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Author(s): Muhammad Akram, Asim Nasar, Muhammad Rizwan Safdar and Falak Sher

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## Restorative Justice Approach to Cow Vigilante Violence in India

Muhammad Akram<sup>1</sup>

*Eastern Mennonite University, USA*

Asim Nasar

*Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Malaysia*

Muhammad Rizwan Safdar

*University of the Punjab, Pakistan*

Falak Sher

*Government College University Faisalabad, Pakistan*

**Abstract:** This paper elaborates on a restorative justice approach to cow vigilante violence in India, intending to develop specific arguments put forward in previous works. It covers the historical, political, and economic aspects of cow vigilante violence against Muslim and Dalit minorities in India, where majority Hindus believe in the cow as a mother to be protected from harm or slaughter. A comparative analysis approach is used to relate the past and present context of cow vigilantism in India. Schematic diagrams are used to discuss the trends, legislation, and restorative governmentalities in terms of building peace among the communities. The key findings suggest that to influence violent and oppressor ideologies of Hindu nationalists in today's India, Muslims should rationally acknowledge the historic harm Muslim rulers have caused to Hindus. This paper recommends adopting an emergent system for change and triangulating the response to violence to overcome the cow vigilante violence in India. To transform the violent ideologies against Muslims and Dalits over cow protection, the government of India needs to adopt a holistic approach to transform violence and restrict political misuse of the notion of cow protection.

**Keywords:** cow vigilantism, historic harm, India, religious minorities, violence.

The cow is a sacred animal in Hinduism, and it symbolizes gentleness, self-giving, and nonviolence, who gives more to human beings than she takes from them. Hence, she should not be killed or harmed, especially for food (Winston, 2015). There are 145.12 million cows in India, 18% more than in 2012 (BusinessLine, 2019). Nearly 80% of India's 1.3 billion people worship cows as goddesses (Gowen, 2018a; Narayanan, 2019). Until 2017, India was the largest exporter of beef in the world; however, after Narendra Modi was elected India's prime minister, exports have decreased putting India in second place after Brazil (Marlow, 2019). Narendra Modi's party, Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP), promised cow protection in its election campaign promoting violent means to do so creating difficulties for those engaged in the cow businesses. Protection vigilantes, Hindu nationalists who aim to protect cows, shatter the cows' nonviolent symbolism through blind

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<sup>1</sup> Correspondent Author E-Mail: [akramuhammad1@gmail.com](mailto:akramuhammad1@gmail.com)

acts of violence against those they suspect of potentially killing the cow. Often, they do not determine whether the suspects will be killing the cow later or merely doing associated business such as just transporting a cow from one owner to another.

Keeping in view the facts about cow vigilante violence in India, the available studies remain few and fragmented, especially in the fields of justice and humanities. Scholars have covered this domain and even fewer have elaborated on the restorative justice approach to cow vigilante violence. Moreover, the factors that cause cow vigilante violence are barely addressed in academic literature. Further, a theoretical perspective related to cow vigilante violence remains elusive in published studies.

This study presents a historical view of cow vigilante violence in India, describing the roles of government and communities in adopting a system for change and triangulating the response system through peacekeeping, peacemaking, and peacebuilding. This paper takes the opportunity to answer the following research questions: 1) What is the historical and legislative importance of holy cows in India? 2) How have history, law enforcement, economy, and politics become drivers of violence by cow vigilantes in India? 3) How theory of change support in reducing cow vigilante violence in India?

The structure of this paper is as follow: first, an overview of the historical significance of the holy cow accompanied with a root cause analysis in a fishbone chart underlying reasons of violence.; second, a research methodology; third, theory of change covering the perspective of government and communities; fourth section presents analysis and last section covers discussion and conclusion.

## Historical Importance of the Holy Cow

### Past Context

The rise of Buddhism and Jainism inspired vegetarianism ideologies, and many Hindus stopped eating cow meat because cows produce milk. By the first century A.D., cows were associated with Brahmins, the highest caste in Hinduism, and to kill a cow was linked to killing a Brahmin (Winston, 2015). However, over the history of the subcontinent, not all Hindus considered cow to be sacred. The first Mughal emperor Zahir-u-Din Babur, who was Muslim, banned cow slaughter in 1527 out of respect for Hindu beliefs, but some Hindu kings did not enforce the ban in their states. In 1857, a Hindu prime minister of Delhi, under the emperor, Bahadur Shah Zafar, made cow killing a capital offense; and in the kingdom of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, cow slaughter was the only crime with capital punishment (Swamy, 2009). Dwijendra Narayan Jha notes in his book, *The Myth of the Holy Cow*, that "[a]ncient Hindus ate beef - the cow got its revered status around 500 A.D. Coinciding with an agricultural boom on the subcontinent, beef was not sacred during the verdict period (1K-5K B.C.) which was the time when Hinduism's oldest scriptures - the Vedas - were written" (Jha, 2002). In the ancient history of India, many Hindus continued eating beef even after the spread of vegetarianism among Buddhists, Jains, and Hindus. The Rig Veda (c. 1500 B.C.), a sacred Hindu text, and the ancient ritual texts known as Brahmanas (c. 900 B.C.) reported that a bull or cow should be killed to be eaten when a guest arrives. Throughout history, political arguments about Brahmin sanctity made cow protection controversial because the Brahmin caste received donations of cows urging mass cow protection (Doniger, 2017).

