



RESEARCH PAPER

**Social Marginalisation and Scapegoating: A Study of Mob Lynching
in Pakistan and India**

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ABSTRACT

This research article aims at understanding the phenomena of mob lynching in India and Pakistan. Over the years, this problem is alarmingly on the rise in the two countries under study. Understanding this issue and finding out solutions is really the need of hour. This article explains this phenomenon with a theoretic-empirical interest. It studied cases of mob lynching. Data on India has been accessed from existing data sites; while, those on Pakistan, has been generated by this research. Rene` Girard's sociological understanding of mob violence as a scapegoating mechanism informs this study. This research argues that mob lynching is a process of marginalisation of certain minorities. It has, as a result, been found out that pattern in both the countries are similar, only that the actors are different.

Introduction

Roche (1996) presents a typology of mobs in violence. This typology is based on two things: system of liability and level of organization. System of liability means: who the group holds responsible for the act? Alleged crime is liable only to certain individuals; or, the entire community or a social group takes its responsibility. Mobs also differ on the level of organization from very organized to very loose collection of people for a while. Mob lynching (or simply lynching) is a form of collective violence where the punishing mob identifies the victim/s as the real target of their violence. The guilt lies with the victim in the eyes of the perpetrators. The mob, in itself, is loosely organized; and appears only for the purpose for this specific violence to be dispersed in oblivion once the act is complete.

Data Set: Lynching Cases in Indian and Pakistan

Both India and Pakistan have experienced scores of lynching incidents over the recent years. This research tried to gather statistics for the accurate estimation of the problem. The following sections present the lynching data for the two countries.

INDIA

According to India Spend, a privately established data base that has compiled data "through a collection and content analysis of reports in the English media" (2017), there were around sixty six (66) cases of vigilant mob violence for the period of eight years, 2010-2017 (India Spend Team, 2017). 2017 has been proved to be the worst with twenty two incidents that year. Ninety Six percent (96%) of the total (64/66) happened since 2014. But according to another website data base, the number of lynching incidents (violence with or without killing) are estimated around two hundred and sixty six (266) since 2014 (Verma, 2019). Another study that filtered through and added-on to the IndiaSpend reveals, "there have been 24 incidents of lynching and vigilante violence, resulting in the murder of 34 persons and rape of 2 women, in recent years (mostly 2015 onward)..." (Hassan, et al., September 2017:06)

All of these sixty-six incidents are bovine related (cow protection), though some other triggers are also quoted. For example, in one study, ninety one percent (91%) of the incidents had cow-protection as the trigger, but, "vigilantism against minorities is not limited to cow and beef. Inter-faith couples and their relatives have been the target of many attacks, as have some Muslims who have been lynched without attributing any specific offence to them" (Hassan, et al., September 2017:06). The headings under which these mobs lynch their victims vary, as one report describes "Usual stories of cow slaughter, beef eating, love jihad (Muslim men kidnapping or enticing Hindu women), support for Pakistan and various criminal activities are circulated and forwarded thousands of times" (Verma, 2019). One more form of mob lynching, more numerous in number, happens to be 'Dayan', a sort of witch-hunting in which the suspect woman is killed by the mob. According to one report, "Between 2001 and 2016, there were 623 cases of women being declared as "dayan" or witch and killed by mobs" (Verma, 2019; Verma, 2019).

Minorities are the targets by the majority in all these lynching episodes. Muslims as a religious minority constitute the main target, followed by the Dalits as a racial minority. India Spend reveals, "Muslims were the target of 55% (36 of 66) cases of violence centred on bovine issues over nearly eight years (2010 to 2017) and comprised 85% (22 of 26) killed in 66 incidents" (2017). Moreover, "Dalits were the target in 8 per cent of the attacks, Hindus 14 per cent, Sikhs 5, [and] Christians, 1" (Hassan, et al., September 2017:15, Parenthesis added). It is also telling that nearly all Muslim victims came from down-trodden segments of the society, mostly engaged in the cattle business in one way or other (Hassan, et al., September 2017:25). But, "There have also been quite a few instances of mob-violence on the basis of race against African and African-American students and tourists" (Baksi & Nagarajan, 2017).

