Hyperreality and Shaping of Perceptions: Media, Advertising, and Religion in Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*

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ABSTRACT: This paper explores the influence of media, advertising, and religion on characters' perceptions of reality in Arundhati Roy's *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*. Using Jean Baudrillard's theory of hyperreality as the primary framework, the analysis demonstrates how constructed images and narratives blur the boundaries between the real and the simulated. The study examines characters such as Anjum, Saddam Hussain, Naga, and Biplap Dasgupta to show how media manipulation, advertising imagery, and religious simulacra shape identity, distort truth, and perpetuate power structures. Instances of 9/11 coverage, consumer culture, and iconographic religion highlight how hyperreality constructs subjective realities that govern individuals' experiences and societal norms. The paper argues that the novel not only critiques these mechanisms but also reveals their pervasive role in postmodern life. By foregrounding hyperreality, the discussion situates *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* as a powerful commentary on media-driven societies where truth is displaced by representation and perception is dominated by constructed realities.

KEYWORDS: Hyperreality, Media, Advertising, Religion, The Ministry of Utmost Happiness

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Introduction

Arundhati Roy's The Ministry of Utmost Happiness is the depiction of an Indian mixed and multi-layered society where the author describes the world through different characters and from different viewpoints. The author depicts the lives of several characters living in India, who are struggling to find happiness amid political and social turmoil. It explores the themes of identity, politics, and society in contemporary India. The novel tells the story of several characters whose lives intersect in unexpected ways, highlighting the complex and often contradictory nature of modern Indian society. In the novel, Roy highlights the role of the media and how it becomes a tool in the hands of the powerful to distort reality. The misrepresentation of events through the media leads to policy-making and decision-making in favor of the big beneficiaries, who, in turn, get wealthy and get their desires fulfilled. Moreover, the journalists are sketched as puppets in the hands of the elite class who intentionally fabricate the news and events that serve the interests of the government, and thus, the corrupt system prevails. This immoral system breathes through the lives of innocents, a system where human lives do not matter. In fact, Roy attempted to show the misrepresentation and the distorted realities through her characters. Indian society, on the other hand, is shown as the direct consumer of this

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falsification. The Indian society, in Baudrillardian terms, has become the "consumer society" of the fabricated agenda.

Roy's writing is characterized by vivid imagery, poetic language, and a deep sense of empathy. She addresses themes of social injustice and challenges prevalent societal norms, questioning the boundaries of gender, caste, and religion, and how it is represented. The Ministry of Utmost Happiness offers a powerful portrayal of a diverse and multi-layered India, unveiling the facts about characters and events that are consumed by the public as reality, especially in the post-modern era.

Hyperreality

A sign is a fundamental concept in understanding how meaning is produced and communicated. The linguistic sign unites, not a thing and a name, but a concept and a sound pattern. The connection between the signifier and the signified is what creates meaning. The signifier and signified cannot be separated from each other as they are the two sides of one single sheet. According to Smith (2010), it is the signified that Baudrillard (1994) comes to observe as problematic in his theory of the sign, where, eventually, a sign becomes a simulacrum, which means that it bears no relation whatsoever to reality. Jean Baudrillard (1929-2007) a French philosopher and poet, sees the postmodern world as based on constructed realities. He discards the conventional claim of referentiality where, in its arbitrary nature, a signifier corresponds to its signified. Poster states, "As Lyotard put it, the metanarratives of the past have collapsed, creating a new theoretical situation in which the concept can no longer pretend to control or grasp its object" (p.2). The lack of connection between a concept and its object gave rise to "hyperreality," the new linguistic state of society (Poster, 2001).

Baudrillard (1994) defined hyperreal as "the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal" (p.1). Baudrillard's (1994) theory of "Hyperreality" suggests that in contemporary society, we are surrounded by images and representations of reality that often obscure the true nature of things. These images and representations can take the place of the real and come to be perceived as real. According to Gane (2010), "the hyper-real is that which moves towards the 'more real than real'...Baudrillard concludes, the hyper-real can 'no longer [be] the mirror of reality'" (p.96).