Violence was quite visible with cow protection during colonial India as the first cow-related riots broke out in April 1881 when a Muslim butcher was traveling with an uncovered beef basket

in Multan, a city in Punjab province. What seems like a spontaneous demand for cow protection was shaped under the inadvertent aegis of the British Empire. Most known incidents of cow protection-related violence in colonial India were the Fyzabad and Ayudhya riots in 1912, Calcutta beef riots in 1909, widespread clashes between 1911 to 1917 in Patna, Muzaffarpur, Bihar, and Gaya cities, mob attack of 25000 Hindus on a Muslim village in Ibrahimpur on September 30, 1917, and Delhi riots in 1924 (Chatterjee, 2016). An Indian lawyer, anti-colonial nationalist, and political ethicist Mahatma Gandhi stated that “How can I force anyone not to slaughter cows unless he is himself so disposed? It is not as if there were only Hindus in the Indian Union. There are Muslims, Parsis, Christians, and other religious groups here” (Venkatraman, 2017). But the current situation around cow protection does not comply with thoughts of democratic India’s founding father.

**Table 1**  
*Cow Protection Laws in the 22 States of India*

No.	Law	Implemented in Year	Amended in Year
1	West Bengal Animal Slaughter Control Act	1950	1979
2	The Assam Cattle Preservation Act	1951	1962
3	The Gujarat Animal Preservation Act	1954	2011 and 2017
4	The Uttar Pradesh Prevention of Cow Slaughter Act	1955	1979 and 2002
5	The Bihar Preservation and Improvement of Animals Act	1955	None
6	The Punjab Prohibition of Cow Slaughter Act	1955	None
7	The Tamil Nadu Animal Preservation Act	1958	None
8	The Orissa Prevention of Cow Slaughter Act	1960	None
9	The Karnataka Prevention of Cow Slaughter and Cattle Preservation Act	1964	None
10	The Pondicherry Prevention of Cow Slaughter Act	1968	None
11	Maharashtra Animal Preservation Act	1976	1995
12	The Andhra Pradesh Prohibition of Cow Slaughter and Animal Preservation Act, 1977	1977	None
13	The Goa, Daman & Diu Prevention of Cow Slaughter Act	1978	None
14	The Himachal Pradesh Prohibition of Cow Slaughter Act	1979	
15	The Ranbir Penal Code, 1989, governs the slaughter of cattle in Jammu and Kashmir	1989	None
16	The Delhi Agricultural Cattle Preservation Act	1994	None
17	The Rajasthan Bovine Animal (Prohibition of Slaughter and Regulation of Temporary Migration or Export) Act	1995	None
18	The Chhattisgarh Agricultural Cattle Preservation Act	2004	2011
19	The Uttarakhand Protection of Cow Progeny Act	2007	2015
20	Madhya Pradesh Gauvansh Pratishedh Adhiniyam	2010	None
21	The Haryana Gauvansh Sanrakshan and Gausamvardhan Act	2015	None

*Note:* A detailed review of each law can be accessed from [cjp.org.in/cow-slaughter-prevention-laws-in-India](http://cjp.org.in/cow-slaughter-prevention-laws-in-India).

After 1947, when India became a Hindu majority country and the world's largest democracy, cow protection was institutionalized and later passed into the hands of vigilantes with the supervision of political power stakeholders. Several political activists relate such violence trends with the Muslim rule over India and the Muslim majority neighbor Pakistan for the oppression of Indian Muslims as an implicit objective of the cow protection movement because Muslims dominate the beef industry in India. Yogi Adityanath, who is a Hindu monk and Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh state of India, believes that all people in the subcontinent were originally Hindus who were forced to convert to Islam, Christianity, and other religions. He quotes the regime of Muslim Mughal emperors, 1526-1707 (Softschools.com, n.d.), during which Muslim rulers, Christian missionaries, and other historical incidents pushed Hindus to be converted from Hinduism (NDTV, 2014). He believed that if Hindus pushed non-Hindus back to Hinduism, then this would be like returning to their original beliefs, which should be encouraged. Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi, who is BJP's Muslim union minister of state for parliamentary affairs, stated that "those who are dying without eating beef can go to Pakistan or Arab countries or any other part of the world where it is available" (Hindustan Times, 2015).

A history of contradictions is also reflected in the legal system of modern India, where there is no restriction of slaughtering a cow in eight states and union territories, and one can slaughter a cow in two other states with a government-issued certificate. Since the independence of India, several acts have been implemented and amended for the protection of cows in 22 states of India (Table 1).

