# Memory, Trauma and Police Brutality: Understanding Capiophobia in Postcolonial India

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**Abstract**
*The term "Capiophobia" is derived from the Latin words "capio" and "phobos", which together mean "the fear of police" or "the fear of arrest". Research on people's perception of the police shows that Capiophobia and distrust of the police are common and collectively shared by the Indian populace. Thus, this research article attempts to understand how the traumatic memory of policing in colonial India is intergenerationally transferred and how they form capiophobia and distrust of the police. The study also looks at the police in independent India as a continuation of colonial police and how they accentuate the fear and distrust of the police.*
**Keywords: Trauma, Memory, Postmemory, Capiophobia.**

The police force of a democratic state like India is purported to be 'people-friendly' and expected to uphold human dignity and rights. The police are supposed to create a sense of security and inspire good deeds among people. But, in reality, the common people of India perceive the police as the most untrustworthy, corrupted and hated institution in India. David Bayley notes that the rapport between the public and the police in the country is "characterized by a powerful 'avoidance syndrome'" (Sen). People generally avoid contact with the police unless their need is intense and unavoidable. A recent survey by the NGO Common Cause and Lokniti pointed out that two of every five Indians are scared of the police. Their study also noted that the underprivileged communities, especially Dalits, Sikhs, Muslims and the poor, find police dishonest. More often, the common people of India associate the police with brutality, and the distrust or fear of the police among them is not groundless. In India, the police are the metaphor for power and authority that repress public interest and misuse their power in favour of the political executive, i.e., the state. The police play an active role in murdering human rights through physical violence, mental torture, verbal abuse, arbitrary arrests, illegal detentions, and fake encounters.

This research article attempts to understand why a vast majority of Indians are capiophobic. The word "capiophobia" means "the fear of the police" or "the fear of getting arrested" and originates from the Latin words capio, meaning "arrest", and phobos, meaning "fear". Capiophobic people fear the police without any evident reason and avoid contact with them because even seeing a police officer, police

station, or a police vehicle alarms them. Capiophobia, like any other phobia, can be associated with traumatic experiences. Addressing the question of capiophobia among the Indian populace, this research article argues that the deleterious and traumatic memory of the colonial police from British India and its camouflaged continuity in the postcolonial context triggers the distrust and fear of the police among the people.

The first argument in this article is that the roots of capiophobia in India can be traced to its colonial past. Ruthless policing and excessive use of authority during colonial rule in India have registered a haunting memory in the collective unconscious of the Indian populace, and it has been transferred intergenerationally through linguistic and visual representations. The generation after colonialism in India unconsciously considers such traumatic memories as their life stories. In other words, having an experience of police brutality registered in the unconscious becomes a significant cause of distrust and fear of the police. Studies on how culturally transferred memories of the collective or cultural trauma of past catastrophes affect the present generation is a trend in contemporary trauma studies. The credits for developing the frameworks of trauma studies essentially go to the works of Cathy Caruth, Shoshanna Felman and Dori Laub. Caruth talks about the dynamic nature of trauma. Trauma is not static in history or with the person who witnessed it. Instead, it traverses through culture and arrives "in a 'cultural memory' of events not witnessed directly, making us all survivors, and turning history into a memory in which we can all participate" (Wake 286). Caruth defines trauma as "an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena" (Caruth). Caruth believes the effects of trauma are often delayed because the tragic event is not fully experienced at the moment of its occurrence but only belatedly in its repetitive appearances. She adds that the belated reappearance of the tragedy is uncontrolled and is against that person's will because "trauma resides in the unconscious". Another nature of trauma is that it is "contagious", which means "it spreads via language and representations" (Wake 286). Hence, trauma can travel to the intergenerational and intragenerational unconscious through language in literary works such as autobiographies, testimonies and fiction. Traumatic visual representations like movies, video records and photographs are also contagious.

The fear of the police and the act of perceiving the police as an enemy in the postcolonial context of India is understood as the belated effects of the trauma of colonial policing. The police under the British Raj, as noted earlier, were insensitive to humanitarian concepts and dehumanized the common people when they protested for their rights. One striking instance of the brutality of police can be found in the Jallianwala Bagh incident when Brigadier General Reginald Edward Harry Dyer opened fire on an unarmed crowd at Jallianwala Bagh, killing several people. Several other incidents of police brutality can be traced in history, like the Patharughat massacre in Assam, the Wagon Tragedy of Malabar, the Vellaloor massacre and the Perungamanallur massacre in Tamil Nadu. Every Indian who lived at the time would have at least one story of being tortured and dehumanized by the colonial police to share. The experiences of being traumatized by police brutality transfer to the current generation through the visual representations of colonial police brutality through familial and cultural stories inherited from elders. The trauma or the cultural memory of colonialism and brutal policing transfer to the growing generation even through history and history classes a student attends in schools. For instance, even the illustrations of police massacres during British rule, such as Jalian Walla Bagh in Amritsar or the Wagon Tragedy of Malabar, in school textbooks or such images available on the internet archives, are potentially traumatizing. The generation after the colonial rule in India receives the trauma from the heart-wrenching stories of colonial policing portrayed by teachers in the classroom or parents at home or through reading story books. Moreover, the movies set in colonial backgrounds also mediate the disturbing images of police brutality among many people.

The reception of a traumatic experience of the forefathers is often considered one's own because trauma's very nature is contagious; it can spread through language and visual representations, as Caruth observed. As noted earlier, "If the text is traumatic and the contagion of trauma extends to the act of listening or reading, then trauma has the potential to victimize all who are affected by the representation of trauma and the experience of representation" (Wake 286).

