

Role of Khap Panchyats in Changing Political Scenario

Paramjit Dhull*

Research Scholar, Department of History, Panjab University, Chandigarh

Abstract – *The Khap Panchayats is an assembly of elders who are of the same clan, gotra or caste. Khaps are dominated by the Jats. Khaps are active in those areas which have a majority of Jat population such as Rohtak, Sonapat, Jhajjar, Bhiwani etc. The Khaps decide on issues related to villages falling under their jurisdiction and their decisions are considered to be binding. However there is a provision of appeal in front of SarvaKhap Panchayat. These enjoy unquestionable obedience and have emerged as a powerful entity. Such is their power and influence that no political party or politician dare to oppose its decisions.*

Keywords – *Khap Panchayat, Sarv Khap, Legitimacy, Political Party.*

-----X-----

DEFINITION OF KHAP

In the State of Haryana, a gathering of senior members is known as the *Khap* Panchayat. This gathering includes members which belong to the same clan or caste or *gotra*. Therefore, different *gotras* have their own *Khap* Panchayats like Dahiya *Khap*, Sangwan *Khap*, Satrol *Khap*. Some of the *Khaps* are named around the regions like Meham Chaubisi in District Rohtak and Chaurasi in Sonipat District. The *Khaps* are dominated by Jats and are active mostly in districts having majority of Jat population like Rohtak, Sonapat, and Jind. They are like self-proclaimed Courts which are managed by senior citizens of dominant castes. According to Prem Chaudhary, these *Khaps* are undemocratic in their structure and functioning. The *Khaps* look after community affairs across villages, settle disputes over various issues mainly marriage issues. The main aim is to preserve the tradition and norms which are followed by the *Khaps*, the main being *gotra* and *bhaichara*. The districts of Jind, Rohtak, Sonapat, Rewari, Mahendragarh, Charkhi Dadri, Hisar, Bhiwani and Jhajjar is known as the Jat belt in the state of Haryana. There are almost 120 *Khaps* in these nine districts.

GOTRA KHAP PANCHAYAT AND SARV KHAP PANCHAYAT:

The members belonging to a particular Gotra spread over a large geographical area forms *Gotra Khap Panchayat*. For example, the Dahiya *gotra* or *Khap*. Whereas, the members of all *gotras* within the larger caste group is known as *Sarv Khap Panchayat*. It is a broader category. In the past, all the *Khaps* and the *Sarv Khap* had undoubtedly played a positive role.

The leaders used to be appointed/ nominated by the individual *Khaps*. These leaders were sent as representatives to the meetings conveyed by *Sarv Khap Panchayats*. The *Khaps* functioned as a socio-political organization. Irrespective of caste, creed and area of influence, the *Khaps* represented all the people. This demonstrates the all-inclusive character of the *Khaps*. The issues pertaining to *gotra* marriage, property and *bhaichara* are discussed in the meetings of *Sarv Khap Panchayat*.

KHAP PANCHAYAT AS A DISPUTE RESOLUTION BODY:

In the past, the aim of *Khap Panchayats* was to maintain unity of the group and protection of local community and customs. The *Khaps* were dominated by Jats which had combatant type qualities. Due to such qualities, they fought against Mughal invaders and the British.

Gradually, *Khap Panchayats* started to evolve as a Socio-political institution with an aim to maintain law and order in the village. It assumed the role of a "Dispute Resolution Body" consisting of elderly people who had the experiences and knowledge of life and people. The general public of villages started to accept *Khap* because of their capability to resolve disputes among them and slowly started to follow their decisions. The issue which was to be resolved was first brought up in the *Tappa Panchayat*, thereafter it was discussed in the *Khap Panchayat*. If the aggrieved parties are not satisfied with the decision of *Khap Panchayat*, they can file an appeal in the *Sarv Khap Panchayat* for reconsideration of the decision.

In the meetings, the *Khap Panchayats* settles disputes and punishments are also announced. The Khaps represent particular clan. It enjoys considerable social influence over the same. The Khaps are dominated by men. The decisions are taken by consensus. Thus, it is not possible to deviate from its decisions.