## Present Context

From the perspective of law enforcement, cows are legally protected from slaughter or harm in 22 states of India. However, violence occurs when the vigilantes take control of laws fueled by suspicion, hatred, or political influence. A vigilante feels freedom when law enforcement's statements and actions offer them space to further their vigilantism and associated violence. In most cases associated with cow vigilante violence, first responder police officers function based on their belief biases, manipulative reluctance, and political influences. They often delay in responding to an incident, hesitate to name the vigilantes as offenders, are reluctant to file the FIR (first investigation reports) against the vigilantes, are afraid of losing their jobs due to political patronage of the vigilantes, and often file cases against victims of violence by vigilantes.

Police have allowed cow protectors to unleash terror with impunity. The police partiality further extends to the families of victims by complicating the investigation of incidents and threatening them so that they keep silent rather than pursuing justice. Samaydeen whose brother was killed by a cow vigilante mob killed in June 2018 in Uttar Pradesh said, "they also threatened us with arrest under cattle protection laws, saying they would put our whole family in jail" (Human Rights Watch, 2019, p. 8). The political perspective of cow vigilantism also entails a complex but organized political phenomenon that operates in the discourses of religious-political power dynamics at local, regional, and national levels. Sakshi Maharaj, BJP member of parliament, on the killing of Mohammad Akhlaq, October 2015, stated that "we will not remain silent if somebody tries to kill our mother. We are ready to kill and be killed" (Human Rights Watch, 2019, p. 4). These religious-political dynamics were further heightened during BJP's regime.

Back in 2013, the state of Uttar Pradesh witnessed cow-related violence in the form of 93 riots and 108 incidents of tension, which resulted in 63 deaths and 353 injuries (219 Muslims and 134 Hindus), as well as more than 50,000 displaced families (Hindustan Times, 2013).

At the intersection of religion and politics, cow protection has been a critical factor of political divisiveness, which sparks during the election seasons at local and national levels. Narendra Modi (the current Prime Minister, 2020) used cow protection as a political campaign strategy extensively during the 2014 elections ultimately resulting in his appointment for prime minister. He allowed a violent approach to protecting cows, which killed 44 people in 2018, 36 of them were Muslims. Nonetheless, contradictions are present in the views of political leadership across different states in India about beef. The BJP's General Secretary in Meghalaya, David Kharsati, and Party Chief in Mizoram, JV Hluna, are mainly concerned with nutrition and hygiene measures while slaughtering rather than banning it because cow slaughter is legal in these states (Parashar, 2017). Figure 1 provides a map of cow slaughter laws in India (Asrar, 2017).

**Figure 1**

*Legal Systems of Cow Slaughter in India*



*Note.* From, “India suspends ban on trade of cattle for slaughter,” by S. Asrar, 2017, ([www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2017/07/india-suspends-ban-trade-cattle-slaughter-170711075047079.html](http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2017/07/india-suspends-ban-trade-cattle-slaughter-170711075047079.html)).

From the perspective of economic impact, the underlying factor of cow vigilantism against Muslims is Muslims' dominance over the multi-billion USD industry of beef in India. Decreasing the beef industry will help the Hindu nationalists of India to oppress Muslims in their country questioning their citizenship by claiming India as Hindu only state. Though India accounts for 20% of the world's beef exports (World Atlas, 2018), the notion of cow protection accounts for a considerable business that ranges from cows' shelter to health to counting to monitoring. The business contracts of cow protection often cross from the hands of politicians serving their financial interests by keeping alive the public notion of cow protection. Between 2014 and 2016, the Modi government spent \$41 million for cow sheds (Gowen, 2018a). Even at the local level, allegedly,