Lane (2000) contends that "Baudrillard thinks that hyperreality will be the dominant way of experiencing and understanding the world" (p.87). Reality that has become hyper-reality and hyper-reality are our experiences of reality that are increasingly mediated by simulations and images that distort or obscure the truth. Baudrillard (2000), states that "if the Real is disappearing, it is not because of a lack of it—on the contrary, there is too much of it. It is the excess of reality that puts an end to reality" (p.65). What is true is irrelevant in the postmodern age. The audience's attention is the only thing that matters, thus presentation is everything. Hyperreal, according to Baudrillard (1994), is more than real. Media technologies create realities and experiences that are more vivid and exhilarating than those in real life. Hyperreal world signs, visuals, and codes govern ideas and behavior in the postmodern era.

Kellner and Best (1991) highlight the role of mass media, particularly television and digital media, in constructing hyper-reality. They argue that the media's pervasive presence and its ability to disseminate images and information at an accelerated pace contribute to the construction of a mediated world that often supersedes actual lived experiences. In this hyperreal environment, individuals and societies increasingly

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derive their sense of reality from the media representations they consume. Baudrillard (1994), describes the loss of the real in these words as described by Poster (2001), "It is no longer a question of imitation, nor duplication, nor even parody. It is rather a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real" (p.167).

Through an in-depth exploration of hyperreality in The Ministry of Utmost Happiness, this article aims to shed light on how Arundhati Roy employs the concept to examine the complexities of modern society. By analyzing the impact of hyperreality on the characters and the broader social context portrayed in the novel, we gain a deeper understanding of the author's critique and the potential for resistance and transcendence in a hyperreal world. The political and social complexities in the novel are presented through a multi-layered lens, reflecting the hyperreal nature of the conflict and its far-reaching consequences. The novel tends to reflect events that took place in real life and describe how the characters in the novel responded to those happening. All of the major and minor events in the novel are transmitted through media, which gives the reader an insight into the misrepresentation of events that favor the powerful and affect the masses in a negative way.

The author of the novel has unveiled several events in the novel where media and media owners have strings of the public in their hands, and they can make the public believe what they want to believe. According to Alam (2021), Arundhati Roy gives a thorough analysis of the media's function in propagating the prevalent ideologies and values of the ruling classes in the novel The Ministry of Utmost Happiness. Therefore, analyzing the events and characters in the novel through the Baudrillardian concept of Hyperreality could be more reliable in order to know about certain acts and their consequences. Ultimately, this article seeks to contribute to the ongoing discussion surrounding hyperreality and its implications in contemporary literature and society at large.

Factors Influencing Characters' Perception of Reality

1. Media

In the essay "The Masses", Baudrillard (2001), described the strong role of media and how it shapes the way people think. Different philosophers have diverse approaches toward media, like McLuhan (1964), who explained media and its role in technological terms, while Enzenberger (1974) discussed media in terms of its interaction with people. Baudrillard (2001) acknowledged both of the positions, where one is technological and the other ideological, thus according to Baudrillard (2001), these two positions inspire the entire contemporary practice of the media. It is the social perspective of the media that attracts Baudrillard (1994), to write about its role in the postmodern era. For Baudrillard (2001), the media is the effector of ideology, an active force that affects our social interactions, shaping and distorting people's perceptions. Press and Williams (2010) maintain the view that almost no moment of our existence is free from the mediation of the media. The influencing and altering nature of media highlights the notion of control and power and how they operate in postmodern societies. The media has a solid relation with power; therefore, it maintains, represents, and justifies the acts that suit the powerful.

