# Violence in Maharashtra - Caste and Nationalism

## What is the issue?

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- There was a caste conflict in Bhima Koregaon and Wadhu Budruk in Maharashtra recently.
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- It is indicative of the larger issues of caste oppression and sub-nationalism.
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## What happened at Bhima Koregaon?

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- **The Battle** - Bhima Koregaon is a tiny village in Pune.
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- A battle in Koregaon took place between British troops and Marathas (Peshwa Bajirao II) on January 1, 1818 and the English won.
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- **Significance** - The English troops constituted a sizeable number of Mahars, a dalit community in the region.
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- The outcome of the battle is seen as a **victory of the dalits** against the injustices perpetuated by the Brahminical Peshwas.
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- **Vijay Sthamb** - The East India Company erected the Vijay Sthamb (victory pillar) in memory of the battle and it includes the names of the Mahar soldiers.
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- Dr B R Ambedkar had also visited it repeatedly and had emphasized the Mahars's defeat of the Peshwas.
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- In the following years, thousands have been gathering in Bhima Koregaon on January 1 to pay homage.
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- **Current conflict** - The 200th anniversary of the Bhima-Koregaon battle was

commemorated recently.
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- Dalits increasingly regard the pillar as a symbol of renewed political aspiration.
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- The denunciation of the Peshwas is being related with Mahars' social and political marginalisation in contemporary times.
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- This is driving the Hindutva forces to doubt the conspicuous politicisation of Dalits.
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- The resulted in the clash and violence during the anniversary and led to the death of one.
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## What happened at Wadhu Budruk?

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- **History** - Wadhu Budruk is a village near Bhima Koregaon, is where Sambhaji, the eldest son of Shivaji, was cremated.
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- As the legend goes, killed by the Mughals in 1689, Sambhaji’s body was mutilated and thrown into a river by Aurangzeb.
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- It was Govind Mahar, a Dalit, who then gathered the body parts and arranged for the last rites.
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- Sambhaji’s memorial was said to have been erected by the Mahars of that village.
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- Consequently, Govind Mahar’s tomb was also erected in the village after his death.
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- **Current conflict** - Recently, Marathas, refused to acknowledge the role played by the Mahars in the last rites of Sambhaji.
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- They also objected to a sign at the site that recounted the story and complaints were filed with the police by both sides.
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- Notably, the violent clashes in Bhima Koregaon were an extension of the conflict in Wadhu Budruk.
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## What are the larger implications?

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- Both the conflicts indicate an effort to situate Maratha history within the Hindutva framework.
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- **Dalits** - Being the 200th anniversary, the gathering in Bhima Koregaon was larger than usual and a big public conference was also organised.
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- The agenda was evidently against Hindutva politics.
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- Notably, Hindutva politics is increasingly being projected as the neo-peshwai (new Peshwas).
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- **Hindutva** - The new political articulation of the Dalits by equating Hindutva with the Peshwai has made the right-wing forces concerned.
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- Certainly, some of the Hindutva organisations are polarising the political landscape on religious and caste lines.
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- This is particularly to weaken the Ambedkarite Dalits who are seen as impediments to ensuring a Hindutva regime.
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- **Nationalism** - The agitation underscores the latent sub-nationalistic impulses currently active in Indian society.
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- In a way, this is a struggle between two nationalisms - religion-based versus caste-based.
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**Source: The Hindu, The Indian Express**

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