals we are not forced to stay their rather choose it as our fate in hunt scouting for 15 minute of fame. Baudrillard opines that “The reality shows act as a metaphor of the modern being enclosed in a personal loft that is no longer his/her mental/ physical universe but a tactile and digital universe, the universe of…, of digital humans caught in the labyrinth of networks, of people becoming their own white mice”. (*The Conspiracy of Art* 193). Real time vision only adds to the unreality of things. We are heading towards total deception. But this deception enthralls us and this uncertainty and rupture has a large role to play in sustaining the insatiable demand for these spectacles. With the excessive participation in all the unreal events, Baudrillard is of the view that “we are in a stage of “un coma depasse” (*The Conspiracy of Art* 199).

Reality shows are a form of voyeurism and pornography not only referring to the publicising of our private sphere but also at the excessive materialization of this whole project. In times when media became incapable of giving account of the world events, they invested in the sweet bitter pill of everyday life. They trespass our private sphere scripting, dramatising and melodramatising it. And we all are enamoured by this condition as it is an ideal state of inertia in which we have nothing to say, nothing to do. Simply cipher and not decipher. This involvement takes place in the form of public voting. But for Baudrillard this freedom to choose is not there to make things visible to the outside eye but:
...to make them transparent to themselves by infusing the masses with control while erasing all traces of operation. The audience is whence involved in a vast negative counter transference with itself and once again this the dizzying attraction of this type of a spectacle. (*The Conspiracy of Art* 182).

All this makes us reach appoint of impossible exchange as these shows exhibit “right and desire to be nothing and seen as nothing” (*The Conspiracy of Art* 182). The dilemma involved in such shows according to Baudrillard is right to be seen and at the same time not to be seen. We have right to see the dramatized version of the manufactured reality and equally do we have the right not to see the treachery and ruse these shows are playing on us. The reason as to why these programs are so popular and believed in (as is evident from the turn out of the voters and the participants) is answered by Anita Beressi in her book *Reality T.V* is of the opinion that:

The simulation of privacy, over a period of time feels authentic and indeed for the thousands this is their lived reality for the duration of the program. As a symbolic realm it is away from reality and much closer to being a metaphor for television itself- intimate, immediate in every day yet highly produced and packaged from mass consumption (21).

Roland Barthes in his book *Mythologies* talking about consumption says that “...everything in everyday life is dependent on representation which the bourgeois has and makes us have of relations between man and the world” (140). And it is the ethics pervaded by the same consumer society that their norms become a natural order. And sometimes one wonders if there is anything true or false about the ideologies being circulated by the capitalists. They are neither completely true nor false. They are a sign function which is beyond the binaries of usefulness or uselessness or good or bad. This is reality of the present when:

Spectators then become ‘exoterics of the screen, living their revolution as an exoticism of images, themselves exogenous, tourists spectators of a virtual history. From the movement studio becomes the strategic centre and screen only site of appearance, everyone wants to be on it at all costs, or gather in the street I the glare of the cameras, and these indeed film each other. The street becomes an extension of the studio, that is, of the non site of the event, of the virtual site of the event. The street itself becomes a virtual space. Site of
definitive confusion of masses and medium, of real time confusion of act and sign (The Illusion of the End 56).

This confusion and paradox is highlighted as the reality shows take pride in their confessional nature, but the confession room in the house of big boss, roadies speak for the same hollowness of language which is unable to communicate. It simply speaks. Language is also unreal and “....becomes nothing more than a medium, a visibility operator” (The Conspiracy of Art 184), losing its ironic or symbolic dimension. Baudrillard bringing in the case for the havoc created in present day’s scenario at the level of communication and language puts forth: “Communications is to language what reproduction is to sexuality”. But he says” the poetic ecstasy of our language corresponds to the libertine phase of sexuality without reproduction” (Cool Memories 2, 88).