The novel The Ministry of Utmost Happiness (2017) tends to reflect events that took place in real life and describe how the characters in the novel responded to those happening. The lifespan of characters in the novel witness events like 9/11, the Bhopal Gas Tragedy, communal violence, various protests, and the Kashmir issue. All of the major and minor events are transmitted through media which gives the reader an insight into

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the misrepresentation of events that favor the powerful and negatively affect the masses. 9/11, for example, haunts not only Americans but all the people around the world even today, and has been televised repeatedly on mainstream media creating chaos in one part of the world while yielding hate in other parts of the world. After the attack on the Twin Towers, the Indian "poet prime minister" announced publically that "The Mussalman, he doesn't like the Other [...] His Faith he wants to spread through Terror" (p.41). The speech instantly spread through the media resulting in violence and hate among the people. Indian Muslims on the other hand become prey to the violence. The symbolic event of 9/11 which was mediated through media led the Indian government "to pass a new anti-terrorism law as a safety precaution" (42) and as a result, hate and antagonism against Muslims in India found a new way.

A railway coach was burned in Gujarat where sixty Hindus were killed and for this hundreds of Muslims were detained "under the new terrorism law" (p.44). Ironically, no one challenged the political narrative of the "poet prime minister" on any organized forum, this is because people's perceptions were created by media and people believed in this constructed reality. Media's propagation of 9/11 led Zakir Mian lost his life and Anjum suffered a lot. Anjum was accompanied by Zakir Mian (a friend of Anjum) to a shrine where a furious Hindu mob kills Muslims because Muslims are believed to be behind every terrorist act. According to Luke (1991), unity is constructed through the mobilization of images and illusions rather than organic social bonds. In the Khwabgah, they watched the news when "Zainab counted ten planes crashing into ten buildings" (p.40). This means that repeating the same footage on media led to the conditioning of the same event (intentionally), making it more than real, a hyper-real event.

The author of the novel criticizes the media as something that can make anyone "become a cult figure overnight" (p.102). A tubby old Gandhian, a social worker, becomes a celebrity overnight when he announces a fast to death for eradicating India from corruption. His every action was so instantly mediated through media that his "each sigh, each widespread instruction to the people around him, [is] being broadcast live through the night" (p.101). As a result, he got a large audience where youngsters were more in number. The youngsters who were "innocents of the history and politics so far" (ibid) started the "digital-age media campaign" (ibid) had become prey to the media and its hyperreality. Furthermore, Gandhian's instant popularity makes him happy, signifying that he is not an honest activist fighting corruption, as a sincere activist shouldn't be thrilled by his "instant stardom" (p.102).

In the novel, The Ministry of Utmost Happiness (2017), the media is frequently depicted as distorting reality and shaping perception. Anjum, the Hijra was often interviewed by journalists in order to create a story about her and her Muslim family. She would be encouraged by the interviewers to talk against her "conventional Muslim parents" who had been cruel to her, but they were "disappointed when she told them how much her mother and father loved her" (p.26). This is how the media tried to falsify the facts about the Muslim Hijra and shape the point of view of the people against Muslims and Islam. Baudrillard (1994) believes that the media manipulates in all directions because it carries both meaning and counter-meaning.

Furthermore, Anjum was once shown an MMS by Nimmo Gorakhpori, her friend from Khwabgah, in which a rooster seemed to say "Ya Allah". Anjum was so astonished by the sight of this rooster that she considered it a sign from the divine and said that "even a simple rooster knew! From that day onwards her faith deepened" (p.69). As Baudrillard (1983) explains, "It is now impossible to isolate the process of the real or to prove the

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real" (p.21). This is where the boundary between reality and imagination gets blurred. These images are evidence of influencing Anjum and her faith. Later on, she was given a new mobile phone by Nimmo with the rooster MMS saved in it. Anjum was so happy with this gift that she thanked her friend by saying, "She now felt she had a direct line to God" (p.72). Although she knew the manipulative intent of the journalists whom she resisted to make a story about her Muslim parents, Anjum was trapped and influenced by images of a Rooster which seemed to recite the name of God.