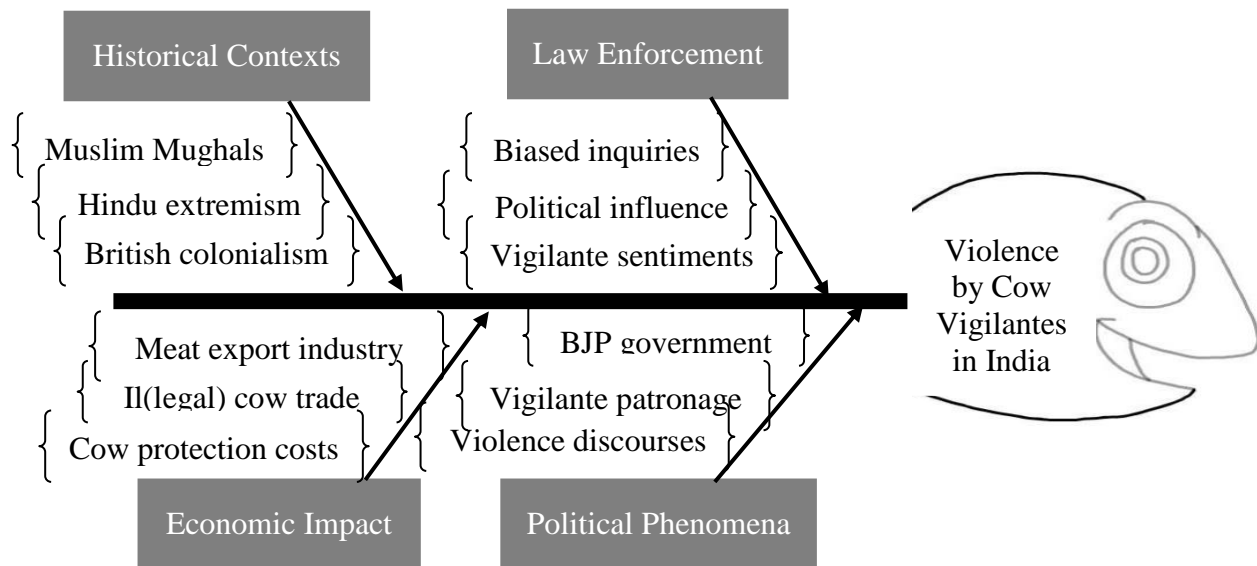


police extort money from cattle traders by threatening mob violence on those who engage in cow related businesses and enforcing punitive laws of cow protection.

Avtar Singh, a livestock trader, mentioned that “the cow I was selling for Indian rupees (Rs) 115,000/-, now I am selling for Rs 50,000/-” (Goyal, 2016). A cattle breeder Daljit Singh, President of Progressive Dairy Farmers Association, says that people humiliate traders by teasing them and naming these animals as their mothers. Vigilantes in Punjab’s neighboring states demand USD 230 – USD 250 per cow from traders to proceed with their trucks to their destinations in Punjab (Goyal, 2016). Although cow protection is a religious duty for many Hindus, it is a significant source of income or business for many others. Figure 2 shows the root cause analysis of cow vigilante violence in India.

**Figure 2**

*Fishbone Chart for the Root Cause Analysis of Cow Vigilante Violence in India*



### Theory of Change for Cow Vigilantism

Kahane (2012) described four processes helping stakeholders to transform themselves in order to transform the problematic situation. The cow vigilante violence in India was analyzed with these processes to understand the contexts and derive change.

First, the law enforcement transforms their understanding of scenario around the notion of cow protection to assess how the holy protection turns into violence. This process of understanding will help them to identify the culprits, practice fair investigations, and name the root causes of violence against Muslim and Dalit minorities. It will urge them to assess the situation with fresh eye enabling the design of impartial steps ahead to discourage the violence. This would not be an easy transformation to rehaul the law enforcement where religious sentiments clashes of many serving the same institution. Second, the political actors would need to transform their relationships. Through working together, the parties can heal their grievances and historic harm aiming peaceful coexistence. Yogi Adityanath, who represents the views of Hindu nationalists in India, stated that “Muslims must fall in line and repent for the sins they committed against Hindus throughout the history of their rule in India, and everyone in the subcontinent were originally

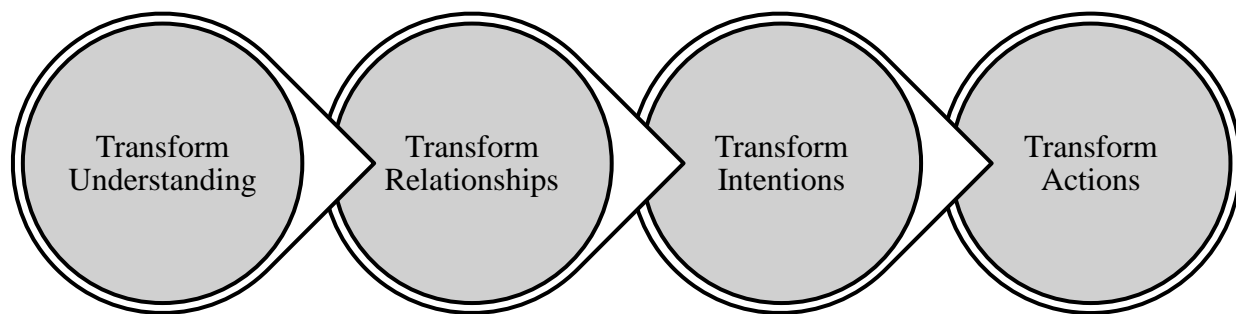
Hindu” (NDTV, 2014). Public acknowledgment of historic harms by the Muslim representatives will discourage the prejudice sentiments of Hindu nationalists causing harm to Muslims.

Third, Muslims and Hindus must consider sustainability aspect by transforming their intentions or perceptions towards each other. The activists from both sides may come forward to set examples of tolerant and willful acceptance of each other. Fourth, the improved understanding of each other will accelerate their relationships among Hindus and Muslims, and further transform their actions to ultimately transform the situation of violence.

The theoretical output of above stated processes for change engage all the stakeholders for a nonviolent communication response to cow vigilantism in India to ensure collaborative efforts for peaceful coexistence (Figure 3).

