

Editorial

## **Ban them! Cast Panchayats are a slur**

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ALL the claims of progress and modernisation that Haryana may make are negated at one go when shocking news of caste panchayats punishing those who marry out of caste emanate from the state. And the unthinkable happens a little too often, mainly in the Jatland. Leave alone targeting a boy or girl marrying out of caste, these khap panchayats can also turn their ire on those who marry in a "gotra" which these self-styled keepers of public morality consider incompatible. Right now, they are targeting a resident of Jevali village of Badhra constituency in Bhiwani district over one such marriage. Two years ago, a couple from Rohtak was asked by a similar khap panchayat to remarry, despite having a child. The Punjab and Haryana High Court has come down heavily on those issuing such "fatwas" but the practice continues regardless. The fault lies with the district administration because it does not enforce the clear-cut orders effectively. The result is that the khap panchayats and maha panchayats behave like extra-constitutional authorities merrily issuing diktats. The relief provided by the courts is not sufficient to protect the harried couples.

There are two reasons for this unacceptable situation. One, the lower constabulary is itself steeped in age-old traditions and tends to show sympathy towards the aggressors. Two, the khap panchayats enjoy considerable political clout and leaders are willing to take them head-on. Whatever the reasons, the long rope given to them has led to ruination of many couples. The farce has continued for far too long and it is necessary to call a halt to it forthwith. Those who do not enforce the court orders suitably should be considered as much guilty as those who issue irrational orders in an unauthorised manner.

The problem is not confined to Haryana alone. Similar incidents take place in various other

states like Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Rajasthan, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu too. The menace has to be fought seriously, and urgently. There is bound to be resistance. So be it. Once the perpetrators of the illegality know that the government means business, they will have no option but to fall in line. That is how "sati" custom was weeded out under the British. That is how the present government has to combat this social evil.

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**P.S.**

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