Mob Lynching: A Curse

What is the issue?

- Since 2014, ugly mob hate has spilled onto the streets, trains and people's homes.
- Fevered group of people surround, brutally assault and sometimes kill unarmed men.

Why is there a denial?

- The crowds allege that the men had slaughtered cows, or were thieves; but sometimes their only crime is that they are visibly Muslim.
- These mob killings are to be described as lynching.
- The initial response of the ruling establishment to criticism of this rising graph of lynching during the current government's regime was one of denial.
- **Argument 1** - The leadership of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) claimed that these were simple failures of law and order, crimes which had ensued under every regime.
- Vested interests opposed to the leadership of Mr. Modi and the BJP imposed on these statistically insignificant, random and spontaneous crimes a pattern and called these an epidemic of lynching.
- However, this defence began to crumble as horrific lynch attacks continued to rock many parts of the country.
- **Argument 2** - These attacks occurred as Muslims continue to traffic and slaughter cows, callous to the sentiments of their Hindu neighbours.
- Hindus, according to this justification, are understandably provoked.
- Not normally given to violence, they sometimes cross a line, which is regrettable but natural.
- Such violence will end only if Muslims and Christians learn to respect the sentiments of the Hindu community, and abjure from cow slaughter.

What are the flaws in the argument?

- Hindus, including Dalits and Adivasis, in many parts of India eat beef.
- Hindu farmers give up their aged cattle for culling because it is no longer economically viable for them to feed unproductive cattle.
- Muslim dairy farmers are no less devoted to their cattle than Hindus.
- In the majority of lynch attacks (such as of Pehlu Khan) the animals are

transported for dairying, and not for slaughter.
- Nothing explains the sudden outbreak of lynching in many corners of the country under the present ruling dispensation (98% of cow-related lynching since 2010 occurred after 2014).

What was RSS chief's address?

- RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat's annual Dussehra address provided explanations about lynching.
- Because of the enormous influence which the RSS wields on BJP government, the words of the RSS head must be held to close scrutiny.
- He made five main claims.
    1. Lynching is a foreign Biblical practice, alien to Indian traditions.
    2. Indians are culturally non-violent.
    3. RSS has no role in these lynch attacks, and tries to prevent these.
    4. Many ordinary crimes are wrongly portrayed as lynching.
    5. The law should be strengthened, if necessary, to ensure those guilty of these crimes are punished.

What could be understood from scrutinizing this address?

- Indeed, there is no word for lynching in most Indian languages.
- But Mr. Bhagwat claim that lynching is a practice created by religions whose 'sacred book is written outside India'.
- This conforms to the customary RSS bigotry against Christian and Muslim religions, demonising their beliefs.

- The word lynching in fact originated in the U.S. in the mid-18th century.
- Although the word lynching is of foreign origin, this **does not mean that mob killings are alien to India**.

1. Single women have frequently been lynched through the centuries, branded as witches.
2. Dalits have been lynched with enormous cruelty for millennia.

- Mr. Bhagwat's claim that Indians are culturally non-violent and their culture promotes peaceful coexistence **doesn't stand up to historical or contemporary scrutiny**.
- The example he offers, that disputes over water were settled amicably by adversaries through dialogue is a joke.
- Many of the most gruesome lynch attacks on Dalits have occurred when they have simply sought a share of water, even today.

What is the connection with the Rights?

- But the most brazen untruth is Mr. Bhagwat's argument that the RSS has nothing to do with lynch attacks, and contrarily prevent them.
- The vigilantes make no secret of their adherence to hard-line violent Hindutva beliefs and the victims of lynching are most often Muslims who are sometimes forced to recite 'Jai Shri Ram'.
- In a strict technical sense, their RSS membership cannot be proved, as there is **no public record of the formal adherents of the RSS**.
- But this cannot obscure the reality that the vigilantes were driven by Hindu supremacist ideologies of the RSS.
- Mr. Bhagwat's fourth claim that many lynchings are ordinary crimes is an older rationalisation, deliberately obscuring the character of lynching as hate crimes that target people because of their identity.
- It cannot be a coincidence that **86% of people killed in cow-related attacks are Muslim**.
- The final avowal by Mr. Bhagwat of the need for tougher laws to bring lynch mobs to justice carries little credibility.
- This is so because the majority of these attacks occur in BJP-ruled States, and **existing laws are more than sufficient** to secure justice against the attackers.
- Almost without exception, police in all these States exert to protect the killers, and criminalise the victims.
- In these ways, Mr. Bhagwat relies on many old RSS tropes –
    1. Demonising 'foreign religions' for advocating violence.
    2. Characterising Indian culture as intrinsically peaceable.
    3. Releasing the RSS from responsibility in instigating, organising and valorising this violence.
    4. State governments from failures to prevent lynching and ensuring justice.
- It is hardly surprising lynching survivors can draw no solace, security or healing from his declarations.
- His words are arid in compassion, displaying neither acknowledgement nor remorse.

Source: The Hindu

SHANKAR IAS PARLIAMENT
Information is Empowering