Women, as mentioned already, constitute a separate category of victims of mob violence. Spatially, “The bulk of these were in Haryana (9killed, 2 raped), Uttar Pradesh (9killed), and in Jharkhand (8 killed). West Bengal has been seeing a consistent increase (5killed, including two after the study) in hate crime numbers as well” (Hassan, et al., September 2017:07). To find out the locations, “The states of Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Chattisgarhi, Gujarat, Odisha, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Rajasthan tend to have the greatest number of religiously-motivated attacks and communal violence incidents” (USCIRF, 2015:149).

PAKISTAN

This research studied the archives of Pakistan based English dailies and internet sources for four years (January 2014-December 2017) to match it with the available data on India. As per it, there were around twenty two (22) incidents of mob violence that can be categorized as lynching. Yearly, it saw a stable trend. It was six (07) in 2014, seven (06) in 2015, eight (03) in 2016, and fourteen (06) in 2017. It makes an average of five point five (5.5) cases per year. Temporally, it has less changing trend as it seems to stay around five to seven cases roughly. Spatially, Punjab province received seven (07), the urban Sindh (Karachi-Hyderabad) got eleven (11), rural Sindh none (00), The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province three (03), and Boluchistan province one (01) cases out of the total. It is important to note here that only those incidents where at least one killing occurred has been included. Mob violence that resulted in the injuries or those were aborted by the police have not been mentioned here.

Three motivations were found out to be triggering these mob lynchings in Pakistan. First, mobs killed victim/s on the allegation of crimes (theft, snatching, kidnapping). Second, mobs had some religious reasons against the victim. Third, victims were targeted on the charges of sexual transgressions. The first type ranked the highest with fifteen (15) such cases over the period of study. Religion was the second biggest trigger with five (05) cases under this head. Gender related cases were the least with two (02) incidents. Obviously, petty criminals, religious minorities and women are the three social groups who constitute the victims of mob lynching in Pakistan under the period of study. In the religious type, committing of blasphemy (against religious persons) and desecration of religious texts were the most often alleged offenses against the victims. Christians felt the brunt of this type of violence, followed by Ahmadiya (Qadiyani) mostly in the Punjab province. In some cases, fellow Muslims too got killed on the suspicion of blasphemy or desecration. Though, in such cases, the accused would also be declared as ‘Qadiyani’ by the members of raging mob. In Urban Sindh, that topped the list in over all lynching, it was on the charges of petty crimes especially of theft and snatching that most of the lynchings happened.

Theory: Mob Lynching as a Process of Marginalization and Scapegoating

Rene’ Girard, a French sociologist, has given a very elaborate explanation of the problem of mob violence in any society. In his book, *The Scapegoat*(1986), he has presented the mechanism through which scapegoating proceeds. He is talking about

mob violence, which he defines “By collective persecutions I mean acts of violence committed directly by a mob of murderers such as the persecution of the Jews during the Black Death” (Girard, 1986:11). The process of scapegoat violence acts in three stages. The first stage is stereo-typing of the crisis, the second stage is the nature of accusation, and the third is the selection of victim. A brief description of these three stages will set the theme of the discussion.

