

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Vol. 4. Issue.4., 2017 (Oct-Dec)

ISSN

INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA

2395-2628(Print):2349-9451(online)

OBFUSCATING THE OBSCURE: THE CEMENTING OF VOIDS BY THE MEDIA

ROSE MARY JOSEPH

Student, Deva Matha College, Kuravilangad

Email: rosejkkunnel@gmail.com



ABSTRACT

The media has permeated every nook and corner of our quotidian lives. The media that we see today was once a scroll of parchment and quill that evolved over time with the technical advances made by mankind. Alexander Graham Bell's telephone and Marconi's radio were just the stepping stones for the revolution that we see today. While the telephone and the radio facilitated long distance communication, the advent of television ensured entertainment to the world that was a war torn mess. Today with the LED screens, laptops, mobile phones and tablets swarming our lives with a single click it's quite evident that techno culture has caught up with even the most ignorant person we've met. The media has become an indispensable 'organ' of our routine lives, an 'organ' that most of us find veritably hard to shed with every passing day. The media from its emergence has always mirrored the current social life of people. Whether it be the 1920's or 2017, the popular culture was always presented through the little devices that took over our lives. Media always expressed and manipulated culture, or propagated ideas that would fulfil the visual pleasure of the viewer.

Keywords: Simulacra, Simulation, Hyper reality

INTRODUCTION

With the rapid advances made in technology, the news media has reached out to people who use it rather efficiently to understand and perceive the unknown. Once the World Wars and the Great depression were over, the common man found himself time to spare with the various events happening around him. Anything new invoked his curious mind, and the speedily evolving news media made sure this curiosity was to be commercialized. Observing the news trends throughout the years, we can assess how efficiently sensationalism was used to develop and commercialize news. The problem that rose with the popularity of sensationalism is the distortion of truth, which made it impossible for the vast masses to know what the real truth is. It's a widely accepted fact that the world we live in today is a hyper reality, where the real and fiction are blended together as one. It's hard to distinguish where one ends and one begins.

The sad reality of today's current affairs is that the media has simply focussed its attention on speculation and suspicion, rather than on solid facts. The reality has been modelled on baseless ideas, and these ideas take the place of reality. Here what comes to one's mind is Baudrillard's concept of 'simulacra', 'simulation' and 'hyperreal'. '...Baudrillard then talks about the power of images and symbols to subvert reality. He draws the distinction between pretence and simulation via the example of illness. If a man pretends to be ill, he may sit in bed, but does not possess any symptoms of illness. A simulator, however, will possess

some of these symptoms, making it impossible to tell whether he is sick or not, provided he produces true symptoms. Baudrillard argues the impossibility of making a distinction between reality and simulation undermines the real itself.' (Zaykova) Baudrillard suggests that media today coaxes us into perceiving a modelled reality, which may have no ties to what actually happens. 'The real is produced from miniaturised units, from matrices, memory banks and command models - and with these it can be reproduced an indefinite number of times. It no longer has to be rational, since it is no longer measured against some ideal or negative instance. It is nothing more than operational. In fact, since it is no longer enveloped by an imaginary, it is no longer real at all.'

In this paper I would like to explore how the 'the Noida double murder case', the most sensational news witnessed by the country, was twisted and turned by the media persons for the past 9 years. The distortion of reality resulted in the arrest of the parents of Aarushi Talwar, one of the murdered. The case drew national attention due to the mystery surrounding the inconclusiveness of evidence.

Baudrillard's Simulacra and Simulation

Jean Baudrillard was a French sociologist, philosopher, cultural theorist, political commentator and, photographer. He has written on issues such as consumerism, gender relations, economics, social history, art, Western foreign policy and popular culture. His best known works are '*Simulacra and Simulation*' (1981), *America* (1986), and '*The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*' (1991). Postmodernism and post-structuralism are the main areas in which his works are based on.

Baudrillard in his essay *Simulations*, defines simulacrum as "...The simulacrum is never that which reveals the truth- it is the truth which conceals that there is none. The simulacrum is true." This is further credited to *Ecclesiastes*, though these words do not occur there. So from the beginning of his essay we can find Baudrillard juxtaposing the difference between reality and the idea of simulacrum. He further explains, "...It is rather a question of substituting signs of the real for the real itself, that is, an operation to deter every real process by its operational double, a metastable, programmatic, perfect descriptive machine which provides all the signs of the real and short-circuits all its vicissitudes. Never again will the real have to be produced - this is the vital function of the model in a system of death, or rather of anticipated resurrection which no longer leaves any chance even in the event of death. A hyperreal henceforth sheltered from the imaginary, and from any distinction between the real and the imaginary, leaving room only for the orbital recurrence of models and the simulated generation of difference."(3)

