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Topic: Honour-Related Violence and Intercaste Marriages in Western Uttar Pradesh

Findings of the Thesis

The thesis critically examines *honour-related violence* in Western Uttar Pradesh, revealing it as a systemic phenomenon deeply entrenched in *caste hierarchies*, *patriarchal domination*, and *state complicity*. Based on extensive fieldwork across Muzaffarnagar, Shamli, and Baghpat districts, the study uncovers how these forces intertwine to suppress *women's autonomy* and reinforce rigid social norms. Despite constitutional guarantees of *liberty* and *equality*, *honour killings* persist as brutal acts to "restore" *communal honour*, exposing the unresolved tension between tradition and modernity in Indian society.

1. Caste Endogamy and Control over Women

Caste endogamy remains the foundation of marriage practices, where *women's bodies* are policed as custodians of *caste purity*. Marriage, far from being an exercise of personal freedom, operates as a vital mechanism to reproduce *social hierarchies* across generations. *Inter-caste* and *inter-religious* unions are perceived as existential threats to the caste system and provoke violent retaliation from families and communities determined to maintain their honour. The murder of *Gulshana*, a Muslim girl killed for eloping with a Dalit boy, vividly illustrates how caste and religious divides are violently enforced. Even *intra-caste defiance*, as seen in *Pratibha's* killing for choosing a partner against familial approval, shows that patriarchal authority demands total submission, irrespective of caste lines. A pervasive *culture of surveillance* continuously monitors women's choices, framing any act of autonomy as a direct affront to *communal honour* that must be violently corrected.

2. Concept of Honour (*Izzat*) and Ritualistic Violence

Central to this system is the performative construct of *izzat* (*honour*), intricately linked to *female chastity*, obedience, and subordination. *Honour* is not a passive cultural value; it is actively produced and vigilantly defended through *gossip*, *stigma*, *ostracism*, and ultimately *violence*. Families and caste groups weaponize *izzat* to justify killings, portraying them as necessary sacrifices to "rejuvenate" *male dominance* and safeguard *communal dignity*. Women asserting agency—through *elopement*, *love marriages*, or *self-choice partnerships*—are branded as existential threats to the very fabric of community life. Thus, *honour killings* emerge not as aberrations but as ritualized acts aimed at restoring disrupted male and caste-based control over women's sexuality and social behaviour.

3. Role of Khap Panchayats and Traditional Authority

The role of *Khap panchayats* is pivotal in sustaining *honour-based violence*. These *extra-constitutional bodies* act as powerful enforcers of caste and gender norms, issuing diktats against intercaste and inter-religious unions and mobilizing communities to ostracize or even eliminate transgressors. The study shows how Khaps are not relics of ancient past but dynamic institutions that have adapted to contemporary governance structures. In Raipur Nangli village, the *overlap between traditional authority and modern governance* is stark, where a Khap leader's wife served as the elected village *pradhan*. Political leaders, dependent on *caste-based vote banks*, often avoid challenging Khaps, allowing these councils to function with near-complete impunity. Thus, Khaps simultaneously provide *conflict resolution* and perpetuate *systemic oppression*, revealing their dual role as both arbiters and oppressors.

4. State Complicity and Failure of Institutions

The complicity of *state institutions* exacerbates the crisis of *honour-based violence*. Law enforcement bodies like the *police* and the *judiciary*, rather than protecting constitutional rights, frequently prioritize *patriarchal* and *casteist* norms over individual autonomy. The case of *Nausad and Nargis*, a legally married inter-caste couple, stands out: despite their

legal protections, *police forcibly handed Nargis back to her family*, where she was later killed. This grave betrayal of constitutional duty highlights how legal mechanisms are subverted by societal pressures. *Judicial delays*, biases, and the framing of honour killings as mere “family disputes” further deny justice. Recent *anti-conversion laws*, notoriously labelled “*anti-love jihad*”, weaponize the state against *interfaith marriages*, criminalizing expressions of women's autonomy and fortifying traditional caste-religious boundaries.

5. Women’s Resistance and Agency

Amidst systemic oppression, *women’s resistance* emerges as a powerful and transformative counter-narrative. Acts such as *elopement*, *self-choice marriages*, and *refusal to comply with arranged unions* become profound challenges to *caste-patriarchal authority*. The study highlights examples of extraordinary courage: *Nargis’s* steadfast refusal to denounce her marriage even in the face of mortal threat, and *Gulshana’s* desperate pleas for protection while being forcibly repatriated, symbolize the existential battle between *individual agency* and *communal honour*. *Honour killings* occur precisely because such acts of defiance disrupt the stability of caste-patriarchal structures. Women are thus portrayed not as passive victims but as conscious agents confronting oppressive traditions and paying the ultimate price for their autonomy.

6. Honour Culture beyond Rural Spaces

Contrary to prevailing assumptions, *honour-related violence* is not confined to rural settings. Urban and semi-urban areas too witness the persistence of *caste-patriarchal control*, though through more covert means such as *forced disappearances*, *social boycotts*, and *institutional harassment*. *Globalization* and broader youth interactions have not significantly eroded *caste endogamy*; instead, traditional hierarchies have adapted to new socio-economic realities. The paradox of *modernization reinforcing tradition* is particularly evident where urban modernity is accompanied by intensified efforts to control women's sexuality and marriage choices.

7. Everyday Surveillance and Normalization of Violence

Everyday life in Western Uttar Pradesh is deeply immersed in *honour culture*. Relentless *surveillance* ensures that women's conduct aligns with rigid caste and gender norms, with even minor transgressions escalating into full-blown communal crises. Informal mechanisms such as *gossip*, *rumour-mongering*, and *social shaming* act as effective tools of control. *Honour killings* thus represent not exceptional outbursts but the grim culmination of *systematic regulation*, where violence becomes a ritualized act to “restore” the disrupted social order and reaffirm caste and patriarchal authority.

Conclusion

The findings starkly expose the contradictions between India's constitutional ideals of *liberty*, *equality*, and *fraternity* and the persistent realities of *caste-patriarchal domination*. *State institutions*, far from dismantling these oppressive structures, often reinforce them, consciously or unconsciously. While legal reforms and judicial interventions are crucial, meaningful transformation demands grassroots efforts to dismantle *caste endogamy*, redefine *izzat* around *gender justice*, and affirm *women's autonomy* as central to social progress.

Without systemic intervention, archaic norms will continue to claim young lives in the name of *honour*. True democratization requires not just legal change but the annihilation of caste and patriarchy, echoing Ambedkar's timeless assertion that *intermarriage and social fusion* are essential to create a just and egalitarian India.