

Curbing the khaps

Many crimes committed in the name of defending the honour of a caste, clan or family may have their origin in India's abominable caste system, but there are other contributing factors as well. Entrenched social prejudices, feudal structures and patriarchal attitudes are behind what are referred to as 'honour killings'. While these cannot be eradicated overnight through law or judicial diktat, it is inevitable that a stern law and order approach is adopted as the first step towards curbing groups that seek to enforce such medieval notions of 'honour' through murder or the threat of murder, or ostracisation. It is in this context that the [Supreme Court's strident observations against khap panchayats](#) and guidelines to deal with them acquire significance. It is not the first time that the apex court has voiced its strong disapproval of khaps, or village assemblies that assume the authority to discipline what they deem behaviour that offends their notions of honour. Previous judgments have made it clear that the life choices of individual adults, especially with regard to love and marriage, do not brook any sort of interference from any quarter. In the latest judgment, a three-judge Bench headed by Chief Justice Dipak Misra has located the problem as one that violates the liberty and dignity of individuals, and something that requires preventive, remedial and punitive measures.

The High Courts of Punjab and Haryana and Madras have laid down guidelines to the police on creating special cells and 24-hour helplines to provide assistance and protection to young couples. The Supreme Court has now gone a step further and asked the [police to establish safe-houses for couples under threat](#). The direction asking police officers to try and persuade khaps to desist from making illegal decisions may appear soft. But in the same breath, the court has also empowered the police to prohibit such gatherings and effect preventive arrests. How far it is feasible to videograph the proceedings of such assemblies remains to be seen, but it may be a deterrent against any brazen flouting of the law. The verdict is also notable for dealing with some points made often in defence of khap panchayats, rejecting outright the claims that they were only engaged in raising awareness about permissible marriages, including inter-caste and inter-faith ones, and against *sapinda* and *sagotra* marriages. The court has rightly laid down that deciding what is permitted and what is not is the job of civil courts. While these guidelines, if they are adhered to, may have some salutary effect on society, the government should not remain content with asking the States to implement these norms. It should expedite its own efforts to bring in a comprehensive law to curb killings in the name of honour and to prohibit interference in the matrimonial choices of individuals.

The revival of the Trans-Pacific Partnership, sans U.S., must buttress the free trade debate

END

Downloaded from [crackIAS.com](#)

© **Zuccess App** by crackIAS.com