Kathua Rape Case Verdict

Why in news?

6 of the 7 men accused in the 2018 rape and murder of an 8-year-old girl in Kathua, J&K were convicted by a special court in Pathankot, Punjab.

What is the case about?

- The case involves an 8-year-old girl from Kathua, J&K who was abducted, drugged, raped and killed.
- Notably, the deceased is a Muslim girl and the accused are Hindus, which has made it an issue of communal politics.
- The formation of a group called the Hindu Ekta Manch in support of those arrested added to this.
- Also, the role played by members of the Bharatiya Janata Party, including two Ministers in the then J&K government, had added to the communal politics.
- The case was thus transferred from J&K to Punjab by the Supreme Court for a fair trial.
- The apex court had taken note of the hindrances to a fair trial in the jurisdictional court, especially the hostile atmosphere against the prosecution.

What is the recent verdict?

- Six of the seven men accused in the case were convicted.
- Three of the men got life term, and the other three got five-year imprisonment.
- The court sentenced to life imprisonment -
    i. the mastermind, Sanji Ram, a retired government official and priest of the temple where the crime took place
    ii. special police officer Deepak Khajuria
    iii. Ram's nephew Parvesh Kumar
- Special Police Officer (SPO) Surender Verma, head constable Tilak Raj, and sub-inspector Anand Dutta were awarded 5 years in prison for destroying evidence.
- The court acquitted the seventh accused, Vishal Jangotra, son of Sanji Ram, giving him the "benefit of doubt".

- The crime branch filed the charge sheet against 8 persons, including a 'juvenile'.
- The trial against the 'juvenile' is yet to begin, as his petition on determining his age is yet to be heard by the J&K High Court.

Why is the judgement significant?

- The Kathua case represents a triumph of justice over communal propaganda.
- The verdict and due process failed the sectarian intruders' efforts who sought to derail the investigation and trial.
- They tried projecting the heinous crime against a girl belonging to the nomadic Bakerwal tribe as a plot to implicate Hindus.
- It is also a triumph for the justice system, as the Pathankot district and sessions court has lived up to the faith reposed in it by the apex court.
- The investigation had been fairly quick, and the charge-sheet was prepared in 2 months.
- The trial lasted a year, and the verdict has been delivered within 17 months of the occurrence.
- The larger takeaway is that efficient investigation, diligent prosecution and judicial sensitivity can ensure speedy justice in all cases.

Source: The Hindu

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