In the first stage, the people of a society (majority per se) lament the loss of former culture differentiations. A sense and a discourse of loss of cultural values take place. It is pointed out with growing concern that old system of the society is weakening. This polemic of crisis exacerbates and finds a mimetic proliferation during the time of some actual troubles in the society. These include spread of epidemic, some natural calamity (flood, earthquake, famine etc.), and eruption of violence in the society (civil war, external war, terrorism etc.). In all, a social ‘crisis’ is invoked. In the second stage, the society in grief over the loss of values and in danger of the crisis accuses someone for the crisis. Logically, if the society is disintegrating or is in the grip of violence; then, the members they would be to blame for it. The fatal attraction towards ‘mimesis’ may be at the root of this loss of old values or spread of violence; but, they would not take the responsibility, instead they would search for the scapegoats. In the words of Girard, “After all, human relations disintegrate in the process and the subjects of those relations cannot be utterly innocent of this phenomenon. But, rather than blame themselves, people inevitably blame either society as a whole, which costs them nothing, or other people who seem particularly harmful for easily identifiable reasons” (Girard, 1986:14). So, in this second stage of accusation, heinous crimes, sexual transgression and blasphemy/desecration are brought forward as the main blames against the selected culprits.

Finally, in the selection stage, victims are chosen who are ‘weak’ from every sense of this word. Weak and minority become almost identical in this sense. Religious and ethnic minorities, physically weak, physically impaired, poor, the elite, female, the different etc. are the segments of the society who are attributed with the accusations described above (crimes, religious profanity, sexual transgression), and resultantly the source of the social crisis (inflation, loss of jobs, persistent violence); hence, individuals or many of them are punished by the mobs representing the majority in every sense of the word. In his remarks, “Ultimately, the persecutors always convince themselves that a small number of people, or even a single individual, despite his relative weakness, is extremely harmful to the whole of society” (Girard, 1986:15).

Analysis: Dynamics of Mob Lynching in India and Pakistan

So far, this research has been able to construct a coherent picture of the phenomena in the region. Mob justice resulting in homicide has been found out to exist and potentially increasing in India and Pakistan. The theory of Rene’ Girard, in this regard, provides the analytical tool to understand the phenomenon. A process of scapegoating by a majority of a marginalized section of the society is visible. This

present section will elaborate this further along three themes: victim selection, stereotype of accusation and discourse of crisis.

VICTIM SELECTION

Victim selection is crucial in both Pakistan and India. They are from minorities in both the cases. Whereas, it was found out in above sections that in India Muslims, Dalits and women are the segments of society out of which the individual victims are selected. Muslims are the main targets; though women seem to be suffering the most, yet it is not confirmed whether they take a mob style of violence or secret murders by the relatives. In Pakistan, petty criminals, religious minorities and women are the victims who have been marginalized by the society for this purpose. It is again telling that murder of women, what is called, honour killing, amounts to around thousand per annum in Pakistan (Rahim, 2017); yet, mob induced violence in this regard is lower than other forms. One example is a mob induced lynching of a boy over the allegation of illicit relation with a girl in Pakistan. According to the report, "As soon as the residents and relatives of the girl came to know about the vague accusation, they marched their way with sticks and stones in their hands to beat the boy. The locals established their own court and decided to beat the boy to death" (Web Desk, 2017). Christians, Ahmadiya and seemingly 'non-religious' persons come under the religious minorities. Misra (2015) duly acknowledges the process of marginalisation under a hegemonic violence of the majority towards the Christian minorities in Pakistan. The last category can be ascribed to Mashal Khan, a famous case of lynching of a young student at campus by the mob of fellow university students for his liberal views (Shah, 2017). Three aspects of victim selection in both the countries are homogenous: class identity of the victim, randomness of the act, and role of rumours.