Another interesting character in the novel is Saddam Hussain, who was a Hindu and whose real name was Dayachand, to take revenge for his father's killer, he changed his name. He was once passing by a TV showroom when he watched the video of Saddam Hussain (the former president of Iraq) hanging, thus he was so inspired by Saddam Hussain's courage in the face of death that he changed his name. He does not know about Saddam Hussain, but it "give [him] the courage to do what [he] had to do and face the consequences like him" (p.90). Saddam forges purpose and direction in his life by immersing himself in the realm of television. In doing so, he constructs his own representation within the simulated world of TV, molding his identity to mirror that of the simulated hero, whom he frequently observes on the screen. The irony unfolds as Saddam fabricates his personal simulacrum from within the larger simulacrum of television, employing a simulation to shape his existence. Striving to infuse life with meaning and to define his identity, he draws inspiration from the television-induced hero. His vision of reality becomes more real than the real.

Saddam's perception of reality becomes clearer when he is asked by Anjum whether "[he] make(s) all [his] life's big decision based on mobile phone videos" (p.407). Saddam's response to the said question is interesting when he asserts "That's how it is these days, yaar. The world is only videos now" (ibid). The author explores into the inescapable influence of mobile technology and its potential to distort our understanding of reality. The reliance on mobile videos as the primary source of information and understanding implies that media outlets hold significant power in shaping our perception of reality. This raises questions about the potential for manipulation and bias, and the need for critical consumption of digital content. According to Ucar (2008), "In the postmodernist understanding, cultural consumption equals the means of constructing an identity" (p.2). In this situation, identity functions as an adornment that can be discarded or embraced at will. Mackay (1997) rephrased Baudrillard's (1998) concept that our identity is shaped by what we choose to consume. Saddam Hussain is forced by hyperreality to accept and wear the identity of another person. Our conceptions of reality and self-perception that the elite class indoctrinates into us often determine the way we exist. We frequently hold the belief that we and the social realities around us are correct and that are accepted in society. As a result, we behave and conduct in accordance with social expectations. Therefore, we are destitute of our ability to think and act as we choose because all of our behavior conforms to social standards and norms.

On the other hand, Anjum, listening to the story of Saddam Hussain (Dayachand) dislikes the former president of Iraq, "Saddam Hussain was a bastard, he killed so many people" (ibid). In both cases, apart from their likes and dislikes, their perception of reality is shaped by images. According to Onal (2019), everyone decides what is real for themselves; thus, personal belief trumps all, and there is no need to search for a single truth anymore. It is therefore, the absence of a single truth gives space to the constructed realities.

Nagaraj, one of the leading characters in the novel, must be taken into consideration because he is a "star journalist" and a "bright puppet" (p.166). His character is mostly described through Biplap Dasgupta, Naga's friend since school, and a bureaucrat. Naga has been a Kashmir correspondent for years. Roy describes the character of Naga as one who knows the reality about the Kashmir issue, but still, his silence, his journalistic silence, surprises the reader. Naga, in his student life, has iconoclastic and radical views about religion, politics, and society, but ultimately turned into mainstream journalism. Naga's transition to a puppet mainstream journalist is termed by Biplap as a "journey to the dark side" (p.162). Despite knowing the facts, he never says anything against the government because he is controlled by the government. Sometimes, the simulated realities are institutionalized and supported by the powerful to justify and maintain their hegemony. Naga was handled by the bureau so much that his relationship with the bureau is characterized as "a marriage and not a one-night stand" (p.163). The character of Naga is used as a tool in disseminating the manipulated information and gets corrupted by hyperreality.

Another prominent character in the novel is Biplap Dasgupta, a high-grade bureaucrat in the Indian government. While outwardly a conventional high-ranking official, his character embodies the intricacies and contradictions of hyperreality, offering an essential lens through which to examine the novel's thematic threads. He served in the Indian embassy in Kabul before he was stationed in Srinagar, Kashmir. It gives him immense pride to be a servant of the Indian government. Lane (2000) explains Baudrillard's (1994) point of view of hyperreality on the Watergate scandal, stating that it regenerates the principle that "the government is fundamentally moral in its approaches" a morality that is shared by society. During his service, he lives life with "happy consciousness" a Marcuse's (1964) phrase, where one believes that the system is primarily good.

