



# ELITES AND THE MODUS OPERANDI OF CONSTRUCTING FEAR

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**Case 1:** One video on Instagram is trending these days. The video shows the impacts of genocide against the Hazara community of Quetta, Balochistan. The video starts with a voiceover detailing that the social media influencer went outside of the Hazara-dominated region in Quetta to the other part to have dinner. Among his common friends was also a young man from the Hazara community. Seeing his quietness and reservedness, the influencer asked him if everything was all right. He responded that it was only because of him (the influencer) that he was out of his communal area because he is easily recognizable about his ethnic identity because of his facial features. The video briefly describes the history of the Hazara ethnic community, their geographical positioning in Quetta and the graveyard where many male martyrs are buried. The video also explains that genocidal violence is so rampant that the graveyard is the largest public place in the area dominated by the Hazara community. The influencer also narrates that while passing through the area, one could see a grieving member of the family speaking to the grave or cutting a birthday cake. The video ends on a

reflexive note by the influencer that living there is synonymous with living in an open jail.

**Case 2:** A VIP route at the D Chowk in Islamabad has confined cars to wait till the route is clear. 15 minutes into this restricted mobility in the scorching heat, people who had been waiting started showing signs of discomfort and restlessness, partly due to getting late to reach the office and partly due to the authoritative tone and misdemeanour of the police. One such agitated driver got out of his car and started yelling at the police. The police yelled back and threatened to put him behind bars. To prevent the altercation from continuing, a driver behind his car got out and tried to resolve the matter. After a few more minutes of waiting, once the VIP charade accompanied by traffic police, ICT police, and multiple protocol vehicles passed, we were allowed to move. I was in the Uber and the driver was equally annoyed but refrained from any friction with the police by commenting, '*In se kon pangā le, inka kuch nahin pata*' ('Who can fight with them, one never knows what they can charge against you'). While passing through the

police check post, I showed my official card to the same threatening police officer, who by the movement of his finger allowed the vehicle to move, while the driver eulogised 'Thank you, Sir. Thank you, Sir.'

**Case 3:** While interviewing female safety and security, when one female respondent was asked what fears her the most in her life, she instantly replied, 'The fear of being raped. I don't fear being killed. The only fear is of being raped.' She continued by detailing that the fear is not self-made. She added that this fear is visible, palpable, experienced and internalised, at home, in the office, on the roads, in shops, behind closed doors and in open spaces. She concluded by affirming that she hadn't learnt to overcome this fear and would take her a lifetime or even more, to do so.

The three cases described above illustrate fear; the fear of being identified as an ethnic minority and hence killed, the fear of being caught under a false charge by the state institution, and the fear of being sexually violated irrespective of the tightness, closedness or openness of the social space. The fear, in all three cases above, has produced a subject. A fearing young man in the first case, a fearing common person on the road waiting to be directed by a policeman in the second case, and a fearing woman who fears being abused by a man, in the third and final case. In all three cases, the fear is situated in the reality of events that have been either witnessed by the people themselves or may have been experienced or passed down to them by their families or passed on to them by their contemporaries or friends. The fear in all three cases, is not self-constructed; they are either speaking their realities or the realities of those who were close to them and have suffered. But this is one side of the story; that who is at the receiving end of this fear- the subject that the fear produces. The other side is that who produces this fear? Why is this fear produced?

R. Skoll in his seminal research on terror, torture and death in a post-capitalist world, theorizes fear through a sociological lens. While specifying the modus operandi and illustrating tactical tools for producing and reproducing fear, the author highlights that the ruling elites across geographical histories have used fear to control the masses. The fear of being physically violated (killed, burnt, lacerated, etc.) steeped into the fear of confiscation, extraction, and expropriation of capital (land, natural resources, etc.). The physical manifestations of fear are compounded by the brutal narratives of violation disseminated by the elites if the masses refuse to comply with their rulers. Hence, the fear of the possibilities of what the ruling elites can do is internalized by the masses. In these situations, undeniable and unquestionable compliance with the elites is organic.

When fear is manifested physically, the institutions of social control are vital. These institutions include the government, police, and military. The connective tissue combining the three institutions and hence playing out its critical role in the social reproduction of fear is the state.

The state by using its apparatuses reproduces fear primarily through brute force, police force, militancy and military. The cost of not complying with these politico-militarized forces can be prosecution, detention, detainment, imprisonment, or death. The fear hence reproduced is re-lived by the masses whenever an interaction between them and the representatives of any of these political and militarized elites occurs, no matter how benign that interaction is. The hierarchical order manufactured by the powerful ruling elites, through the years of creating fear, is, palpable in the lived-in experiences of the masses.

The narratives of fear are extensively researched in social sciences research. The fear of sexual and physical violence in the female-headed households in Indian-Administered Kashmir (extensively researched in ethnographic research by Angana P. Chatterji), the militarized Chittagong Hill Tract (of what happens when men from marginalized ethnic groups are forcefully killed in extrajudicial and encounter killings narrated by the female respondents in Amena Mohsin's heart-wrenching research), the gendered violence exercised by the military forces during the War of Liberation in East-West Pakistan dismantling (primary data collected by Yasmin Saikia from women in Bangladesh), the recording and widespread dissemination of brutal killings of Muslims from the Rohingya community in Burma, and the most recent trending videos of Israeli military goons violating the religious, gendered and private spaces of people of Gaza. All these examples depict both the producers of and the reproduced subjects from fear. All examples confirm ruling elites in each case and peripheral communities at the receiving end of violation, physical occupation, and physical and non-physical colonization. The ruling elites described in the preceding text, are from politics, military, and militancy (or groups and coalitions constructed through the alliances of these all) and use every possible medium (on-site, virtual, closed spaces, open areas, etc.) to record and document fearful events and disseminate to reproduce fear.

Coming back, the three cases described in the beginning, show varying conceptualizations of elites: a religious majoritarian group exercising violence against the ethnically marginalized people of the Shia sect (first case), a representative of the state institution (police force) flexing his authoritative muscle to the commoners (second case), and violating men in the closed/open spaces who can charge at women and violate their bodies and sexualities. In each of the three cases, the fear is in the realities of Pakistan operable on three levels: macro: fear due to religious majoritarianism, meso: fear internalised due to institutionalised state body, and micro: fear communally internalised by one gender. The fear is hence socially constructed, a reflection of where our society stands and what it stands for in contemporary Pakistan. Unfortunately!

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