Victims, both in Indian and Pakistan, have *class identity*. As a matter of fact, nearly all of the victims come from the lower strata of the society. 'Poor' has been identified by Girard as one of the potential sacrifice of the society. Being poor exposes weakness and weakness brings in all forms of vulnerabilities. As a matter of fact, the poor segment is a making of the society itself, yet (and because of that) it has to face the wrath of its own creator. But, it is also to be emphasised here that rich itself constitutes a category of potential victims according to a Girardian scheme for being a minority. The highest number of victims in Pakistan were the alleged petty criminals in shape of pick-pocket, mobile snatchers and shop looters. Definitely, they represent the lowest class of the society. Even, in other forms of mob lynching, victims were mostly from the lower class, as observed by this research. One glaring example was the lynching of a poor Christian couple in Pakistan over the charge of desecration. According to one report, "Their bodies were burned at the brick kiln where they worked in the town of Kot Radha Kishan in Punjab province" (BBC, November 4, 2014). It is equally true of India. One report suggests, "The victims in all cases were poorer backward caste Muslims, mostly those who traditionally make a living in the animal husbandry, dairying, and meat supply chain sector, such as Qureishi, Meo, Gujjar, and Ansari" (Hassan, et al., September 2017:25). Dalits, another victim group, are a racially segregated minority living mostly on low-income works.

Second aspect of victim selection is the *randomness of the act* of lynching. It dazzles the eyes of a bystander (like a researcher) to see the abrupt chasing and thrashing of an alleged victim by a mob that has formed right on the occasion and that disperses right away. If it were not for the theoretical lens, the researchers would lose their eyesight. The researcher would incline to take every lynching event as unique. But, the theory informs that the society was since long preparing for this ritual through a process of social marginalization of certain segments of the society. A cursory study of data reveals the pattern in these seemingly uncoordinated events. In India, out of sixty cases of mob lynchings, mostly two social groups are among the targets; in Pakistan, out of twenty two cases, three groups are the ones becoming the victims more often. The randomness of mob violence is not that random as it appears. The randomness of the act, Girard argues, is a scheme of the society to hide its scheming process. He quips, "The attempt to moralize myths ends in a dilemma... The simplest solution is to retain the victim's crimes but claim they were not intended" (Girard, 1986:82). The randomness exposes the 'fact' of the offense as caught red-handed. It also absolves the society of any guilt. Lynching 'just' happened, there was no progress towards it.

The *role of rumours* in mob induced violence is unsurprisingly high. Nearly, every mob lynching has a rumour serving as the 'fact'. The mob relies on the rumour for their brutal action. Members already believe in the guilt of the victim. They are acting out of this belief. As such, rumour is just a calling for the action they are supposed to commit. One Indian report understands it, "More than half (52 per cent) of these attacks were based on rumours, specifically, false allegations targeted against a particular person on the basis of their identity..." (Hassan, et al., September 2017:15). Another report accepts the role of rumour, especially going viral through the social media and quotes, "On June 27, 2017, a mentally ill woman was lynched in West Bengal after a 14-year old child went missing in the area with and rumours of Bangladeshi child abductors being active in the area" (Danyal, 2019). It was equally true for the twenty two cases studied by this study on Pakistan. Mobs acted on the strength of rumours. The process of marginalization and scapegoating is also the source of rumours. Stereo-type of rumours carry the identity of the future victim and the set of accusations against them. It is the identity of the victim that demands action not the factuality of the accusation; the latter is only the occasion of the act.

Stereo-Type of Accusation

Violent unity called mob is charged with certain accusation against the member of a segment of society they have marginalised. Accusations are typical, showing a remarkable continuity from the time immemorial to the most modern ages. Girard has identified three main stereo-types of accusations for the entire human history. These are accusation of offense targeting someone highly esteemed in society like father, elders, kings etc; accusation of sexual transgression as defined by a community; and, accusation of blasphemy and desecration of the religious persons, text and places. Clearly, accusations in the two countries under study follow this historical pattern. Whereas, in India, accusation of breaking the religious taboo over cow triggered the