**Figure 3**

*Processes to Transform the Scenario of Cow Vigilante Violence*



## Methodology

This study is based on exploratory research that gathers insights from secondary sources about cow vigilante violence in India. It reviews the perspective of government, social activists, and communities by analyzing prior research studies, blogs, and news posts related to cow vigilante violence. The inclusion criteria to search for secondary data included non-political and non-government content, civil society perspective, and non-religious publications. The data for this paper included content analysis of secondary resources like books, journals, and conference proceedings to develop a comprehensive understanding of the study topic. The Web of Science database was used for systematic review using search words “cow vigilante violence” from 1970 to 2020 with three indexes, i.e., social sciences citation index, science citation index expanded, and arts & humanities citation index. Since there is limited academic work, only two studies found from the Web of Science database, Sunder (2018) and Kennedy et al. (2018), related to cow protection in India. This study excluded speeches from social and political leaders as addressed via social and print media in India to overcome the bias in the content analysis. Further, a comparative analysis was performed to relate the past and present situation about cow vigilantism in India.

## Analysis

The literature was synthesized using NVivo version 10, a qualitative data analysis computer software package, to identify three disciplines based upon thematic categories. The first was collaborative practices to deal with cow vigilante in India. The second was the role significance of



government and communities to adopt a system for change. The third was establishing a response system to triangulate peacekeeping, peacemaking, and peacebuilding.

### **Collaborative Practices**

The collaboration of the communities representing Muslims, Hindus, and even Dalits can be initiated through nonviolent communication among stakeholders divided over cow protection and the uniformity of its status. Collaborative communication between Muslims and Hindus could enable both parties to observe and understand each other's concerns and grievances spanned over history of Muslim rule over subcontinent. Observations of vigilante incidents and relevant communication with Hindu nationalist leaders could allow Muslim representatives to share the harms and traumas that cow vigilantes cause to the victim Muslims and Dalits, their families, and the broader communities. Collaborative communication could further create a common space for Hindu nationalists to share their concerns and reasonings to support cow vigilantism. This could foster empathy and mutual understanding of harms and trauma. In order to build respect for each other's values and beliefs, and transform the violent behaviors into the peaceful coexistence, all the parties must be able to share their concerns with one another.

WhatsApp, a mobile app for free messaging, is a critical communication tool to execute mob violence in the name of cow protection, but vigilantes often do not verify the information received through WhatsApp groups concerning whether the cow was to be slaughtered or just being traded (Benaji & Bhat, 2018). A nonviolent communication model would allow in-person communication among Hindu nationalists and Muslim or Dalit cow traders or keepers, giving space to discuss the rumors and violent narratives (Rosenberg, n.d.). This space could potentially strengthen the coordination triangle between Muslim and Dalit cow traders or keepers, Hindu nationalists, and first responder police officers with similar objectives of justice and minimizing violence. This coordination triangle leaves the least possible space for the conflict entrepreneurs who pursue their political and economic interests on the verge of mob violence.

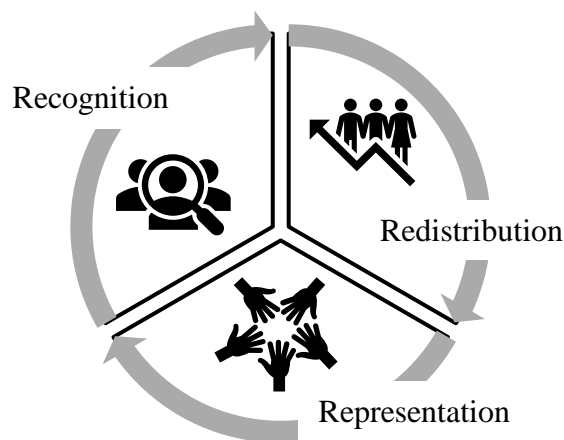
The vigilante violence narratives and systems require a holistic and collaborative approach to identify, monitor, and address the drivers of violence in the notion of cow protection. An ideal collaboration must have the stakeholder representation of mosques, mandirs, cow business groups or unions, animal transport unions, and local civil society groups. At the institutional level, the collaboration could engage local police, courts, media houses and their local representatives, government and private companies, or offices dealing with information technologies, local offices of political parties from Hindus and Muslims. Such collaboration could focus on all three levels of transformation from healing the historic harm to improving legal systems to build-up response and resilience at the grassroots level to address violence issues of vigilantes. Though the Supreme Court of India discouraged violence via its decisions on some of the lynching incidents and urged the government to discourage mobocracy (Gowen, 2018b), the main focus of the Supreme Court should cover the legal aspects of investigating the lynching incidents by law enforcement in a symbolic way of discouraging the violence discourse by the cow vigilantes.

The findings of this paper suggests that a holistic approach could help to address the violent situation around cow vigilantism in India. The situation analysis urges for collaborative practices to transform the systematic violence around cow vigilantism against minorities, particularly Muslims and Dalits.

