

The Truth Machines: Policing Violence and Scientific Interrogations in India

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In 2009, I followed the trial of a man who the Delhi police accused of being a terrorist. His crime? He was a trade union organizer, who allegedly possessed Marxist literature. India's anti-terrorism laws are regularly used to persecute minority populations and to suppress dissent. One does not have to commit acts of violence to be branded as a terrorist by the government. Possessing 'suspect' literature is enough.

After they completed the investigation, the police requested a magistrate to permit a "Narco Test on the accused." This is one type of 'truth machine' employed by the police in India. According to advocates of this technology, the intravenous drugs administered during the test induce the subject to respond truthfully to questions. While there is scant scientific backing for this and similar technologies, the police wanted to subject this man - without his consent - to this test, so that he could "disclose all useful information which he knows being (sic) a member of the [terrorist organization]."

The defence lawyers objected on the grounds that he was medically unfit and that it violated his right against self-incrimination. The magistrate ordered the man to undergo a medical examination at a prestigious medial institution to investigate whether he could withstand the test. The institute assembled its most senior doctors who performed a number of medical tests on the man - without his consent - and established there was "no medical evidence to suggest that... [he could] not withstand [the] test." The magistrate also dismissed the constitutional arguments as she was bound by a higher court's decision which held that the test is a "modern and scientific technique ... necessary for the conduct of a fair investigation."

Ultimately, the test was never performed. The defence lawyers appealed and obtained a stay on the magistrate's order and the trial proceeded without the 'evidence' from the test. In informal conversations with police officers, they told me and other defence lawyers that they never actually intended to use statements from the test. Why then were the police so keen to conduct it? How did a medical institution come to be co-opted by the investigative process? How did technologies with little scientific backing embed themselves into the Indian investigative and judicial process?

Jinee Lokaneeta's *Truth Machines* provides a way to answer these questions and uses them as an entry point to theorize the relationship between the police, science, and state violence. The book looks at how a number of 'truth machines' - polygraphs, brainscans and narcoanalysis - have entered the architecture of the Indian police and forensic system. By looking at the role of the police in enacting both welfare and violence, this book aims to complicate the relationship between law, state, and violence. Further, by looking at the gradual and haphazard incorporation of 'scientific' investigation methods into bureaucracy of a police investigation, the book seeks to move away from frames of state power that employ Weberian rationality or Agamben's exceptionalism, to provide a disaggregated, contingent theory of state power.

The book argues that the reliance upon truth machines in India emerged in a milieu where torture and even deaths at the hand of the police, are rife. According to official reports, police employed torture to elicit confessions and information from suspects. In bemoaning the colonial approach of the Indian police, these reports argued that the state ought to invest in 'scientific' methods of investigating crimes. Officially, truth machines were meant to replace 'third degree' methods employed by the police. But through an insightful series of interviews with police officials, the book argues that truth technologies do not emerge out of an abhorrence of torture. Instead, their use is motivated by a fear that torture may lead to the

death of suspects. In the logic of the police officers then, the use of truth machines is actually a form of care, a means to prevent death.

The book argues that this 'pastoral' aspect of police power exists alongside its violent aspect. In so arguing, it joins those who look at police power outside the lens of violence like Beatrice Jauregui (*Provisional Authority: Police, Order and Security in India*, U Chicago P, 2016) and who provide a bipolar concept of state power such as Bhrigupati Singh (*Poverty & the Quest for Life: Spiritual & Material Striving in Rural India*, U Chicago P, 2015). I wonder if 'pastoral' - implying care - is the right concept to describe the police's fear that the people they torture may die. Nevertheless, the book provides a fascinating insight into how the police harness the idea of tempering their own violence by the use of techniques they regard as scientific.

Far from reducing violence, the book reveals that use of these truth machines is enmeshed within systems of torture. Often, suspects - particularly those accused of terrorism - are tortured and *then* subject to these truth machines. Furthermore, the performance of these tests are themselves forms of torture. Apart from the fact that these tests are often administered against the will of the suspects, what often accompanies the tests is physical violence at the hands of the medical practitioners who administer them. One terror-suspect reveals how prior to a narco-analysis test, the doctor who performed the test beat him and then threatened him with an "AIDS injection" if he refused to give correct answers. After administering the serum, the doctor would pinch his ears with pliers if he did not give the answer she expected. What these accounts reveal is that while involvement of the medical establishment in the forensic architecture of the state was initially seen as a way to ensure the welfare of suspects, what has actually occurred is the extension of spaces of torture into other, more 'scientific' domains.

This is unsurprising, as the book shows how both torture and truth machines are premised on the logic that "the body can betray the conscious will and reveal the truth" (49). Both torture and truth machines are premised on the idea that the brain is a repository of objective memories which can be revealed by a manipulation of the body. This is tellingly revealed by early advocates of truth machines in the US who described them as a 'painless third degree' which would obviate the necessity of torture to reveal the truth. What sustains the myth that these machines can reveal truth, is the cultural production of scientific validity. Even as scientists have consistently refused to back these truth machines, the book argues that aggressive marketing by companies, combined with regular media narratives about the truths revealed by these machines has sustained the idea that these techniques are scientific.

Legal discourse has also added to the aura of legitimacy that surrounds truth machines. The book shows that courts in India have turned to science as a way to modernise the legal system, as a way to limit the state's violence. In characterising these machines as scientific, the legal system portrays itself as moving away from violence to rationality. But, in a "peculiarly postcolonial" move, the desire to modernise the legal system through the use of science is accompanied by a reluctance to challenge the conditions which make violence possible. What results is, what the book calls, the 'scaffolding' (140-141) of the rule of law, where law and science come together to provide a truth of a crime in "public through procedures meant to avoid the theatrical production of torture" (141). Legal and scientific processes performatively produce an objective truth, while occluding the violence at the heart of the state's production of truth.

This is perhaps why the Delhi police asked for permission to conduct a narcoanalysis test in the case of the man whose trial I observed. In order to mask the political nature of their case, they sought to paint their investigation as objective and rational. It did not matter if the test was actually conducted, as the police used it only as a prop to establish their investigation's apolitical credentials. The application to conduct the test was filed by the

prosecution almost as an afterthought. Far from being a well-thought out strategy, the police belatedly sought to hide the violence of their prosecution under the cover of “scientific methods of interrogation.” As Lokaneeta’s insightful work shows us, violence and contingency remains at the heart of the state, even as science and the law constantly work together to maintain the facade of coherence and rationality. The book charts a way to understand the modes through which state violence operates, and the ways in which it can be revealed.

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