The concept of "postmemory" by Marianne Hirsch is appropriate to understand police brutality better in the context of intergenerationally transferred memory and contagiousness and latency of trauma. She describes postmemory as the "events that happened in the past, but their effects continue into the present" (5). Hirsch used the term "postmemory" in her study of the autobiographies of the children of holocaust surviving families. Postmemory describes how the memory of a cultural or collective trauma of the previous generation shapes the memory and acts in the behaviour formation of the post-generation. The continuation or transference of the trauma from one generation to another shows trauma's contagiousness and latency property, as Caruth identified. Hirsch explains that the postmemory is shaped by reading or listening to traumatic experiences. Therefore, postmemory "is defined through an identification with the victim or witness of trauma, modulated by an unbridgeable distance that separates the participant from the one born after. (Wake 292)

Hirsch says how the stories of the holocaust that she heard from her parents influenced her. She says: "My parents' stories and behaviours, and the way that they reached me, followed a set of conventions that were no doubt shaped by stories we had read and heard, conversations we had had, by fears and fantasies associated with persecution" (4). Quoting Geoffrey Hartman, Hirsch says, "Postmemory would thus be retrospective witnessing by adoption". How Hirsch understood postmemory in the context of holocaust studies can also be applied in this study. As said earlier in this paper, the later generations in postcolonial India have adopted the stories of police brutality, inherited them culturally from the previous generation as their own experiences and inscribed them into their own life stories. As Hirsch notes: "'Seeing through another's eyes…remembering through another's memories might collapse into seeing through one's own eyes and remembering own memories instead" (Wake 292). Thus, as a consequence, the current generation unconsciously believes that the police are enemies and untrustworthy. Moreover, their unconscious fear becomes accentuated when they see police brutality at present.

Therefore, the second argument in this paper is that the nature and operation of the police in independent India reminds of colonial policing. Witnessing or being subjected to police misconduct, torture, arbitrary use of power, and fake encounters in the present day strengthens fear and distrust in the people's unconscious. Witnessing always need not be one's own experience. As mentioned above, the contagious nature of trauma operates in traumatizing even through watching, reading or listening to traumatizing events. The portrayal of police misconduct and brutality in the media, films and Literature recalls the fear and distrust.

The operational methods of the police in India have been a topic of discussion since the country gained independence in 1947, largely due to its colonial legacy. Some scholars argue that the post-independent Indian police continued colonial policing from British India. Upendra Baxi says, "Indian police is basically colonial police, both in its organization and operations: it's basically a repressive" force" (85). According to Bayley, "independence brought revolutionary changes in the political structure of the government, it brought none of any consequence to the structure of police administration" (51). The sole reason for the ruthlessness and violence of police against the people is its colonial history. Indian Police Act of 1861, introduced by British rulers in colonial India, is the cornerstone of establishing the first police force in the country. The act directly responded to India's first war of independence in 1857, and its purpose was to prolong colonial rule in

India by suppressing dissent. Charles Napier proposed that the Irish model colonial paramilitary police system is suitable for India as it is only responsible to the government. It was designed as a repressive force that ensured its servitude to the politicians and the state authority rather than protecting human rights. The colonial police were created to separate the public from the police, and this gap between the people and the police still exists.

The present Indian police continue the repressive and authoritative colonial policing in a postcolonial context because, even after seven decades of freedom from colonial rule, the Indian Police Act of 1861, the Indian Penal Code and the Criminal Procedure Code drafted by colonizers remain the backbone of policing and law enforcement in India. Subramanian quotes Ananda Swarup Gupta to show how repressive and authoritative the Indian penal codes, which India still follows, are. He says: "The Indian Penal Code (IPC) begins with chapters on criminal conspiracy and 'offences against the state,' as against the common preoccupation of the police everywhere with the prevention and detection of offences against the person and property" (Subramanian). Moreover, the police in India continue as a tool in the hands of the ruling party for all kinds of coercive measures, and they enjoy unwritten impunity against all kinds of violence. Though many commissions were appointed to study reformations needed in the Indian police system, none were implemented. Subramanian notes that "the unreformed Indian police system has shown itself to be pliant and amenable to manipulation by the political interests of the ruling party".

Based on his research survey, Bayley comments on how the Indian people in independent India perceive the police. He says: "For the majority of people, the police are faceless and nameless creatures with whom they had any contact. Their opinion, it follows, must be wholly derived from the community's storehouse of common knowledge" (219). What Bayley calls the "community's storehouse of common knowledge" is similar to what Hirsch calls "postmemory". In other words, the inherited experiences of being ill-treated by colonial police shaped their attitude towards police. Representation of the contemporary police in media and movies strengthens their fear and confirms their experience.

To conclude, this research paper has explained how the traumatic memory of colonial policing has been transferred to the generation after colonialism through textual narratives and visual representations. It further explored how they shape the memory and reality of people in the present generation, addressing capiophobia and distrust of police in India. The inherited memory of traumatic policing from the colonial era and witnessing police brutality in the present aggravates the fear of police among people. To prevent atrocities of police against its people, amendments to the existing legal structure are necessary. Though India has signed the Convention Against Torture (CAT), none of its recommendations have been implemented yet, and there are no explicit laws to prevent police brutality. To build trust in the people, the current police system with colonial rules must change to one that fits modern democratic India. Only when the police become approachable to common people without fear and only when the police become the protector of the people's lives and property will they achieve their real purpose. "The transition from colonial police to democratic police would come about only when the notion of police as a paramilitary organization is abandoned" (Baxi 106). Most of the states in India have started following the concept of community policing, such as the Janamaithri Suraksha Project in Kerala, Friends of Police in Tamil Nadu Maithri in Andhra Pradesh and Mohalla Committees in Maharashtra. The concept of "community police" is "a collaborative model of law enforcement in which police and the community work together" (Baxi 110). However, the execution of these schemes has not been effective enough to make people trust the police.

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