



Moral Policing

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Why in News

Recently, five teenagers were arrested by the police in connection to an attack on a 23-year-old man in Kerala. This attack is one of the **growing examples of moral policing** in India.

Key Points

- **Definition:** Moral Policing in its broadest sense could mean **a system where a strict vigil and restriction is imposed on those who violate the basic standards of our society.**
 - The basic standard of our society could be found in its cultures, age-old customs and religious doctrines.
 - It is a situation where the moral character of an individual is questioned by those who advocate this phenomenon.

- **Manifestations of Moral Policing:**

- **Mob Lynching: Lynching**, a form of violence in which a mob, under the pretext of **administering justice without trial**, executes a presumed offender, often after inflicting torture and corporal mutilation.
- **Cow Vigilantism:** Cow vigilantism or lynching in the name of **Cow Protection** poses a serious threat to the **secular fabric of the nation**.
Killing of people just on the suspicion of beef depicts the intolerance among the vigilantes.
- **Cultural terrorism:** Various extra constitutional actors like **Anti Romeo Squads** imposes their subjective belief through use of physical violence.
- **Honor Killing:** Honor killings are one of the extreme cases of moral policing which supposedly curtail western influences by encroaching on Individual freedom.
- **Affecting Fundamental Rights:** There are many times when moral policing hinders the basic fundamental rights of the citizen enshrined in the constitution such as the **right to freedom of speech & expression, right to privacy, right to live with dignity etc.**
For example, due to moral policing, the LGBT community faces extreme consequences and their basic right to life and liberty has been threatened.

- **Factors Promoting Moral Policing:**

- **Religious Values:** In a Hindu religion, cows are worshipped and they are seen as a symbol of life and thus they are revered and worshipped.

This sometimes leads to Cow vigilantism, which is perpetrated by the majority towards the minority on the presumption that the minorities are in regular consumption of bovine meat.
- **Social Networking Platform:** Platforms like Whatsapp' and Facebook act as a **catalyst towards moral policing**, as it can amplify the spread of **fake news**.

Fake news can lead to events like Lynching, Communal clashes, etc.
- **Patriarchy:** People with a patriarchal mindset views the security of women as their duty, for they are perceived as weaker sex and gullible.

Due to this, they would impose restrictions on women in terms of speech, attitude, clothing, public behaviour etc.
- **Overreach by Police:** Police is a public organisation that is **given extraordinary powers to use force**. This leaves Police sometimes overreaching their powers. For example:
 - Section 292 of the **Indian Penal Code (IPC)** criminalized materials like books and paintings if it is deemed to be obscene. However, the term **obscenity has not been defined**.

However, the police personnel use Section 292 to file cases against film posters and advertisement hoardings that are deemed to be obscene. This **undermines artistic creativity and curtails the artists' freedom of expression**.
 - The **Immoral traffic (prevention) act (PITA)** was originally passed to prevent **human trafficking**.

However, it has been used by police to raid hotels if they suspect a sex racket being run there even without proper evidence, thus embarrassing legal couples and young people.

Way Forward

- **Reforming Criminal Justice System:** There is a need to carry out reforms in the criminal justice system, so that sensitivity and awareness about constitutional values can be imbibed in the administration.

Criminal justice system reforms broadly comprises three sets of reforms viz. **Judicial reforms, Prison reforms, Police reforms**.
- **Public Discussions:** Public discussion and debates should be promoted in schools and colleges to create awareness and sensitization towards different moral policing.

Source: TH