

# COWED DOWN: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON THE NEED FOR STRICT ANTI-LYNCHING LAWS

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In yet another disturbing and dastardly act that is now part of a pattern in much of North India, [two tribal men were beaten to death](#) by alleged activists of the Bajrang Dal in Seoni, Madhya Pradesh, on the suspicion that they were slaughtering cows. Apart from tribal people, Muslims and Dalits in particular have borne the brunt of these senseless acts of mob violence and murders. Reminiscent of the [murder of a dairy farmer, Pehlu Khan](#), after he and his sons were attacked by self-described “cow vigilantes” in April 2017 in Rajasthan, the two men, Sampatlal Vatti and Dhansai Invati, were attacked by nearly 20 men; both died of injuries. The police have arrested 13 people for their alleged involvement; at least six of them were members of the Bajrang Dal, according to the family members. An insinuation by the police that one of the dead men was involved in a “cow slaughter” case has shown yet again where the priorities of law enforcement lie in such cases. In another pattern, there has been a certain acuity in the implementation of cattle slaughter laws which is missing in trying and bringing those involved in lynch mobs to justice. Stricter cattle slaughter laws have been implemented with a fervour that has less to do with animal preservation and more to do with appeasement of majoritarian impulses to garner political support.

In 2005, the Supreme Court had justified the total ban on cattle slaughter by an expansive interpretation of the directive principles of state policy, and relying on Articles 48, 48A, and 51(A) of the Constitution, that seeks to preserve breeds used in agriculture and animal husbandry, explicitly prohibiting the slaughter of cows and calves and other milch and draught cattle, besides promoting compassion to animals. The judgment had overturned an earlier ruling in 1958 which had limited the ban only to “useful” cattle which are still engaged in agriculture and husbandry. This interpretation only laid the grounds for State governments — especially those led by the BJP and its alliance partners — to come up with stringent laws on cow slaughter, and in the public sphere, a stigmatisation of communities such as Dalits, Muslims and tribals for their dietary habits and their dependence on cattle products for a livelihood. Four States (Rajasthan, Jharkhand, West Bengal and Manipur) had passed laws against lynching after many such incidents but they were under various stages of implementation with the Union government taking the view that lynching is not a crime under the Indian Penal Code. While civil society in Madhya Pradesh must demand justice for the injured and dead tribal men and a return to the rule of law in which such murderous acts do not go unpunished, it is time for a judicial rethink on legislation around cattle slaughter.

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