Shooting the Messenger

What is the issue?

\n\n

\n
- There has been a spree of mob lynching in recent times, due to alleged rumours that were spread through the messaging application "WhatsApp".
\n
- But pinning the blame solely on WhatsApp for the violence is diversionary tactic to not address the larger malice that is plaguing our society.
\n

\n\n

What is wrong with the current public narrative?

\n\n

\n
- **Post Truths -** In the age of social media, authenticated news is losing steam and is getting submerged within a mesh of online false propaganda.
\n
- It is easy to get swept in this wave of sensational social media forwards, which draw neat narratives which ignore factual complexity.
\n
- Rumours on WhatsApp that child kidnappers are roaming around have led to mob lynching at various places recently, killing about 20 people.
\n
- This has opened a debate on the growing use of technology by the "ignorant" masses and the responsibilities of a technology platform.
\n
- **The Blame -** Whatsapp does indeed have to do more for curtailing rumours on its platform and weeding out fake news.
\n
- But the public opinion, which is largely accusing Whatsapp, seems oblivious of the government's responsibility to ensure the safety of all.
\n
- This also distracts us from paying attention to our current polarising political discourse, which is causing the social divide within the society.
\n
- The long overdue police reforms is another aspect is missing the public eye.

What are the aspects that need attention?

- While technology is indeed an enabler for the faster dispersal of rumours, it is only a trigger and the undercurrent lies elsewhere.
- **Data -** Government maintains no central data on public lynching – thereby making it hard to decipher clear trends, if any.
- There is also no plan to start such a data collection in the near future and there is no specific legal framework to deal with lynching offences.
- In the absence of official data or a substantive law, media briefing by the police become the principal source to build a public narrative.
- For its part, police narratives have been largely simplistic and lacking in substantive data on the incident.
- **Social Tensions -** Rumours of child kidnappers is the commonly stated reason, which has caused most of the recent lynching incidences.
- But there seems to have been no realistic analysis on the profile of the victims who were trashed on mere suspicion, which in itself is a revealing tell tale.
- Most victims were "nomadic tribes and people from religious minorities", a trend that reflects our pre-existing social tensions and discriminatory outlook.
- The "political vulnerability (lack of state support) and the ostensible cultural distinction" of the victim from the mob is likely to have precipitated the crime.
- **Organised Assault -** Some scholars who've studies riots (which often involves public lynching), term them to be "organised political productions".
- Hence, as an extension lynching is not mere street madness, but there is an element of organization on the lines of some identity to establish dominance.
- In this context, the current spree of lynching can't be seen in isolation from

the previous ones that involved rampage by "Gau Rakshaks" (cattle brigade).
\n
- Notably, a fact-finding report titled "Lynching without end", documented 24 instances of lynching and vigilante violence between 2014 and 2017.
\n
- The report finds that, the incidences led to the murder of 34 persons, and that 94% of these incidences were organised and 91% were cow related.
\n

\n\n

\n\n

Source: The Hindu

\n\n

\n