## Systems for Change

The comparative analysis of history around cow protection and the ongoing association of violence factors supports building an understanding to intervene for change in three major systems. The issue of cow vigilante violence involves the aggression of the Hindu nationalists around their feelings of historical harms that Muslim rulers of the subcontinent caused to the Hindu identity. They reflect similar concerns of future oppression from the growing Muslim population and their economic position in India's meat industry. The three-dimension theory of justice by Nancy Fraser, 1997-2000, offers a three-factor systematic change to cow vigilante violence in India (Woolford, 2009). Figure 4 indicates the three-factors response to cow vigilantism in India, urging Muslims to recognize the historical harms that their ancestors caused. This response will invite Hindus to rephrase their violent approaches and actions towards Muslims to accept their share and representation in Indian society and the economy. It will identify guiding approaches whose adaptability in their systems can help address historical harms, allow Muslims to fearlessly contribute to the Indian economy and society, and guide the governance system to adapt inclusive actions to respond to the vigilante violence in the name of cow protection. Because vigilante violence is significantly grounded in Hindu nationalist ideologies with the belief of historical harms by Muslims, open recognition of those harms by a local Muslim leader can symbolize the empathy for Hindus. This recognition could urge Hindus to recognize in return the harms they are causing to the Muslim communities in their neighborhoods in the name of cow protection.

**Figure 4**  
*Three-Factors Response*



*Note.* From “*The politics of restorative justice; A critical introduction,*” by A. Woolford, 2009.

The restorative justice ethos, i.e., conflicts are knowable and transformable, can base this exchange of the full recognition between both parties to move forward for the greater interest of inclusive India. The recognition of historical and current harm caused by both sides will bridge the economic prejudice and injustices allowing Muslims to continue flourishing their meat industry businesses in trust with Hindu nationalist cooperation and Indian laws on cow protection.

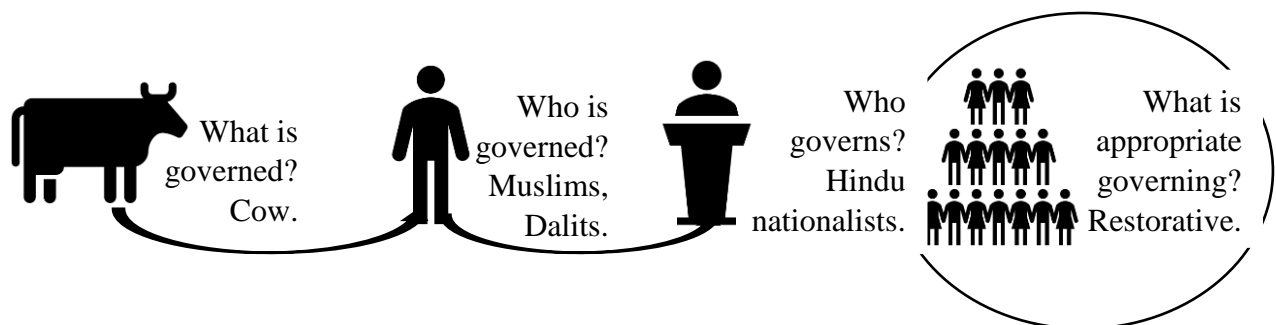
The perceptions of Hindu nationalists about their economic exploitation by the Muslims and Muslims' experiences of violence by Hindus in suppressing their meat businesses could be redistributed. This could happen through each party's just position around the principle of fair ownership of the meat industry contributing to India's economy. Representation of Muslims as

local witness or influence groups to voice their observations and witnesses of violence or unjust incidents could add integrity in the reform process. Further reform factors could be the mandatory statements of victims and witnesses before law enforcement investigating violence incidents and other reform and reconciliation groups at the community levels such as interfaith coalitions, human rights defender networks, transporter associations, meat industry corporations, and the youth councils. The cow vigilante violence phenomenon in India is complex and complicated, which needs a substantial systematic shift towards inclusion and nonviolence. However, the application of the above stated three-dimension theory can set an example at a small town or village level to portray the values of just and peaceful coexistence in the better interest of Indian society and its economy.

To transform the ongoing systematic violence around cow vigilantism in India, healing in a restorative way should be the primary goal of recognition, redistribution, or representation, it will enable victims, offenders, and other stakeholders to define the nature of the harm that includes trauma, economic vulnerability, and identical threats. This could create the space for offenders to create an inclusive space and respect or treat the victims and their families with human dignity to address the communal needs of rebuilding the broken communal and inclusivity fabric of the society. The vigilantism of cow protectors is present, even though the violation of the criminal justice system in India that aims to determine guilt towards punishing offenders in its legal jurisdictions. Vigilantes create their own “street-justice” courts with no opportunity to appeal that often result in death for the Muslim or Dalit suspects engaged in cow trade. Hence, understanding cow protection governance systems will help to adopt suitable measures of change in perceptions and violence (Palvich, 2005). See Figure 5.

**Figure 5**

*Restorative Governmentalities*



Source: Authors.

