

CASTE, CULTURE AND KHAP: NO HONOUR, ONLY KILLINGS

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ABSTRACT

A woman has to go through a life-and-death like situation in giving birth to a world that men would like to look after. But the processes centered on her seem blatantly biased in favor of men and undemocratic instead of being a blissful choice of equal sharing. This is true especially in matters of Khap where women are facing a number of social diktats in our customary society embedded in patriarchy. Khaps that mainly belong to states of Haryana, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, are originated from the ancient system of 'Panchayats' as a social administration and organization. Actually, the word 'Khap' itself denotes a regional area or 'Janpad', now equivalent to a 'tehsil'. Khap actually wield much more power than the statutory panchayats in these states. Survival of the institution of 'Khap' during such a long passage of time demonstrates not only its resilience but also its suitability for the people inhabiting the long tract extending from Madhya Pradesh and Malwa to Sindh, Punjab and Multan. Can such a historical institution be scrapped at arbitrary political calls? Complaining 'Taliban-style' diktat of a Khap Panchayat in Baghpat region of Uttar Pradesh, union home minister, P. Chidambaram, anticipated state government action against them. But neither policing against a community is likely to succeed nor can any 'fatwa' forbid women from using cell phones, going to the market or walking unescorted. Concentrated efforts by polity, civil society and media are required to put in order the anachronistic institutions of Khap. This paper is a modest attempt to develop strategies of resistance in the light of shared knowledge and to vocalize the silent but brave resistance of women in India whose life has been encroached upon with claims of dishonor. Hope it provides a tool for anyone seriously committed to eradicating violence against women in all communities.

KEYWORDS: Khap, Diktat, Panchayat, Haryana, Women, Patriarchy, Gender