Biplab carefully presents himself as an example of success. His contented life, family, and significant position align with the hyperreal world's emphasis on constructed identities and appearances. However, beneath this squarely crafted facade lies a deep-seated dissatisfaction and disillusionment with his life and the society he inhabits. This internal conflict underscores the inherent duplicity of hyperreality, where individuals often find themselves caught between maintaining societal expectations and seeking genuine meaning. While watching television news about simultaneous explosions that killed and injured many people, Biplap says that "blast evoke a range of emotions in me, but sadly, shock is no longer one of them" (p.143), revealing the influence of hyperreality in his life.

Kashmiri people's calls for freedom and demands are masked and oppressed by press releases. These separatists are often labeled as terrorists by the media and deprived the inhabitants of Kashmir of their right to live in freedom. Biblap sees both sides of the issue have become disoriented in recognizing and accepting the truth. He loses his moral courage to stand against the atrocities of the Indian government that are being done to Kashmiris.

Biplap's complicity and disappointment embody the absurd nature of navigating a hyperreal world. He actively participates in the system's corruption as a high-ranking official; for example, he admits that we fund some of the newspapers, "to tell you the truth, we even funded some of them" (p.173). At the end of the novel, he simultaneously voices his disapproval and even assists individuals like Tilo, who actively challenge the system's legitimacy. Biplap marvels at the ignorance of news channels and regrets his involvement in them, "all my life I have been a part of it" (p.430). This internal conflict highlights the individual's complex relationship

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with hyperreality, often caught between maintaining their position within the system and yearning for authenticity.

Biplab's lifelong one-sided love for Tilo serves as a driving force throughout the narrative. It symbolizes his nostalgia for something beyond the superficiality and vacuum he finds in his own life. According to Baudrillard (1994), "When the real is no longer what it was, nostalgia assumes its full meaning" (p.4). Tilo's defiance and free spirit against societal norms offer different ways of being, challenging Biplab's constructed identity and encouraging him to question the very nature of reality.

Biplab's role as a recorder and narrator of events further underlines the blurred lines between simulation and reality in the hyperreal world. His observations and memories are often fragmented and subjective, reflecting the inherent unreliability of individual narratives in a world where truth is frequently constructed and manipulated. For example, it is an absurd notion for Biplap to say that "Kashmir could have freedom" (p.160). Despite showing moments of defiance and rebellion, Biplab eventually remains stuck within the system he critiques. He fails to fully break free and embrace other possibilities represented by Tilo and other characters. This incapability to surpass the hyperreal world reveals the limitations of individual struggle against the powerful and pervasive forces that shape our perceptions of reality.

2.   Advertisement

Arundhati Roy's The Ministry of Utmost Happiness is not just a captivating novel; it's a scathing social commentary, particularly when it comes to the insidious influence of advertising and its hyperrealistic portrayal of reality. For Baudrillard (1983), advertisement has taken a central role in shaping the perception of reality in the postmodern era, because advertising supplies information about an object to promote its sales. Baudrillard (2001) terms contemporary society as a consumer society where we make sense of products through advertisements. Baudrillard (2001) argues "If we consume the product through the product itself, we consume its meaning through advertising" (p.10).

In Arundhati Roy's The Ministry of Utmost Happiness, advertisements play a significant role in shaping Anjum's perception of reality, particularly through the concept of hyper-reality. Hyper-reality, as proposed by Jean Baudrillard (1994), suggests a simulated world constructed through media and consumerism, blurring the lines between the real and the artificial. Through Anjum's engagement with advertisements, we see how this fabricated reality impacts her understanding of herself, her desires, and the world around her. For example, Anjum narrates the flyover story to her adopted daughter, Zainab, about how she was "walking under a huge advertisement of a wet woman drying herself with a Bombay Dyeing towel. And the towel was as big as a carpet" (p.34). The advertisement describing Anjum's Flyover story in The Ministry of Utmost Happiness offers a fascinating glimpse into her unique perception of reality. According to Baudrillard (1994), "huge billboards express by inviting you to relax and to choose in complete serenity… [It] looks at you, you look at yourself in it" (p.76).