Some Muslims view cow protection as a matter of political conspiracy and government hypocrisy driven by Hindu nationalist ideology. “Cow is Mummy in Uttar Pradesh but Yummy in North East India,” said Asaduddin Owaisi, president of the All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM), views contradictions in the notion of cow protection. Crackdowns for cow protection are political rather than religious, and crackdowns often happen in the election seasons. Cows are a subject of governance in Indian plural society where all do not believe in either a single governance mechanism or that cows are subject to be governed. Because the cow protection industry involves a significant amount of money in terms of contracting and conflict entrepreneurship mainly by the Hindu nationalists who hold positions at political nexuses, it could be of enormous help if Muslim representatives at the local or regional levels can also be involved in governing the cows in support of Indian laws around cow protection. This shift of being governed

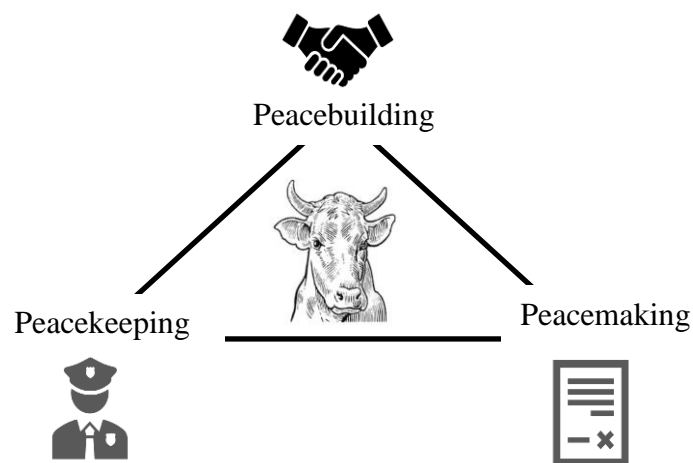
in the name of cow protection to governing cows alongside Hindus could not only eliminate the misconceptions and misunderstandings between Muslims and Hindus but could also heal harms and prevent future violence.

Restorative governmentalities around cow vigilantism can be initiated from introducing Hindu-Muslim cow protection committees and appointments of few Muslim representatives in the violence investigation teams of law enforcement. It can also include Muslim members in the vigilante communication channels like WhatsApp, Muslim witness hearing before courts in cases of vigilante violence, and media campaigns to acknowledge and share the statements of Muslim witnesses. This would not only reflect upon the reasoning of violence around cow protection but also urge Hindu nationalists and their respective governments in each state (Elections.In, 2019) to have the support of their Muslim neighbors in the protection of Hindu beliefs to protect cows.

### System for Violence Response

Galtung (1976) mentioned in *Impact of Science on Society*, three levels of responding to systematic violence, like cow vigilante violence in India, that helps to transform the violence into peaceful coexistence. Figure 6 depicts a violence response system with Galtung's three main pillars: peacekeeping, peacemaking, and peacebuilding.

**Figure 6**  
*Violence Response System*



*Note.* From “*Three approaches to peace: Peacekeeping, peacemaking and peacebuilding*” by J. Galtung, 1976.

*Peacekeeping:* Cow vigilante violence in India requires significant work at the peacekeeping level. Violence is not addressed but encouraged by the first responder police officials, both by their delayed response to the incident and by their encouragement of the vigilante mobs by arresting the victims, if still alive after suffering violence. The amount of violence and further harm to the victims and their families can be reduced through immediate police response to the violent incidents, as unbiased investigations of vigilante violence depends upon the first investigation report made by police. Law enforcement monitoring of suspected vigilante communication channels like those through WhatsApp, and the establishment of local Hindu-Muslim committees to monitor circumstances of potential vigilante violence is also of vital importance. It will help the law enforcement to prevent the incidents of vigilante mob violence. At

the peacekeeping level, law enforcement and influential local groups like the media should publicly acknowledge the harm that victims have suffered and arrange monetary compensation for their physical, economic, and psychological damages, which can symbolize the communal regret and heal the victims' losses and traumas. Such initiatives will amplify the voice of victims and publicize their suffering so that they can receive support. This can discourage the violent actions of vigilante groups just based on suspicion.

*Peacemaking:* In the absence of discouraging systems and policies, violent systems and trends reoccur. Countering the violence through transformative and adaptive rules and policies is crucial. The cow vigilante violence trends in India can be reduced via three peacekeeping approaches, which include:

1. Greater support from law enforcement to identify those who cause and those who are harmed by vigilante violence;
2. Public-level agreement(s) between Hindu-Muslim leadership on nonviolence and cooperation for cow protection that respects the religious beliefs of Hindus and protects Muslims from unfair victimization; and
3. Development of an interfaith coexistence charter at the local levels between mosques and mandirs or Imams and Pandits to discourage violence in the name of cow protection, encourage cooperation for protecting the cows, and denounce the violent narratives and factors in their communities.

Peacemaking at these levels will increase positive interaction between Hindus and Muslims as they define inclusive neighborhoods that have a focus on human rights values. Additionally, peacemaking will support institutional reforms at the local committee or city council level, as well as state or national legislative houses such as *Lok Sabha* (Rihani, 2002).

*Peacebuilding:* Galtung (1976) stated that peacebuilding was the most critical and transformative level in the journey of systematic change. To transform the violent systems and narratives around cow vigilantism into peaceful coexistence and a more inclusive society in India, a range of restorative justice styles can be applied (Woolford, 2009). However, civil society organizations and community activists can take the lead. Community mediation groups with representative membership of Hindus and Muslims can be established to identify threats of violence and further mediate truth and reconciliation meetings between victims and offenders. Religious leaders from Muslim and Hindu communities can organize and lead circle processes with their respective communities individually, and then jointly facilitate process to increase the prospect of peaceful coexistence. Within these processes, hearing and addressing the concerns of one another can occur, which can begin to heal the harms experienced. There can also be a series of dialogue sessions with different stakeholders at various levels. For instance, butchers, traders, religious leaders, transporters, civil society activists, journalists, local youth councils, and local law enforcement officials could all participate. These sessions should aim to build trust among divided communities, identify opportunities for collaboration and cooperation around cow protection, and influence policies so that violent narratives are eliminated, and actions supporting peaceful coexistence and inclusion can be taken.