Various types of punishments are given to the accused like fines, expulsion from village. In some cases, accused and family are boycotted socially which is known as "*hookapani band*". It means that nobody from the village will share water or hookah with that person

KHAPS AND POLITICS

The political parties support the *Khaps* and its decisions. The *Khaps* also support political parties. The *Khaps* form a major part of the vote bank and parties thrive on the vote bank. That's is the reason they do not ignore or oppose the *Khaps*. The areas under the jurisdiction of *Khaps* is also classified on the basis of its support to various parties. The Congress has found solid support from the *Khaps* of Bhiwani, Rohtak, Jhajjar and Sonapat. It is evident from the victories of two-term former Chief Minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda and MLA Kiran Choudhry. Kiran Choudhry is the daughter-in-law of former CM Bansi Lal. They got support from Meham Chaubisi, Dahiya, Sangwan and 'Sonipat 360' Khaps.

In 1980s, former C.M. Devi Lal was supported by *Khaps* of these areas. But in 1989 assembly elections, the Khaps were double minded over supporting his son Om Prakash Chautala. The INLD continued to get support from the Khaps of Jind and Hissar. The breakaway party, the Jannayak Janata Party of Ajay Chautala (son of Om Prakash Chautala) and grandson Dushyant Chautala has also been supported by the said Khaps.

As it has been observed that Khaps have a large fan following which culminates into a solid vote bank. Due to this reason, all the political parties encourage and support the Khaps and try to get in the good books of Khaps. This demonstrates the power wielded by the Khaps. In this regard, the speech given by P.M. Modi is worth mentioning. During the speech given in Jind on the eve of 2014 assembly elections, he gave reference of *Khap Panchayats* and mentioned that he is bowing before the land dominated by the *Khap Panchayat*.

One strange practice has been observed with regard to the *Khaps*. Though *Khaps* have the backing of common people and of political parties, yet the candidate fielded by *Khap* leaders in election always loses. But if they support any candidate fielded by the political parties, his victory is inevitable. It shows lack of co-ordination on the part of *Khap Panchayat*. There is a rivalry among the *Khap Panchayats* as well. *Khap* can tolerate domination of political parties

but cannot tolerate domination of another *Khap Panchayat*. It is all the "Power Game of *Chaudhar*" (dominance). Such is the co-ordination of *Khaps*, that they can reach consensus over social-political issues but as far dominance is concerned, the *Khaps* chose to remain independent of another *Khap*. In the 2014 assembly elections, Congress refused ticket to Tek Ram. He then contested as an independent candidate from Jind. In District Sonapat, the head of the *Gathwala Khap* was Dada Baljeet Singh Malik. He contested on the BJP from the Baroda assembly segment. From District Rohtak, head of the *Athgama Khap* in Meham was Shamsher Singh Kharkhara. He contested the Lok Sabha elections. He contested on INLD ticket. In a turn of events, he again contested the assembly elections on a from Meham on BJP ticket a few months later. From Beri, INLD fielded its candidate Santosh Dahiya. She was the head of the women's wing of the *Sarv Jatiya Sarv Khap Maha Panchayat*. It is worth mentioning that despite being related to Khaps, all the said candidates could not taste success.

It is believed by many that the impact of Khaps in politics is now waning. The fragmentation of I.N.L.D materialized in September 2018 and led to creation of the JJP. At that time, the *Khaps* tried to broker peace among the Chautala family members but could not taste success. The political parties did not offer tickets to leaders of Khaps in the year 2019 despite the fact that they favoured the Khaps.

The political parties namely Congress, the INLD and JJP approached a BJP person before Jind by poll. But he was not offered ticket. He tried to contest as an independent candidate but failed to get ticket. From Meham, Kharkhara contested the assembly polls on a BJP ticket. Yet he failed to taste success.

KHAPS AS A POLITICO- SOCIO ORGANIZATION:

Deliberations are going on about the involvement of *Khap Panchayats* in politics. This can be viewed in the light of interviews conducted among *Khap* leaders and social activist. The leaders of *Khap* joining politics resulted in the division of Khaps. It has been apprised by Hardeep Ahlawat that the leader of *Khap* who enters politics fails to enjoy authority over the members. It is a general assumption that the *Khap* leaders will not join politics, nor will they announce support for any candidate. But eventually, the decision is left with the individuals.

The *Khap Panchayats* are described as very powerful by social scientist Prem Chowdhry. He further adds that these have the final word in matters related to villages. This may be either be partially due to fear of life or fear of social boycott. The panchayats are dominated by the *Khaps*. The head of village favours Khaps. It is because that they cannot get elected without their support. Here,

basic ideas of decentralization and empowering people at ground level becomes redundant.

The Khaps have been held in high regard as per a retired DGP of Haryana Police, M.S. Malik. These command moral authority. The system of Khaps has always been good but due to vested interests, corruption has found way in their system. The Sarpanchs of village are regularly accused of misappropriation of funds. The Khaps commands respect from the people because it is not an official body and they do not handle money. These play a substantial role in society as those problems which are not solved under the law are solved by them.