The advertisement itself blurs the lines between reality and fantasy. The exaggerated size of the towel and the woman's pose create a hyperreal image, detached from the actual trauma of the police chase Anjum experienced. Anjum edited her stories so "to please Zainab, Anjum began to rewrite a simpler, happier life for herself" (ibid). This "rewritten" version reflects Anjum's conscious effort to shield Zainab from the harshness of her past. It portrays a whimsical moment of rain and humor, replacing fear with playful exaggeration. This

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fight against the dominant standards of commodities suggests how Anjum shields herself and her daughter from the grand scheme of things. They try to adjust themselves in a society where injustices do not bother.

The advertisement showcases a beautiful, white woman, embodying the dominant beauty standards that exclude Anjum and other transgender individuals. This reinforces the societal norms that marginalize them. This suggests that advertisements create not only commodified culture but also advocate marginalization. However, Anjum subverts this power dynamic by framing the advertisement within her own narrative. Therefore, "Every hint of adversity and unhappiness was required to be excised from Anjum's story" (p.34). This act of appropriation reclaims agency and challenges the exclusionary ideals promoted by mainstream media.

Anjum's focus on the absurdity of the giant towel demonstrates her resilience in the face of adversity. Humor becomes a coping mechanism, transforming a potentially traumatic experience into a lighthearted anecdote. This element aligns with Anjum's broader personality, marked by wit and an ability to find joy in unexpected places. Despite the humor, the advertisement hints at Anjum's internal conflict. The stark contrast between the idealized woman and her own lived experience could trigger moments of self-consciousness and insecurity. The exaggerated size of the towel, covering the woman's body, might subtly reflect Anjum's struggle with societal expectations of femininity and physical appearance.

Another main character of the novel Tilo, is also portrayed as one influenced by advertisements, which she confronted. She does not say anything about advertisements that she sees; instead the narrator describes several advertisements on her mobile phone and a TV screen. However, the reader comes to know the influence of advertisements through her actions. For example, Tilo's mental illness creates a distance from mainstream culture, including the persuasive messages of advertising. For example, she received a text message stating, "Organic Homes on NH24 Ghaziabad … Booking starting at Rs 35000 For Discount call 91-103-957-9-8" (p.236). She views them with suspicion, recognizing their constructed nature and manipulative intent. This skepticism aligns with her broader rejection of conventional narratives and societal norms.

However, Tilo isn't entirely immune to advertising's allure. She occasionally utilizes its imagery and language in her own fantastical stories, playfully subversively incorporating them into her personal hyperreality. For example, she once writes to a doctor that she witnesses a scientific phenomenon where two bulls living near her house grow tall to stare at her in her second-floor window, and "when they piss, they lift their legs like dogs" (p.298). This act could be seen as a way to reclaim agency and deconstruct the power dynamics inherent in advertising.

Despite her critical awareness, Tilo exhibits moments of vulnerability to advertising's influence, particularly regarding beauty standards. For instance, upon seeing a Nicaraguan jaguar in a zoo, she wished to be like him, for representing an object, "Tilo felt like him. Dusty, old and supremely indifferent. Maybe someday she would have an expensive city car named after her" (p.236). She desires to become a sign among other signs to differentiate herself from others. This is the death of the subject in postmodern culture and the triumph of the object over the subject. She wished to escape into the system of signs because signs are more valued in postmodernity. Luke (1991) argues that "reality is the effect of sign. The system of reference is only the result of power of the sign itself" (p.357). Her self-consciousness about her appearance, especially in contrast to the idealized images presented in advertisements, hints at a potential internal conflict.

