

Mob dynamics



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Man is an animal first and a social animal later. However, our 'social' status has failed to erase our animal instincts, which lies dormant in our basic dispositions. The urge to spread violence, the need to kill, and the thirst to quench our carnal desires are proof that there is still some animal in us. These urges raise their ugly heads in the form of homicides, rape and molestation incidents, and mob violence etc putting mankind to shame. The dangerous of all is our affinity towards the mob mentality that threatens to ensnare us at the slightest pretext and at the slightest of provocation.

The term "mob mentality" is used to refer to unique behavioral characteristics that emerge when people are in large groups. It is often used in a negative sense, because the term "mob" typically conjures up an image of an aggressive, chaotic group of people. Social psychologists who study group behavior also use terms such as "herd behavior," "herd mentality" or "crowd hysteria" to describe similar behaviors. The study of mob mentality is used to analyze situations that range from problems during evacuations to public gatherings that turn violent.

The [Beltola violence](#) was an eye opener, a curtain raiser to the mob mentality that lurks in our psyches. It has to or why else would normal harmless people suddenly turn into hedonistic beasts destroying whatever came in their way and disrobe the modesty of a hapless innocent girl. Like a pack of hyenas that fight among one another to get hold of the carcass of the prey the mob pounced upon the unsuspecting victim, in this case a simple village belle who had landed in Guwahati to participate in a rally.

Close on its heels was the [GS Road episode](#) where once again mob dynamics came into play and ended up outraging the modesty of another women. This time the roadside alcoholics turned moral police powered by alcohol of course allegedly wanted to teach the girl lessons of morality and decency. The role of the media especially the electronic one raised a thousand uncomfortable questions regarding its role in the incident. The unholy race to be the number one position has made it sacrifice all ethics in the altar of TRPs. All of us have seen the evil faces of the mob, which could be our friendly auto driver, barman, odd job man and sadly even a reporter.

The GS Road episode also brought to the forefront the ugly rapier of male chauvinism bursting our erstwhile bubble of an equal society where men and women were said to be equal counterparts. Assam in fact has been shamed not twice but thrice by the paws of mob mentality for we cannot forget the episode of [Cong MLA Rumi Nath's assault](#) by a similar mob in a Hailakandi hotel. The MLA's alleged second marriage did not sit well with a section of the public and they decided to punish the allegedly pregnant woman by hurling her with punches and kicks and injuring her in the process. Interestingly the mob mentality is least bothered with the rampant corruption in all fields of our society, or with the injustices with the poor or helpless people, as they are too busy doling out unwanted pseudo and sadist justice to women of the society considering them to be weak. Also note that the mob usually in our case constitutes of some male members of our society who consider it a macho thing to collectively attack and prey on single helpless women of society.

It seems after decades of evolution and breaking away from our animality we have failed to brush off our animal instincts. In fact the study of herd behavior considers groups of all animals, not just humans. People have been observing group behavior of flocks, herds, pods and other assortments of animals for centuries, but it was not until the early 20th century that observers started applying scientific theories about crowd behavior to humans. Several books published in the 1910s discussed mob mentality, along with various ways to minimize or control it.

One reason for herd behavior is that people and animals tend to do what others around them are doing. This usually is because those who join the group in the behavior figure that if several others are doing something, it must be worthwhile, or they would not be doing it.

So much so that a group of five or more people inclines dangerously to becoming a mob. Contrasting attitudes clash among one another giving rise to a volatile atmosphere threatening to break free and unleash havoc in society. Whatever the background of a people, all tend to become one when they constitute a mob.

The male members of society who is either idle or illiterate or afflicted by certain sadist mental illness usually form a mob. A harmless neighborhood going about its usual business may turn into a bloodthirsty mob if the conditions are conducive. The BTAD violence, which has been given a communal color, too is a result of mob dynamics at work. A mob believes in the policy of making a mole out of a molehill. If one person spits venom on a particular issue the ones surrounding him soon follow suit creating a verdant fire out of mere smoke. Next step for a mob is to take the law at one's own hands and break it left right and center. Sanity flies out of the window as animal urges rule the roost.

Accident sites take on the shape of a mob when people gather and start blaming each party involved in the accidents. Petty thieves or pickpockets become easy prey of a mob if caught red handed. A spur of the moment urge to vent pent up frustrations and let out the steam of failure make mobsters leave caution to the winds and often commit heinous crimes of rape, homicide or mass destruction – a trait often seen in the animal kingdom when a beast is on heat or gone mad. However, ones the animal urges die down the ‘social animal’ returns to terra firma with a thud and once again dons its cloak of civility till the next attack of mob mentality hits it.

No matter how hard we try to camouflage the animal in us or try to run away from our animal instincts they threaten to surge up and destroy our veneer exposing our true colors.

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BY RITUPARNA GOSWAMI PANDE

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