The name The Reality Television is highly ironic. Even though the camera captures action as it occurs and no scripts are used, the individuals know they are being filmed. Sometimes they even talk directly to the cameras. Calvert in his book Voyeur Nation: Media, Privacy, and Peering in Modern Culture suggest that such shows reflect changing cultural norms. He says that: “Far from fearing the prying presence of the lens, a new generation longs to live its life out in full view for all to see….Although the generations that came of age in the 1970s and 1080s grew up on watching television, the youth of today now crave growing up in television “(32)”. The “blurring of reality” impacts not only the cast members, but those consuming and watching the shows resulting in a quest on the part of audience members for reality in an increasingly mediated world in which fact and fiction, acting and being are hard to distinguish. Reality television becomes one of the sites of fascination, where mining is supposed to implode with greater flourish; you bestow beauty on that void and give meaning to what should not have any.” (Cool Memories 35). He says that these implosions occur in terms of spectatorly and carnal visuals of reality shows which flesh out of what are ultimately our metaphysical leanings.

The soaring TRP’s and viewership of such programs vouch for the chosen servitude of the audience which so enthusiastically and religiously consume these programs. According to reports, ‘Big Boss Season 2’ has had nearly 40 lakh viewers watching the show, with a TRP (television rating points) of 1.4 between 10:00 p m and 11:00 p m. For instance, Zee SA Re Ga Ma Pa Li’l Champs got over with close to 50 lakh voters deciding on crowning Sanchita Bhattacharya from Kolkata. Baudrillard derides this fervor on the part of viewers.
thus: “In such a height of extreme visibility, the producers succeed in making the loss of all symbolic space, a form of disenchantment with life an object of contemplation, amazement and desire” (Jean Baudrillard, The Conspiracy of Art 184). For him this self alienation has reached such a degree that it can experience its own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of highest order. He takes this case as a point where:

Experimentalism takes place of reality and the imaginary. We are included in the protocols of science and verification and we are in process of dissecting-vissecting under the scalpel of camera the relational and social dimensions outside all language and any symbolic content” (The Conspiracy of Art 184).

Baudrillard in his book Cool Memories II wonders how the “mime artists do their act of keeping stock still, eyes closed, for hours on end with crowd milling all around”(22). Similarly do we remain indifferent to the shirking and dying corpses of reality all around and exhibit the calmness and complacence of the mime artists. Reality television whence becomes an aphrodisiac. We are so captivated by the aesthetics of it though it renders us useless still we take pleasure in it.

The reality shows based on adventure like “Fear Factor” et al are examples of the circumstance when all our imagination regarding sense of adventure is swept away leaving only a protocol of eating creepy insects and snakes, jumping an airplane etc. Baudrillard to this immense abysmal situation says that “When sex is no more than sex processing, it becomes transfinite and exponential. It does not reach its goal. However which it would do is to exhaust sex and to reach the end of its use” (The Conspiracy of Art 185-186). In the article published in international journal of Baudrillard studies “ Baudrillard and The Joe Schmo Show” the writer Michael Rennett comments that: “Reality shows are only side effects, if the level of reality decreases from day to day it’s only because the medium itself has passed into life” (Art and Artefact, 20). Reality television is a euphemism. Although audience members may believe they are seeing what happens “when people stop being polite and start being real,” nothing could be further from the truth. Reality shows violate the public
trust. Baudrillard names the post modern reality as an “anamorphosis” (Cool Memories II 30). It is distorted image which has started to appear normal in case of reality shows when viewed from the same lens and angle of seduction and incapability. The participants (in form of the celebrities or the viewers) have “mental and cultural profile of clones” (The Conspiracy of Art 192). The movements, words and actors already meet and all the conditions are prefabricated resulting in programmed presence. Baudrillard calls the masses in his book Vital Illusion Ubu (allusion to Alfred Jarry’s notorious invention around whom he wrote several plays. Ubu is depicted as monstrously obese. He wrecks havoc everywhere he goes.) He is of the view that we all are Ubu still blissfully ignorant of our destructiveness. And this state is more terrifying than any tragedy. He maintains: “Action or exaction? Voting, petitions, solidarity, information, human rights: all these things are gently exorted form you in form of personal or promotional blackmail” (Cool Memories II 6). No doubt all of us think that we live with our will and desire but secretly these thoughts and desires come to us from elsewhere. In lieu we have entered a phase where:

- It is not the man who drinks the tea but the tea that drinks man.
- It isn’t you who smoke the pipe but the pipe which smokes you.
- It is the book which reads me.
- It is the TV which watches me.
- It is the object that thinks me.
- It is the lens which focuses on us.
- It is the effect which causes us.
- It is language which speaks us.” (The Impossible Exchange 89).

Indifferent to every truth, reality becomes sort of a sphinx, enigmatic in its hyperconfirmity, simulating itself as virtuality or reality show. Reality becomes a hyperreality-paroxysm or parody all at once.” (Vital Illusion 77).

The instances regarding the fudging of the votes are till rampant. But the worst scandal was aired when a reality show on American television ‘Joe Millionaire’ turned out to be dupery. Television advertising and newspaper articles insisted that the show was real, unrehearsed and unscripted. Only the Internet hinted at the truth, suggesting that Joe was not who he claimed to be and that the women on the show were actresses. When it was revealed that the show was actually a hoax and that Joe was not a millionaire but a construction
worker the public trust was violated to a degree that demanded Congressional investigation. Hasan Suroor in an editorial in *The Hindu*, dated 30 January 2007, lambasting the incredibility of Big Brother reported that all participants get a fee and Shilpa Shetty was reported to have got anything between £200,000 and £300,000. There was no special prize for the winner but the editorial said Shilpa Shetty pocketed an additional £100,000.

Baudrillard problematizes the cultural role television and film play in our society, especially its ability to naturalize a fictional account as being realistic. He refers to this mode of signification as “hyperreality,” suggesting that in the process of representing the “real,” media artefacts actually create a simulation of what is real. He writes that:

> Information devours its own content. It devours its communication and the social ……. Rather than creating communications, it exhausts itself in the act of staging communication... Behind this exacerbated mise-en-scene of communication, the mass media, the pressure of information pursues an irresistible destruction of the social. Thus information dissolves meaning and dissolves the social in a sort of nebulous state dedicated not to a surplus of innovation, but, on the contrary, to total entropy. Thus the media are producers not of socialization, but of exactly the opposite, of the implosion of the social in the masses... This implosion should be analyzed according to McLuhan’s formula; the medium is the message, the consequences of which have yet to be exhausted (*Simulacra and Simulations* 80-81).

Reality shows are another spiral in the simulacrum of popular culture. This consensus to the popular culture of the neo real is the devastating virus of our modern times against which we are producing fewer and fewer antibodies. So such a stage, Baudrillard has rightly titled one of his books as “*The End of Illusion*”. This telerality and the reality of all the sophisticated technologies initiate us into deception, into opposite of illusion into total disillusionment. Wherefore Baudrillard’s isolated court to describe the present condition suits perfectly the genre of reality television as well. As it just like all reality and realism around becomes:

> Anathematic illimited.

> Transvaal express.

> Viral incorporated.
International epidemics.

Allergic apathetic agency. (Cool Memories II 88)

Baudrillard comments on our fixation to all the pseudo events and happenings around the world by saying that “what you discover you can never invent is again” this is how we found reality which remains to be invented ….. In truth, the real world among all other worlds is unimaginable. Unthinkable except as a dangerous superstitions”. (Cool Memories II 166). In this passion of the artifice, for illusion, we are undoing the beautiful constellation of meaning and reality. Reality TV is a lazy genre that substitutes manufactured personalities for real stories and takes jobs away from talented writers and directors who could probably turn out much better entertainment. And the spectators in pursuit of the real on these unreal shows posit a stage of immanent reversal, a reversal direction of direction and meaning in which things turn into their opposite.

Works Cited


