Treatment of Pre-Trial Political Prisoners - Bhima Koregaon Case

What is the issue?

- June 6, 2021 marks the third anniversary of the incarceration of five rights activists in the Bhima Koregaon conspiracy case.
- Here is a look at the case and the larger issue behind.

What is the Bhima Koregaon case?

- January 1, 2018 was the 200th anniversary of a battle fought at Bhima Koregaon, a small village in Pune.
- [It was where 500 Dalit Mahar soldiers of the British army defeated an army of the Peshwas.]
- Dalits converged in thousands from across the state for its commemoration.
- But violence broke out and one person died.
- Initially, the police investigated Hindutva leaders Milind Ekbote and Sambhaji Bhide for instigating the violence, and arrested Ekbote briefly.
- But some months later, the police claimed that the violence was a conspiracy by left activists and intellectuals.
- Five rights activists were arrested in this conspiracy case and eleven more were subsequently jailed for the same.
- These 16 women and men - the BK-16 accused - are intellectuals, lawyers, a poet, professors, cultural and rights activists.
- It includes an 84-year-old Jesuit priest, Father Stan Swamy.
- All these persons have sterling records of service with India's most oppressed people.

Why is the case contentious?

- The charge against BK-16 was that they had conspired to instigate Dalits into violent insurrection, and to assassinate the Prime Minister.
- 3 years later, the trial against them has still not commenced.
- The state has succeeded in misusing the law with the complicity of all institutions of criminal justice.
- It worked to confine behind bars the BK-16 accused, without any opportunity for either bail or to prove their innocence.
- [After a tortuous court battle, just one of them, poet Varavara Rao, was

granted bail because of his critically deteriorating health.]

- The evidence marshalled against the accused rests on some alleged emails.
- But independent agencies contest that these are malign insertions through malware.
- The case reveals the ease with which it is possible for the executive to undermine reputations of activists.
- It has imprisoned indefinitely without bail or trial, people who dissent and organise struggles against state policies.
- Many among the BK-16 are suffering from various kinds of illnesses.
- They are now housed in the overcrowded Taloja and Byculla jails, ideal sites for super-spreading the Covid virus.
- Above all, it is the agenda of the state to ensure that political prisoners are kept well.

Source: The Indian Express