maximum mob lynching, in Pakistan too religious motives for action abounded. Accusation of sexual deviance was also noted in both the countries. One report in India counts, “propaganda accusing Muslims of being terrorists; spying for Pakistan; forcibly kidnapping, converting, and marrying Hindu women; and disrespecting Hinduism by slaughtering cows” (USCIRF, 2015:150), as the main accusations hurled against the victims. One writer observes the victims are accused as “they are ‘cow eaters’, a threat to Hindu women, and members of terror sleeper cells” (Apoorvanand, 2017). Blasphemy and sexual promiscuity were the two of the three dominant accusations in Pakistan constituting thirty percent (30%) of the total. Accusation of petty crime is one dominant accusation in Pakistan that seems defying the theory. In fact, crime has remained one of the accusations against the victim throughout the history and Girard has indicated it many times (Girard, 1986, 1989). In essence, ‘theft’ exposes the arbitrariness of private property on which the stratification of society stands. It is a ritual impurity to lay your hands over the ‘holy property’- the fabric of the society, especially when it is imagined to be the hand of the one who is marginalized (Jews, blacks and Dalits). Two aspects of stereo-type of accusation are interesting in the present context: mimetic contagion and role of party.

One observes ‘spells of mob lynching’ to be called *mimetic contagion* here. Someone interested in the topic can definitely experience rising trend of mob lynching in India and Pakistan. Especially, writers about India are concerned with a recent spell of such incidents. So, a Reuter report indicates a surge in mob induced violence in India between 2010 and 2017, which accelerated after 2014 (Reuters, June 28, 2017). The Human Rights Watch too saw a surge in vigilant violence since 2015 in India. (Human Rights Watch, 2017). Writer Rhada Sarkar also posits, “Cow vigilantism itself is not new in India, and violence over the protection of cows has occurred in the past. However, the frequency, impunity, and flagrance of the current instances of cow-related violence are unprecedented” (Sarka, 2017). Writers concerned with Pakistan too observe a surge or trend in mob induced lynching, especially the blasphemy triggered ones. According to Huma Yusuf, “There is no shortage of horrifying tales of mob justice in Pakistan, nor want for gruesome details. The practice – and our resignation to its ubiquity – seem to be woven in the fabric of Pakistani society” (Yusuf, 2015). As human thoughts are mimetic, so are their actions contagious. It is not that mob lynching has been invented during the previous few years in India and Pakistan. Some scholars observe, “There are however certain sections within the media who deny such perception any basis in reality. They point out to the gruesome history of mob violence and massacres in the past, particularly prior to the current central government, to state that lynching is essentially a law and order problem” (Baksi & Nagarajan, 2017). They are right. The process is as long as human history; only its spell is recent. Girard has a clear explanation for such spells, “The blind instinct for reprisals, the stupid reciprocity which pits each one against the nearest or most visible adversary, is not based on anything specific; thus everything can converge at almost any time, on almost anyone, but preferably at the moment of greatest hysteria” (Girard, 1986:86). Spells are mimetic convergences during the moments of hysteria.

This brings us to the second aspect of accusations: *role of certain political actors and parties*. These actors seem to be promoting the mass hysteria to establish mimetic convergence against the known targets. In India, nearly all reports available indicate the co-rise of Bharatiya Janata Party and vigilant violence in the country. One report tells, "Since Hindu right wing BJP took power in many provinces (through the 2000s) and in the centre (in 2014), with majoritarianism having gained ground, anti-cow slaughter laws have been more strictly enforced, and laws themselves made more stringent" (Hassan, et al., September 2017:12). Another report concludes, "The past five years of the Modi government have seen a spate of mob attacks across India. The elements that fuelled this bloody mix include religious fanaticism (specifically, cow protection), increased penetration of social media and politicians, who ranged from being apathetic to instigators of violence" (Danyal, 2019). PJP, a party, provides the political resources to the mobs for their violence (WardBerenschot, February 2011). The rise of religious vigilantism and the rise of mob induced violence has also been observed in Pakistan. One writer observes, "In recent times, backed by the formidable power of the state, Hindu India and Islamic Pakistan have vigorously injected religion into both politics and society" (Hoodbhoy, 2017). The religio-politics that emerges as a result is also termed, 'Bareilvi Rise'- the majority sect of Pakistan (Ispahani, 2015), as a reaction to the organized violence of the Deobandi sect (Syed, 2016). Khadim Hussian Rizvi, a firebrand leader of the former sect, is famous in recent times for his speeches enticing the youth and other faithful to resort to direct violence against the enemies of religion (Rana, 2017). This research too, in its study of the select cases, found out the role of certain instigators in promoting the accusation among the willing participants. Girard has it, "Such things can happen, especially in our time, but they cannot happen, even today, without the availability of an eminently manipulable mass to be used by the manipulators for their...purposes, people who will allow themselves to be trapped in the persecutors' representation of persecution, people capable of belief where the scapegoat is concerned" (Girard, 1986:40). Mass hysteria begets leaders.

