

## Six get life for massacring Dalits

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New Delhi, Dec 5 (IANS) The Supreme Court has sentenced six upper caste men from Uttar Pradesh to life terms for killing seven Dalits 30 years ago.

Sentencing the six men after reversing their acquittal by the Allahabad High Court, a bench of Justice Dalveer Bhandari and Justice A.K. Patnaik said: 'Unfortunately, the centuries-old Indian caste system still takes its toll from time to time. This case unfolds the worst kind of atrocities committed by the so-called upper caste (Thakurs) against the so-called lower caste caste in a civilized country.'

'It is absolutely imperative to abolish the caste system as expeditiously as possible for smooth functioning of rule of law and democracy in our country,' the bench said in its verdict, which was delivered Friday but released Saturday.

In September 1979, a horde of around two dozens Thakurs descended on a Dalit settlement in Lahori village of Fatehpur district and kidnapped eight members of a family, hacked them to death and threw their bodies into the Ganga river.

The case was registered on the statement of a woman member of the family who survived a murderous bid on her.

The case was registered after she wrote to then prime minister Indira Gandhi and Dalit leader and former deputy prime minister Jagjivan Ram as the police dilly-dallied in booking the offenders.

Though the Fatehpur trial court had convicted 18 people for the offence, the Allahabad High Court had acquitted them all, giving them the benefit of doubt. The Supreme Court, however, reversed the acquittal of six of the accused.

'In the instant case, the accused persons belonging to Thakur caste literally butchered seven totally innocent persons belonging to the Harijan caste and to wipe out the entire evidence of their atrocities, after shooting they were thrown in the river Ganga where currents were very strong.

'Out of seven, even the bodies of five persons could not be recovered,' said the bench.

The Dalits murdered were identified as Jasodiya, Ganga, Tulsi, Deo Nath alias Madan, Din Dayal, Sukhlal and Shripal. One person survived the incident.

The apex court ordered Uttar Pradesh government to forthwith arrest the six men.

The six convicted were Mathura Singh, Udai Bhan Singh, Dharendra Singh, Munna, Ram Niwas Singh and Vijay Karan Singh.