Simulation refers to a process in motion whereas simulacrum refers to a more static image. It is a process of destabilizing and replacing reality. There are four successive phases in the generation of this new image or reality:

- the reflection of a basic reality
- the masking and denaturing of basic reality
- the masking of the absence of basic reality
- bearing no relation to any reality whatever: it is its own pure simulacrum

In the first case, the image is a good appearance - the representation is of the order of sacrament. In the second, it is an evil appearance - of the order of malefice. In the third, it plays at being an appearance - it is of the order of sorcery. In the fourth, it is no longer in the order of appearance at all, but of simulation. (5)

The Double Murders of Noida

This is a murder that shook the conscience of the whole country. The crime took place at midnight on May 16, 2008 at Aarushi's home. Since then there have been speculations on what had happened that night, most of them by the media. A botched up investigation based on inconclusive evidence finally led to the arrest of Rajesh and Nupur Talwar, Aarushi's parents. On 12th October, 2017 the Talwars were acquitted by the Allahabad High Court. The Talwars had to spend four years in prison, which is now widely debated as a grave miscarriage of justice. Moreover, it is now widely debated as a trial by media that put salacious allegations against the Talwars.

Aarushi Talwar was a fourteen year old girl, student at Delhi Public School. She was found dead on the morning of May 16 by her parents. She had blunt head trauma and her throat was slit. Their Nepali domestic worker Hemraj Banjade was not found anywhere near the scene, which naturally aroused suspicion. Fingers

were pointed at him for two days until his dead body was found at Talwars' terrace. He was also killed in a similar fashion, with injuries from the same object and slit throat. The terrace being locked for two days, his body had lost all forensic evidences by the time he was found. Whether or not he had killed the girl is to this day a mystery.

Aarushi's father turned out to be the sole suspect due to various reasons. He was alleged to have an affair with his close friend Anita Durrani, which was baseless. The police and the media alleged that Aarushi and Hemraj knew about this relationship, which enraged Rajesh Talwar. Next it was alleged that Aarushi and Hemraj had shared a sexual relationship, to which Rajesh bore witness to, and in a fit of rage he killed them. Many such allegations were put forward, all being baseless. The inability of the police to secure the crime scene had erased all evidences, even if there had been any. This led to a difficulty in proving Rajesh was innocent. Nupur was accused of helping cover up the scene of crime.

The whole country kept scrutinizing the case. Many just wanted somebody to put the blame upon, which the police and media were doing a good job at. A few sympathised with them, thinking no parents could kill their own child. Many couldn't stomach the alleged honour killing by the parents, as they were well educated and had married inter-caste. The case reached a dead end, and the police attempted to close it. Finally in 2013, a special CBI court in Ghaziabad convicted them of murder. The Talwars continued to fight for justice, and their efforts were realized four years later.

From a blog post by Aarushi's close friend Fiza Jha, we can recognize that the Talwars were a normal, liberal family. Aarushi was a normal healthy girl, with tendencies that any teenage girl had. Her being called 'a loose girl' was completely unprofessional, that too by a senior police officer. She may have wanted to go to the movies, or have a few crushes, but she was never sexually active. The media distorted such allegations, so that there existed only one version, for convenience. Various eye catching head lines were used so that papers could be sold and links would be clicked. People closely followed the story, leaving no room for a parents of the girl to mourn. As a nation, we have been terribly cruel to the Talwars for we gave into the distorted reality that was put on a plate to us by the media.

Conclusion

The case of the double murders of Noida had been twisted and turned so often that nobody wanted to believe in the innocence of Aarushi's parents. Simulating facts led to people not being able to realise what was right and what was wrong. "Baudrillard suggests that we are being coerced into believing the simulacra around us are real." (Zaykova) We are badly in need of a critical approach to information and whom it benefits. In Aarushi's case, people went after what soothed their imagination, rather than after hard and steady facts.

In a way, the double murder case of Noida led to another double murder, the murder of the spirit of the Talwars. The huge miscarriage of justice is an embarrassment to the whole nation. The role that the media played in this game of headlines is contemptible. We need to assess the daily news we come across with precision, and a mind that is not carried away by sleazy headlines. One must always look beyond what is presented to them, for what has been presented could be a case of distorted truth. In trying to find meaning, let nobody tarnish another name by misrepresentation of truth. This was a case of botched investigation, badly handled by the media to cater to the interests of visual pleasure of the public.

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