Stereo-Type of Crisis

The crisis- real or imagined- is either spread of violence in the society in the shape of war and civil-feuds, economic hardships in the shape of ancient famines or modern rapid loss of jobs, existential problems like spread of epidemics and rapid cycles of death, and, the most formidable one in the shape of loss of ancient culture, impurity of rituals and change of values. Both the countries have very poor law and order situation. Monopoly over violence is just an ideal to be sought in books not in the streets (Yusuf, 2015). Pakistan, especially, has gone through a long period of terror-style violence in its society. People have been living in a constant state of insecurity (Nelson, 2011). Insecurity is 'the' crisis the society wants to spin through its search for surrogates. Hassner (2015) argues the blasphemy triggered mob violence in Pakistan had a self-created threat perception to the some core belief of the majority. Economic down-turn is also visible in the case of India (Dutta, 2019). Since the coming of BJP, India has been losing its former growth. It might result in further squeezing at the bottom half of the society. Consequently, the lower class is further neck to neck with

each other for the already receding chances of survival (Corzine, Huff-Corzine, & Creech, 1988). Loss of old culture and religious values by the on-set of the 'new' times is another 'crisis' that looms large among the mob instigators in both India and Pakistan. Invasion of a foreign culture and the loss of members towards it is the main concern. "In December 2014, Hindu nationalist groups announced plans to forcibly 'reconvert' at least 4,000 Christian families and 1,000 Muslim families to Hinduism in Uttar Pradesh on Christmas day as part of a so-called 'Ghar Wapsi' (returning home) program" (USCIRF, 2015:151). The rise of BJP is a promise of stopping the cultural disintegration of Hindustan, and preserving its ancient glory (Krishna, 1985). In Pakistan, the religious lot is always weary of the invasion of the foreign culture in the shape of liberal ideas and relations. The foreign culture has their proto-types in the shape of the marginalised segments of the society who look foreign, because they have been carefully turned into the 'other'. So, at the end, Ahmadis, Christians and Liberals are held out to be conspiring against the old unity of the society.

In a word, the new age in the form of 'modernity' is a set of crisis the guardians of the old culture wish to eliminate. What they cannot eliminate is the fatal attraction towards the new age by themselves. So, they have to offer scapegoats for the evils themselves are the source. In a nut-shell, Girard summarise the entire process as, "The crisis is seen as a mysterious illness introduced into the community by an outsider. The cure lies in ridding the community of the sole malignant element" (Girard, 1989:84). But, this cure needs further deepening of the crisis; so has to recur at times.

Conclusion

This research opened up door on a social problem called mob lynching in the context of India and Pakistan with both an empirical and theoretical commitment. Empirically, it found out a stock of data in India for the period of 2014-2017, which has been gathered from internet sources. The researcher matched the period with similar data from Pakistan. In total, around eighty eight (88) cases of mob lynching were studied. Theoretically, Rene' Girard's concepts of scapegoating and collective violence against surrogate victim informed this study. This theoretical-empirical understanding of the problem enabled this work to propose: mob lynching in Indian and Pakistan is a process of social marginalisation and scapegoating. In the final words, this research is a modest opening into the field inviting future research on the topic to explore further avenues relating to the problem of mob lynching.

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