3.   Religion

In his early school life, Naga's speech is of utmost importance in challenging the mainstream religious belief of Hinduism. Baudrillard (1994) questions "What becomes of the divinity when it reveals itself in icons, when it is multiplied in simulacra?" (p.4). In Baudrillard's opinion, iconoclasts have predicted the "omnipotence of simulacra" (ibid.) that can efface God from the consciousness of man. Naga, like iconoclasts, directly challenges the traditional Hindu belief system by calling 330 million idols "mute" and deities like Ram and Krishna "selfish." This can be seen as a critique of how religion, with its constructed narratives and rituals, can serve as a hyperreal experience. In alignment with Baudrillard's (1994) conception of hyperreal divinity, Geoffroy (2012) asserts that "the image of Jesus with a beard and long hair that we are familiar with in our Western civilization is not real, but merely a simulacrum of divinity, a hyper-real divinity." (p.26-27)

This model of divinity has the potential to erase reality from the human consciousness. Wolny (2017), states, "Baudrillard argues, the power has remained with the images as the "murderers" of the real, "murderers of their own model" (p.78). It can also be seen in the case of Naga as a distraction from reality of divinity and addressing real-world problems like hunger, disease, and poverty. He further criticizes faith in "monkeys and elephant-headed apparitions," a reference to Hanuman and Ganesha, respectively. This challenges the power dynamics within religion, where symbolic representations hold sway over practical action. The speech highlights Naga's disillusionment with religion as a solution to societal problems. He argues that blind faith in these constructed realities only obscures the need for concrete action and social change. Applying the concept of hyperreality, one could argue that Naga is pointing out how religious faith acts as a hyperreal construct, offering comfort and meaning but failing to address the actual suffering of the masses. The "idols" and "deities" become simulations of power and salvation, distracting from the need to grapple with real-world issues.

Findings and Conclusion

Advertisements play a significant role in changing people's perception of reality and force them to adopt the idealized version of reality. Advertisements in "The Ministry of Utmost Happiness" are not merely background noise; they actively shape characters' perceptions of reality, highlighting the dangers of hyper-reality and its impact on individuals who exist outside the dominant narratives. For example, Anjum's journey offers a critical look at the constructed nature of our contemporary world and the importance of recognizing and resisting the manipulative power of advertising. According to Onal (2019), there is some possibility to escape hyperreality. This fight against the dominant standards of commodities suggests how Anjum shields herself and her daughter from the grand scheme of things. They try to adjust themselves in a society where injustices do not bother. This suggests that advertisements create not only a commodified culture but also advocate marginalization. However, it's crucial to note that Anjum's relationship with advertisements is not entirely passive. She possesses a critical awareness of their manipulative nature, and at times, she even resists their pull. For instance, her decision to become a hijra challenges the idealized norms of femininity perpetuated by mainstream advertising.

The character of Tilo is another example of advertisements' role in an individual's life. From Car's logos to TV ads, she is entrapped in the charm of advertisements, leading her to experience a hyperreality. As a result, it causes her abnormal mental health, like seeing bulls taller than a building and urinating like a dog. Besides

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her mental health, she desires to become a sign among other signs to differentiate herself from others. This is the death of the subject in postmodern culture and the triumph of the object over the subject. She wished to escape into the system of signs because signs are more valued in postmodernity.

Our analysis suggests that advertisements in the selected text are not merely background noise; rather, they actively color how characters see the world, highlighting the dangers of a fabricated reality and its impact on those who don't fit the mainstream narratives. It is one of the main factors in constructing and distorting characters' perception of reality in the contemporary world.

The media acts as a powerful manipulator of information and narratives, shaping characters' perceptions of reality and dictating what constitutes "truth." This can lead to the creation of alternative realities and misinformation. Several events in the novel, like 9/11, communal violence in Gujarat, the Bhopal Gas tragedy, and conflict in Kashmir, broadcast through TV, ultimately benefited those in power. The media employs two significant instruments for manipulation and distortion: advertising and propaganda. From the prime minister to journalists, each individual wields the role of a propagandist, exerting control over the content disseminated through mainstream media channels.