## Discussion and Conclusion

The content analysis describes diverse aspects of cow vigilante violence in India and proposes different theories and concepts of restorative justice to transform this violence. The key



finding depicts that violence against Muslim minorities in connection to the notion of cow protection in India is significantly derived from political drivers grounded in historic harms by Muslim rulers as claimed by Hindu nationalists.

This study contributes to a growing body of research on rapidly changing political dynamics in India where violent ideologies of nationalism are taking over the values of democracy and nonviolence. The reasons for increased violence over the notion of cow protection evolve from the promotion of Hindu nationalism by pushing religious minorities, particularly Muslims, to the margins of society where they experience socioeconomic discriminations. The Hindu nationalists ascribe Muslims and Christians as aggressors who looted the subcontinent and forced Hindus to be converted from Hinduism. (Qureshi, 2018)

This claim urges political patronage of violent discourse for cow protection by negating her nonviolent symbolism and ignoring Gandhi's teachings of nonviolence. The political factors over the course of history on the subcontinent have contributed to shaping India's current laws of cow protection and the attitudes of Hindu nationalists who practice and defend her violent protection. The significance of cow protection in political campaigns of BJP reflects the continuity of reaping political gains by utilizing the notion and slogans of cow protection. Human Rights Watch (2019) viewed political patronage of cow vigilante violence as guaranteed protection from legal accountability. The political perspective of cow vigilantism entails a complex but organized political phenomenon which operates in the discourses of religious-political power dynamics at local, regional, and national levels.

This study elaborates on a restorative justice approach to cow vigilante violence in India. It identifies the need for acknowledgement from Muslims and Dalits to honor the beliefs of Hindu nationalists related to cow protection by extending their cooperation with such protection. Muslims and Dalits have expressed a need for Hindu nationalists to work together to avoid violence based on mere suspicion. Muslim representatives should come forward to begin healing the historic harms by their ancestors, as claimed by Hindus, and help open space to move forward with peaceful coexistence in pluralist India. Every possible activity or approach within the religious tradition of Hindus and Muslims or Dalits should be utilized to bridge their understanding of each other and learn how their coexistence can strengthen the democratic and nonviolence values of India. In cooperation with civil society, governance institutions of India need to play the leading role to ensure unbiased reporting and investigation of lynching incidents, discourage vigilantes and violent narratives via governance mechanisms and decisions, and to bridge divides among Hindus and Muslims or Dalits over cow protection.

To draw unbiased conclusions and recommendations based upon the past and present contexts around the notion of cow protection was a challenge for this study. It has given particular attention to not undermine the special status of cows in the Hindu belief system and has tried to focus on political aspects that misuse beliefs about the sacred cow to provoke violence for political gains. If mob lynching associated with cow protection has a season directly related to election campaigns in India, its association with violent political narratives benefit from violent discourses. The findings suggest a transformation of stakeholders' understanding around cow protection. Muslims should set an example of extended cooperation with Hindus to ensure the protection of cows currently being slaughtered illegally and should acknowledge the historic harms their ancestors caused to the Hindus. Additionally, the Indian government should take steps to discourage nationalist ideologies which urge mob violence against Muslims.

The study implications for public narrative of cow protection among Hindus is heavily associated with their belief system which is often hijacked by the nationalist ideologies. At the policy level, the BJP rule will continue as the political shadow to the nationalist ideologies



provoking vigilante violence, particularly as their political campaign builds upon the violent protection of cows. Furthermore, dynamics of this issue span centuries, which hinder the smooth process of redressal. Civil society organizations can enhance their understanding to know community attitudes towards violence associated with cow protection.

The study limitation was the reliance upon secondary data mainly due to the subject sensitivity. Therefore, future research should engage Muslim and Hindu communities at a grassroots level to understand the local dynamics of violent protection of cows. This could result in communal and governmental strategies to tackle the situation.

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### Note on Contributors

**Muhammad Akram** is graduate of Conflict Transformation from Center for Justice & Peacebuilding at Eastern Mennonite University, USA. He consults on research and evaluation projects in fragile contexts and writes on justice and preventing violent extremism.

**Asim Nasar** earned PhD from Universiti Teknologi Malaysia. He provides research and strategic consultancy services on community economics.

**Muhammad Rizwan Safdar** is Assistant Professor of Sociology at the Institute of Social and Cultural Studies, University of the Punjab, Pakistan. His research interests are culture, politics, and media Sociology.

**Falak Sher** earned PhD Sociology and is Director of the Institute of Arts and Sciences at Government College University Faisalabad, Pakistan. He specializes in community psychology.