



Honour Killings in India

For Prelims: [Khap Panchayats](#), [National Crime Records Bureau](#), [Article 21](#)

For Mains: Role of family and community in perpetuating caste-based violence, Honour killings as a violation of fundamental rights

[Source:TH](#)

Why in News?

In India, **caste remains deeply rooted**, and [honour killings](#) are increasingly used to enforce **caste hierarchies**, especially against inter-caste unions.

- Recent incidents in Tamil Nadu and other States highlight how **families and communities legitimise such violence**, undermining constitutional values.

What is Honour Killings?

- **About:** Honour killings are acts of violence, usually murder, often committed by **family members against young couples** perceived to have brought dishonour by defying caste, community, or gender norms, including violations of **caste endogamy and gotra exogamy**.
- **Role of Law in Addressing Honour Killings:**
 - **Constitutional Safeguards:** **Articles 14** (Right to Equality), **15** (Prohibition of Discrimination), **19** (Freedom of Choice and Association), and **21** (Right to Life) provide safeguards against honour killings.
 - **Statutory Provisions:** Honour Killings are classified as murder under the Indian Penal Code (now [Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita](#)).
 - [Hindu Marriage Act, 1955](#) allowed inter-caste and sagotra marriages, challenging caste-endogamy practices.
 - [Special Marriage Act, 1954](#) recognizes inter-caste marriages, facing opposition from khap panchayats.
- **Judicial Precedents:**
 - **Lata Singh vs. State of U.P. (2006):** SC noted that inter-caste marriage is legal, and directed that police must protect couples.
 - **Arumugam Servai vs. State of Tamil Nadu (2011):** SC stated that **Khap Panchayats are illegal**. Decrees against inter-caste couples must be stamped out.
 - **Vikas Yadav vs. State of U.P. (2016):** SC ruled that women's freedom to choose partners cannot be violated in the name of honour.
 - **Shakti Vahini vs. Union of India (2018):** SC expanded definition of honour crimes and upholds that individual choice is part of **dignity (Articles 19 & 21)**.
 - Directed states to establish safe houses, monitor caste gatherings, and hold officials accountable for negligence.
 - **Shafin Jahan vs. Asokan K.M. and Ors. (2018):** The SC under Article 21 upheld an

individual's right to marry a person of one's own choice.

- **Consequences of Honour Killings:** It represents a grave violation of human rights, directly attacking fundamental rights such as [Article 21](#) and **Article 19**.
 - They perpetuate **gender injustice**, as women are disproportionately targeted, while also reinforcing caste hierarchies instead of eroding them.
 - Such crimes weaken **democracy and the rule of law**, with parallel caste councils challenging the authority of constitutional courts.
 - Beyond legal and political implications, honour killings inflict **deep psychological trauma, creating fear, insecurity, and hesitation** among youth to marry outside caste or religion.
 - This not only stalls social progress but also draws international human rights scrutiny, tarnishing India's image globally.

What are the Factors Driving Honour Killings in India?

- **Role of Family:** The family has historically been the **central vehicle for enforcing caste norms**.
 - Despite urbanization, education, and exposure to modern ideas, caste persists due to **family-centered socialization** through rituals, marriage arrangements, customs, and inherited prejudices.
 - **Children internalize caste boundaries early**, shaping social interactions, marriage choices, and notions of "honour."
 - The enforcement of caste through families makes inter-caste relationships particularly vulnerable to violent backlash.
- **Community Enforcement and Social Pressure:** Communities and informal bodies, like [Khap Panchayats](#), often approve or tacitly support violence against those defying Caste endogamy norms.
 - Social norms, and peer pressure reinforce the idea that violations of caste rules must be punished.
- **Paradox of Social Progress:** States with **higher Dalit empowerment**, such as Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Maharashtra, and Kerala, report more inter-caste marriages and **also higher incidents of honour killings**.
 - This violence is most common in states where these **hierarchies feel threatened**, rather than where casteism is most entrenched.
 - Honour killings often occur when marginalized communities, particularly Dalits, gain empowerment through education, employment, and social mobility. Inter-caste relationships, especially between Dalit men and women from dominant castes, challenge established **caste hierarchies, leading to violence**.
- **Conflicting Public and Private Attitudes:** In regions like Tamil Nadu, public opposition to caste violence exists, yet private attitudes and social media often glorify caste-based control and violence.
 - The **anonymity of digital platforms amplifies caste pride** and the fear of losing inherited social power, fueling hostility toward inter-caste unions.
- **Weak Law Enforcement:** **Khaps (North of India) and kattas (South of India)** are self-appointed village councils dominated by powerful caste men who enforce **patriarchal norms through violence**, often under the guise of preserving tradition.
 - Honour Killings are not recognized as a separate crime in India, recorded under 'murder' by [National Crime Records Bureau \(NCRB\)](#), making identification and classification difficult.

How can Changing Social Dynamics Impact the Caste System in India in the Future?

- **Changing Social Dynamics:** Global trends in countries like South Korea and Japan **falling marriage rates and evolving family structures** are mirrored in urban India.
 - Urban youth increasingly **prioritize individual growth, autonomy, and emotional well-being** over traditional family obligations.
- **Implications for the Future of Caste:** India's caste system is at a crossroads, with both violent

reactions and democratic resistance coexisting.

- **As family influence weakens**, the enforcement of caste norms and honour-based expectations is challenged, gradually eroding the cultural infrastructure sustaining caste.
- This requires open dialogue, counter-narratives, and shifts in social priorities, which could weaken caste's grip on institutions and societal values.

What Measures can be Taken to Combat Honour killings?

- **Enact a Standalone Law:** A national law specifically addressing honour killings, separate from general homicide laws, must be enacted to ensure swift and targeted legal action.
 - Implement **witness protection programs** for those testifying against perpetrators, and provide training to police officers and judges on honour killings, caste-based violence, and gender sensitivity.
 - Establish **fast-track courts** to handle honour killing cases with urgency, ensuring timely delivery of justice.
- **Shelter Homes:** Establish more shelter homes and support systems for victims and those at risk of honour killings, especially in rural areas.
- **Public Awareness Campaigns:** Involve community leaders, including religious and caste-based leaders, in spreading awareness about the harmful effects of honour-based violence and advocating for change.
- **Educational Programs:** Promote gender equality, human rights, and the consequences of honour-based violence in schools and colleges to challenge orthodox mindsets.
- **Promote Digital Counter-Narratives:** Utilize social media for positive campaigns that champion individual freedom, equality, and love.

Conclusion

Combating honour killings requires legal, social, and cultural reforms, along with community engagement. Empowering individuals, especially women, through education, economic opportunities, and legal protection is key to breaking the cycle of violence and fostering equality.

Drishti Mains Question:

Q. "Honour killings in India reflect the persistence of caste-based control over individual freedoms." Discuss with reference to constitutional safeguards.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)

Mains

Q. "Caste system is assuming new identities and associational forms. Hence, caste system cannot be eradicated in India." Comment. **(2018)**

Khap Panchayats have been in the news for functioning as extra-constitutional authorities, often delivering pronouncements amounting to human rights violations. Discuss critically the actions taken by the legislative, executive and the judiciary to set the things right in this regard. **(2015)**