Our study suggests that the perception of reality of certain characters has been influenced by media like Anjum, Saddam Hussain, and Nagaraj (Naga). Anjum's watching videos on her mobile phone illustrates her religious beliefs deepening by witnessing a rooster say "Ya Allah". She is astonished to see that even a small rooster knows God. When she gets a mobile phone from Nimmo she feels direct contact with God. The result of this can be seen when she ordered Saddam Hussain to "Recite the Kalima ...as though she were Emperor Aurangzeb" (p.85). By comparing Anjum with Emperor Aurangzeb, Roy skillfully reveals the effects of MMS on her beliefs. Although she knew the manipulative intent of the journalists whom she resisted to make a story about her Muslim parents, Anjum was trapped and influenced by images of a Rooster which seemed to recite the name of God. To use Eco's (1986) phrase, this is a kind of "faith in fakes".

In the case of Saddam Hussain's character, two forces played a vital role in changing and influencing his perception of reality. Firstly, the social construction that led him to change his identity. Dominant ideologies, cultural norms, and societal expectations impose limitations and biases on individual understanding, shaping how characters perceive and interact with the hyperreal world. For example, the character of Saddam Hussain is evidence of how social construct in Indian society works. He belongs to the lower caste, which is called the "untouchables," compelled to adopt a simulated identity of an Iraqi president, Saddam Hussain, although his real name is Dayachand. He did so to hide his identity and to fit into the existing social order, where he could live in comfort. Our study suggests that the character of Saddam Hussain is forced to dissociate from reality due to social constructs prevailing in society, leading to confusion and a sense of detachment from the world around him. Secondly, the hyperreality of TV screens persuades Saddam Hussain to change his identity from Dayachand. He is amazed by the video of Iraqi President Saddam Hussain's courage when he was about to be hanged. Anjum asked him, "But why call yourself Saddam?" (p.85). He could have chosen any other name like Raza, Hamid, Asif, etc., but he was attracted by the blue glare of the TV screen. Saddam's perception of reality becomes clearer when he is asked by Anjum whether "[he] makes (s) all [his] life's big decision based on mobile phone videos" (p.407). Saddam's response to the said question is interesting when he asserts "That's how it is these days, yaar. The world is only videos now" (ibid). The author explores the inescapable

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influence of mobile technology and its potential to distort our understanding of reality. The reliance on mobile videos as the primary source of information and understanding implies that media outlets hold significant power in shaping our perception of reality. This raises questions about the potential for manipulation and bias, and the need for critical consumption of digital content. To sum up, it can be argued that our identities are influenced by both unconscious social conditioning and conscious consumer choices.

Being a "star reporter," Naga's perception of reality is also affected by his simulation on the TV screen. Despite knowing the facts, he never says anything against the government because he was mesmerized by his reflection on TV as a "celebrity". Naga was enjoying his status as a "star reporter" because he was fed advanced information from the Bureau, which made him better than his other colleagues. Biplap called this "another kind of drug racket", where "we were the drug dealers [and] he was our addict" (p.163). Despite knowing the facts about Indian Army atrocities in Kashmir, he never states the facts because he has a handler in the Bureau. Therefore, our study suggests that Naga's perception of reality was compromised due to his fake popularity as a journalist. Our findings suggest that sometimes the simulated realities are institutionalized and supported by the powerful to justify and maintain their hegemony. Although in his school life, he resisted the hyperreal religious dieties by calling them "mute", but ultimately became prey to his hyperreal popularity.

Our findings suggest that religion also plays a vital role in shaping the perception of reality. In the case of Naga's speech, Roy draws the reader's attention to the hyperreal icons of divinity. Roy's depiction of divinity, especially in a speech by Naga, matches the Baudrillardian concept of religion. Naga addresses the divine icons by calling them "mute idols," forcing the reader to critically re-evaluate the idea of divinity that has no solution to the real-world problems. Baudrillard's (1994) proclamation that the simulacrum does not hide the truth, but instead the absence of it, stands true here. The icons of divinity murder their own models; thus, it remains, according to Naga "mute idols". Therefore, it can be argued that religious faith also plays a hyperreal role in creating the perception of reality.

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