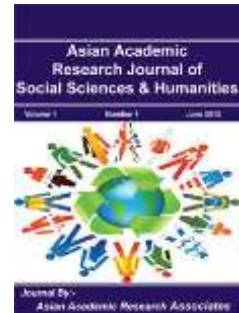




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KHAP PANCHAYATS: CONTINUITY, CONFRONTATION AND CONTRADICTION

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ABSTRACT

Khaph is a cluster of villages united by caste and geography. It is as old as 14th century started by upper caste jats to consolidate their power and position. The main rule is that all boys and girls within a khaph are considered siblings. Khaph panchayat governs the Khaph formed by same gotra (clan) families from several neighbouring villages. Khaph panchayats are prevalent in Haryana, western Uttar Pradesh and Parts of Rajasthan. Love marriages are considered taboo in areas governed by Khaph panchayats. Those living in a Khaph are not allowed to marry in the same gotra or even in any gotra from the same village. Many young couples have been killed in the past defying khaph rules. Khaph panchayat imposes its writ through social boycotts and fines and in most cases end up either killing or forcing the victims to commit suicide. All this is done in the name of brotherhood and its honour. It is due to the inherent weakness of democratically elected Panchayati Raj institutions, Khaph panchayats have been powerful. Even the government has not done much to control their power. In some Haryana villages, the young girls are routinely threatened, abused and killed all under Khaph verdicts. It is acceptable for the families to feed pesticide pills to the teenage girls and then dispose off their bodies by burning them without any police records. The entire onus of siblinghood rests on the girl. She is the keeper of village honor. Sometimes rules are bend for the boys but a girl is never allowed to bend the rules. If a couple run away then the families risk the boycott and hefty fines in lakhs of rupees. Even the other women of the house can suffer abuse. In keeping with the khaph rules, older villages try to keep the young people apart. Some schools are also forced to have separate timings for the boys and girls. Fearing their daughters would go astray, many parents marry them off at an early age. People have unquestionable faith in the justice of khaph. The question of rights for women does not exist anywhere in the territories ruled by Khaph panchayats.

Key Words: *Khaph Panchayats, Continuity, Confrontation and Contradiction*