Another opinion is put forward emphasizing on the fact that after the emergence of Panchayati Raj System, Khaps should have been dispersed. The PRIs have not been working efficiently. This has led to the flourishing of Khaps. This opinion has been voiced by Jagmati Sangwan. She is the vice-president of the AIDWA (All-India Democratic Women's Association) and also a former director general of the Maharshi Dayanand University in Rohtak. Moreover, the Khaps have maintained a reformatory image in the past. But at present, the sole attention of Khaps is devoted to issue of caste marriages instead of social issues related to female foeticide, dowry and alcoholism. The Khaps do not allow representation of women in the decision-making process as in North India, the society is dominated by men. She is the first woman who has dared to disrupt a meeting of Khaps and has voiced her opinion despite threats.

The Khap Panchayats represent attitude and point of view of society as per Om Prakash Dhankar. He resides in District Rohtak and is president of the Bharatiya Janata Party's farmers' wing. Khaps survival and flourishing depends on the existence of caste system. People will continue to consult *Khaps*. This will change only after the heads of village will start exercising their powers authoritatively. Furthermore, the Khaps have now been acting as a Pressure Group. They are a deciding factor in the electoral success of a candidate. The Khap Panchayats initiate social reforms and thus are being viewed as useful by Manohar Lal Khattar, Chief Minister of Haryana. Even if they do commit one or two mistakes, they cannot be termed as wrong.

The Governments do not form Khap Panchayats. They are in existence since the last 800 years. Khaps have been working against the social evil of dowry and adverse sex-ratio. They have also initiated a campaign namely "*Beti Bachao-Beti Padhao*".

CONCLUSION

The *Khaps* have emerged as a powerful entity which enjoy unquestionable obedience. The norms followed and propagated by the *Khaps*, are followed by all the villages religiously within their jurisdiction. The *Khap Panchayats* form a major part of vote bank. To thrive in power, no political party or politician can dare to oppose the decision of *Khaps* as parties need the support of the *Khaps* to win elections.

REFERENCES

- Chowdhry, Prem (2004). 'Enforcing Cultural Codes: Gender and Violence in Northern India', *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 32, no.19, pp. 1919-28.
- 'Private Lives, State Intervention: Cases of Run-away Marriage in Rural North India', *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 38, 1997.
- Aggarwal, Partap C. (1971). "*Caste, Religion, and Power: An Indian Case Study*", New Delhi, Shri Ram Centre for Industrial relations.
- Pradhan, M C. (1966). "The Political System of the Jots of Northern India", Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Punit, A.E. (1978). "Social System in rural India", pp. 107, New Delhi: Sterling Publication.
- Sharma, Miriam (1978). "The Politics of Inequality, Competition and Control in an Indian Village", Honolulu :University of Hawaii Press.
- Maine, Sir Henry (1895). "Village communities in the east and west", London: John Murray, 1895.
- Hershman, P (1981). "Punjabi kinship and marriage", Delhi: Hindustan Publishing Corporation.
- Bates, Crispin and Subho Basu: "*Rethinking Indian political institutions*", London, Anthem Press, 2005.
- S. Barnett (Eds.) *Concepts of Persons: Kinship, Caste and Marriage in India*. London: Harvard University Press
- Das, Veena (1976). 'Masks and Faces: An Essay in Punjabi Kinship', *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, (ns), 10 (i).
- Dube, Leela (1997). *Women and Kinship*, New Delhi: Rawat Publications.

- Joseph, E. (1911). *The customary Law of the Rohtak District*, Lahore: Government Printing, 1911.
- Gupta S. V. (1992). *Hindu Law*, Nagpur: All India Reporter.
- Joseph, E. (1911). *The customary Law of the Rohtak District*, Lahore: Government Printing.
- Kaur, Ravinder (2004). Across Region Marriages- Poverty, Female Migration and Sex Ratio' in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Volume XXXIX, No.25.
- Kaur, Ravinder (2010). Khap Panchayats, Sex Ratio and Female agency' *Economic and Political Weekly*. Vol.65, No. 23.
- Karve, Irawati (1965). *Kinship organization in India*, Bombay, Asia Publication House.
- Lewis, Oscar (1958). *Village life in North India*, Urbana: University of Illinois.

Corresponding Author

Paramjit Dhull*

Research Scholar, Department of History, Panjab University, Chandigarh