

Honour Killings in India

Posted at: 18/08/2025

Honour Killings in India : When Family Honour Overrides Individual Rights

Context

Recent **caste-based killings in Tamil Nadu and other States** have reignited the debate on **honour crimes**. These incidents show how **family and community structures still legitimise violence** in the name of caste and honour, undermining constitutional values.

Introduction

Honour killing refers to the **murder of individuals by family or community members** for marrying or choosing partners outside caste, religion, or clan boundaries. Families claim to protect **honour**, but in reality, it is about **upholding social control, caste hierarchy, and patriarchal dominance**. Most victims are **inter-caste or inter-faith couples**, often **Dalit men with dominant-caste women**.

Causes Behind Honour Killings

- **Caste and Community Pressures**

Caste endogamy preserves hierarchy. Inter-caste marriages, particularly with Dalits, provoke severe backlash.

- **Patriarchal Control**

Women's autonomy in choosing partners challenges **male dominance** as they are considered **bearers of family honour**.

- **Economic and Social Interests**

Same-caste marriages protect **dowry systems, inheritance rights, and social ties**, while inter-caste unions threaten these benefits.

- **Fear of Social Boycott**

Families fear humiliation or expulsion from caste networks. Violence is used as a deterrent.

- **Khap and Jati Panchayats**

In states like Haryana and UP, caste councils issue diktats against inter-caste marriages, legitimising violence and weakening formal law enforcement.

- **Weak Law Enforcement**

Police often hesitate to act against influential caste groups, leaving couples vulnerable.

Consequences

- **Violation of Fundamental Rights** - Direct attack on **Article 21 (right to life with dignity)** and **Article 19 (personal liberty)**.
 - **Gender Injustice** - Women disproportionately face violence, being treated as symbols of community honour.
 - **Reinforcement of Casteism** - Rather than eroding caste, honour crimes strengthen it.
 - **Threat to Democracy and Rule of Law** - Parallel caste councils undermine constitutional courts.
 - **Psychological and Social Fear** - Youth experience trauma, insecurity, and hesitation to marry outside caste or religion.
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Legal and Constitutional Safeguards

- **Constitutional Provisions**

Article 14 - Equality before law

Article 15 - Prohibition of discrimination

Article 19 - Freedom of choice and association

Article 21 - Right to life and liberty

- **Statutory Provisions**

Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita - Section 103 (murder), Section 109 (attempt to murder), Section 61 (conspiracy)

Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006; Hindu Marriage Act, 1955

- **Proposed Law**

Prevention of Crimes in the Name of Honour Bill seeks to criminalise honour killings.

Judicial Stand

- **Lata Singh v. State of UP (2006)** – Upheld inter-caste marriages as valid under freedom of choice.
 - **Arumugam Servai v. State of Tamil Nadu (2011)** – Declared khap panchayat dikats unconstitutional.
 - **Shakti Vahini v. Union of India (2018)** – Directed states to establish safe houses, monitor caste gatherings, and hold officials accountable for negligence.
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Way Forward

- **Dedicated Law** – Specific legislation on honour crimes with stringent punishment and police accountability.
 - **Strengthening Law Enforcement** – Sensitisation of police, swift trials, and witness protection.
 - **Community-Level Reform** – Public campaigns involving caste and religious leaders; promotion of inter-caste marriages.
 - **Safe Houses and Support Systems** – Expansion of shelters with counselling, legal aid, and financial assistance.
 - **Educational and Digital Counter-Narratives** – Promotion of constitutional morality in schools and through social media.
 - **Incentives for Inter-Caste Marriages** – Strengthening the **Dr. Ambedkar Scheme for Social Integration** through timely financial support and protection.
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Conclusion

Honour killings are not only crimes against individuals but also **crimes against the Constitution**. They expose the persistence of **caste hierarchies and patriarchal dominance** under the guise of honour. The way forward lies in **asserting constitutional morality, empowering youth, enforcing strict laws, and dismantling caste-based family control**. A society that values **freedom of choice over family honour** moves closer to **equality, justice, and true democracy**.



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