**We and the Gaslight Effect**

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“Let us not allow gaslighters to plunder the treasured gems of our mind file, nor erode the translucent color of its quality. ”

-Erik Pevernagie (The Absence of Desire)

One is amazed at the influence the silver screen has on our culture and the way it directs the course of knowledge in addition to, of course, helping us understand the intrinsic characteristics of our society. Gas Light was a 1938 play that was adapted as a 1940 movie first but the hit film with the same namesake released in 1944 has left an indelible impact on students of psychology who have embraced this word to head an important branch of this subject. Based on the story of an opera star and her crafty husband who was trying to get hold of her aunt’s and his former wife’s precious jewels by using gaslight tactics the story revolves around the fluctuating gas flame used as means to invoke insanity.

Cynthia A. Stark, in her paper Gaslighting, Misogyny, and Psychological Oppression explains: “The literature on gaslighting has two strands. In one, gaslighting is characterized as a form of testimonial injustice. As such, it is a distinctively epistemic injustice that wrongs persons primarily as knowers. Gaslighting occurs when someone denies, on the basis of another’s social identity, her testimony about a harm or wrong done to her. In the other strand, gaslighting is described as a form of wrongful manipulation and, indeed, a form of emotional abuse”.

It must be kept in mind that gaslighting is generally directed against females whereas the perpetrators can be both men and women. The main objective is to lead the victim toward the idea that despite being fully cognizant of herself and her situation, she is in error. This constant hammering of disillusionment and self-doubt can eventually cause a woman to lose her sanity allowing her offender to take complete control over her life to be manipulated howsoever. Paige Sweet, PhD and assistant professor of sociology at Michigan University says in quite simple words: “I think of gaslighting as trying to associate someone with the label ‘crazy’. It’s making someone seem or feel unstable, irrational and not credible, making them feel like what they’re seeing or experiencing isn’t real, that they’re making it up, that no one else will believe them.”

When an entire nation is afflicted with the gaslight effect, how can it be treated?

A cursory look at the hundreds of teleplays produced in Indo-Pakistan will reveal that the concept of gaslighting is well-built in their plots. A woman is usually the centre-point of conniving people bent upon declaring her too foolish and stupid to think straight about herself. Situations are spun around in such a way that make her life as miserable as one can imagine and while the villains’ intentions remain remarkably concealed, she is made to appear the scoundrel until a knight in shining armour comes to her rescue. More or less, most of the stories are aimed at misogynist ideals where females are depicted as the devil’s avatar.

The world of entertainment is just one segment of people’s social life reflecting whatever good or bad exists in society but in reality, gaslight can be seen fully operative in our lives-from the home to the workplace and right up to the level of governments, a mad race for power and absolute control is in full play. A dictatorial head of the family, male or female, can create an atmosphere of high tension within the family; a ruthless boss can drive employees up the wall and the political scenario, generally of the world and particularly that of our blessed country seems fraught with gaslighting elements.

Check out the blatant lies the nation is told every day by politicians sitting in the Parliaments and those who are aspiring to grab those leathered seats at the first available opportunity. They portray real-life episodes exposing their true worth and witnessed by the people, as merely illusive, implying that what is seen by myriads of eyes is nothing more than deception because of their opponents’ misleading conclusions. In other words, the nation is made to self-doubt which is causing anxiety, depression, lowered self-esteem, frustration, fear and uncertainty-all being symptoms of gaslighting.

There is a need to understand the way gaslighting differs from other means of control-it occurs over a long period. In this case, the victims are consistently listening and considering the other’s perspective and who is constantly negating the victims’ perception, insisting that they are wrong, or they are being told that their reactions are irrational or dysfunctional. Is this not happening in our country? Over the last 75 years, the nation has seen its gaslighter government officials and public office holders ordering to shoot tear gas and bullets at peaceful protestors, baton-charging in broad daylight, killing innocent bystanders, damaging private properties, abducting journalists and people of interest but when confronted they conveniently back out refusing to admit their wrong-doings and pretending as if everyone else is mistaken. Disagreement is one thing but flagrant denial of truth is another and this is what has been consistently done with this nation over the last many years.

When there are individual gaslight victims and they require medical attention, chances are that they will find it. A few sessions with a psychologist might lead to recovery and within no time, the patients can be brought back to their senses. However, when an entire nation is afflicted with the gaslight effect, how can it be treated? This is a question that requires thoughtful answers that only genuine people can offer. Unfortunately, the gaslighters would make us believe that even the genuine ones are insincere leaving us in limbo as to what will be our fate but we just need to remember that facts are facts, even though liars among us will try their best to conceal them.

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