

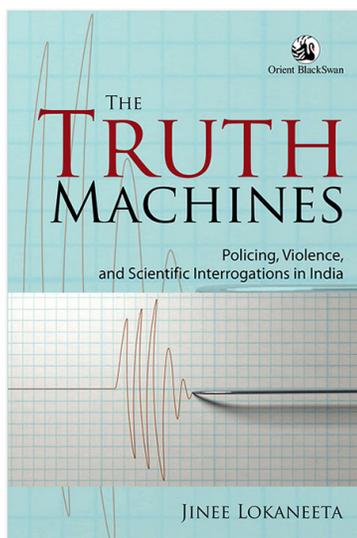


BOOK REVIEW

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The Truth Machines: Policing, Violence and Scientific Interrogations in India

Oishani Nandi reviews "The Truth Machines: Policing, Violence and Scientific Interrogations in India", a thorough examination on the current status of interrogation techniques in India and its implications on today's society.



The Truth Machines by
Jinee Lokaneeta

Through a comprehensive analysis of case studies surrounding policing, violence, and scientific truth determination systems in India, *The Truth Machines* grapples with the “well-intentioned”, scientific methods of interrogation. The traditional methods of interrogation have been underplayed through society’s usage of euphemistic terms, such “enhanced interrogation techniques”, for what is truly a violation of human rights. Jinee Lokaneeta brings this issue to light along with questioning and analysing the validity, morality and role of these methods in our judicial and criminal systems. The book primarily analyses the current frameworks in place that explain and justify the abuse of power, their root causes and the adequacy of these pre-existing frameworks. The book then moves onto exploring the inner workings of our legal and scientific systems and how they generate institutions of state power and legal violence.

The three primary interrogative systems that are focused on in *The Truth Machines* are the usage of deception detection tests (DDT), ie. lie detector machines, brain scans and narcoanalysis in our modern policing system. The lie detector technique utilises the polygraph machine which examines several physiological responses of the subject such as heart rate, blood pressure and etc. Through a series of questioning, and the physiological indicators, the polygraph determines whether the subject is telling the truth. Brain scans or brain mapping utilise machines such as the fMRI and EEG to examine the subject’s neurological systems and determine the credibility of what they are saying through a line of questioning. Finally, narcoanalysis (the usage of the truth serum) involves intravenous injection of anesthetic drugs to put the subject into a vulnerable and hypnotic state. The subject is then put under a line of questioning is then pursued to ascertain their guilt or innocence; however, this method is not always successful as the subject may not tell the truth. Modern criminal systems have deemed that this series of deception detection tests are more humane and effective than traditional violent means; however, Lokaneeta refutes these claims through the examination of well-known case studies and the introduction of a new perspective.

The author, Jinee Lokaneeta, is a professor of Political Science and International Relations at Drew University, New Jersey. With several other books and articles such as “Transnational Torture: Law, Violence, and State Power in the United States and India” and one of the co-editors to “Feminist Politics: Struggles and Issues,” her writing experience exhibits her interest in critical political theories, global human rights and legal studies. Lokaneeta’s work primarily revolves around exposing the institutional abuse of power within various systems in both the Indian and international context. Her previous work has been published in forms such as the Economic and Political Weekly, The Wire, Politics & Society and many more.

The book, *Truth Machines*, is split into 7 primary chapters that explore the means of policing, violence and scientific interrogations in India. Legislation surrounding the means of evidence collection and interrogation were created by the Colonial powers in India. These laws primarily sought to primarily place an emphasis on scientific forensic measures as opposed to other forms of testimonials such as witness judgement which were not thought to be as reliable. The continued search for what is said to be “scientific” forensic tools in India, has prevailed even post-colonisation and this is the primary focus of Lokaneeta’s novel. Throughout the book, Lokaneeta utilises various case study analyses to understand the relationships between state power and legal violence and how the law and science coverage in our modern judicial system. A notable case that is explored within this book is the famous double homicide case of Aarushi and Hemraj. This case was one of the Indian populus’ largest media interactions with narcoanalysis when campaigns were created to challenge the validity of narco analytical techniques. Another notable case study was the examination of the usage of the lie-detector test for two women from Rohtak and were accused of faking a case of harassment after being charged for violence against their alleged harassment. The third case study analysed the usage of sodium pentothal (a truth serum) on YS Jagan Reddy by the Central Bureau of Investigation to prove a case of embezzlement. These three case studies discuss the usage of the aforementioned deception detection tests.

Lokaneeta not only looks at case studies but through the examination of in-depth fieldwork, effectively highlights the role of transnational borrowings and scientific contestations that occur as a result of the status of interrogation in India. This book can be seen as more of a critique of the Indian forensics and criminal system as opposed to an informative piece and Lokaneeta makes justified arguments as to why these methods of DDT are futile in our society. The main conclusion that Lokaneeta arrives at throughout *Truth Machines* is the concept of a contingent state where there is a decentralized state of power which welcomes areas of critique and intervention in what is remarked to be a “flawed” legal system.

The former associate justice of the Supreme Court of the United States, Potter Stewart, once famously quoted that “ethics is knowing the difference between what you have a right to do and what is right to do.” In the *Truth Machines*, Lokaneeta effectively analyses and assesses the ethical dilemmas, the societal and scientific implications, and the deep rooted systems within our society that allow for deception detection tests to be the norm in our judicial systems. This book is a critical analysis of the rhetoric surrounding “modern, scientific” interrogation techniques that are used within the Indian judicial system. Lokaneeta makes several compelling arguments regarding how replacing physical torture with “truth machines” is futile as it, in an essence, is synonymous with physical torturing techniques. Overall, this book effectively highlights the true nature of our judicial systems and frameworks and provides an expository and evaluative analysis of the same.

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