Chapter 3: Introducing the Field and Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter attempts to capture the essence of the fieldwork undertaken for the purpose of research. For the same reason, the analysis part of the facts or data has been kept here to the minimum. To understand the issues relating to any phenomenon or region, it is imperative to understand the location and attitude of the region and the community linked with the particular phenomenon. This chapter brings out the on-field methodology of the research and also details the field experiences as well as the observations of the researcher. It also talks about the geographical and historical location of the region. The changes that the region has gone through are also touched upon.

3.1.1 Initial Impressions

My field opens up with reservations about the level of acceptability regarding the outsiders. I got introduced to the field through media and few academic works. Most of the reports by media were around the issue of honour killing and the diktats of cultural organisations called khap panchayat concentrated in the regions of Western UP and Haryana. These cultural organisations as portrayed by media seemed to be jarring against the idea of modern trends of the present time. There was a heading from an English national daily, which summarises the generic understanding that was doing rounds in media fraternity –the heading was as follows- “khaps: Progress an Invader, Control Lies in fear. The second paragraph of the report explained khaps in the following way -“khaps, the collective body of ‘caste panchayat’, double as family courts today. Their origin lies in the medieval era, when Jats in Rajasthan, UP, Haryana countered invasions, protected land, people, heritage and property, Frozen in time, Post-Independence their influence is narrowed to rural Haryana, where they’re the law. Progress the only invader today, khaps control through fear” (TNN, 2010).
The harshness, that came across through media reports as well as through people’s general perception of the field as being dangerous and not suitable for women, made me also apprehensive about going to the field in the beginning. I was slightly anxious on my first field visit that I had short hair and did not even cover my head. When I went to the field I was perplexed to see the normal state of affairs on the field. I was not getting cues to start my research. The literature that I had read on khap panchayats was not helping me. I understood that I would have to wipe off all the preconceived notions about the field. I realised I would have to let the field unfold its complexities to me gradually. The ephemeral nature of media, in covering issues, leaves many questions unanswered and wanting in information and explanation. Mass media many a time seem to give the oversimplified view of everyday life. Detailed recording of everyday affairs gets necessary to regain some complexity to reinvent life.

3.2 Locating the Field Settings

This study happens to be an ethnographic study of the region that supposedly benefited both from the abolition of zamindari as well as the green revolution. The region selected is Muzaffarnagar of western Uttar Pradesh, as most of the khaps are situated in this area. It becomes necessary to have inductive approach for the study of the region, as the field seems to be preserving a multilayered phenomenon in its soil, due to the overlapping of several issues, incidents and changes over a period of time.

The area of Saharanpur division of western Uttar Pradesh, which consists of three districts viz. Saharanpur, Muzaffarnagar and Shamli (Prabudhdhanagar), has remained in the limelight due to killings here in the name of ‘honour’. The so-called incendiary diktats have also been coming from this region every now and then. Diktats regarding women’s behaviour and the choice of marriage by young men and women have drawn a lot of attention (Kiener, 2011).

The region also happens to be the birthplace of the late Mahendra Singh Tikait, who was known for attracting media attention by getting up on his soapbox about the issues of gotra and marriages. His fervent speeches to reign in the young minds in order to prevent the fragmentation of the Jat dominant regions have been
widely covered by media. Media people believe that khap has been synonymous to Baba (Mahendra Singh) Tikait. Mahendra Singh Tikait was an astute leader and deft in organising farmers’ rallies and negotiations. The region is also acknowledged for this reason.

The media reports of this region have been addressing the issue of rampant disappearance of women here. It is said that hundreds of girls have disappeared from these districts in a few years’ time. It is believed that most of these girls became the victims of honour killings. They could never be found, as the family members themselves never wanted to pursue any case for the recovery of these girls.

It is reported that India has seen resurgence in the cases of honour killings in relation to men and women violating Hindu marriage traditions by marrying against the will of the family (Kiener, 2011). Indian Government had ordered the Law Commission to look into the matters related to honour killings in 2010\(^1\) (Law Commission of India, 2012). The Supreme Court of the country asked the local governments to report instances of such crimes and the efforts made to contain them.

3.2.1 Historical backdrop

Every field swings in the hammock of its historical folds and its geographical vicinities. It is imperative to understand the nature of the field and set-up from both

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\(^1\) Law Commission’s Report No. 242 was submitted to the Law ministry in August 2012. The report was titled “Prevention of Interference with the Freedom of Matrimonial Alliances (in the name of Honour and Tradition): A Suggested Legal Framework”. The report mentions that:

“The law proposed by the Commission under the title of Prohibition of Interference with the Freedom of Matrimonial Alliances Bill is intended to curb the social evil of the caste councils / panchayats interfering with and endangering the life and liberty of young persons marrying partners belonging to the same gotra or a different caste / religion. These offending acts imperiling the liberty of young persons marrying or intending to marry according to their wishes are being perpetrated in certain parts of the country in the name of honour and tradition. It is felt that such honour crimes can be effectively checked by prohibiting the assembly or gathering of such members of panchayats for the purpose of condemning the marriage and taking further action of harming or harassing them” (Prevention of Interference with the Freedom of Matrimonial Alliances (in the name of Honour and Tradition): A Suggested Legal Framework, 2012)
these angles. It is helpful and important to understand the backdrop of the cultural and economic dynamics of the field. In my field of concern, the Acts regarding land distribution and its sharing of borders with Delhi have played an important role.

After independence in 1947, the Indian Government abolished the system of zamindari in 1954 and went for a ceiling on the land holdings’ size in Uttar Pradesh. Abolition of zamindari came down heavily on the erstwhile landholders from Brahmin and Kshatriya communities. Historical accounts and records show that the new landed class emerged comprising of the middle-lower caste cultivators. It is said that the “new Kulak is a chowdhary or a mahton” of Ahirs, Kurmis and Jat castes (Singh, 1982). These were the castes most preferred by the upper castes and zamindars as the tillers during colonial period and had secured occupancy tenure in land. It is said that they were potentially well poised to outwit the bottom segments of Harijans and many other ex-untouchable castes in the expansion of their land holdings and had money to purchase land from ex-zamindars who wanted to sell off in order to escape from the land ceiling (Singh, 1982).

It is a noted fact that the joint family structure gave the above-mentioned caste groups, free labour, which allowed them to go to urban areas to earn a livelihood. They could send the money back to their villages, and their capacity to economise agricultural production expenditure in favour of further investment and accumulation led them to become a “swelled caste group” (Singh, 1982). People from the region of the west, comprising of today’s Haryana and western Uttar Pradesh belonging to the Jat communities were also recruited in the army during the colonial times, which further helped them get remuneration which they could send back to their villages (Chowdhry, 2011).

It is said that the “rich middle-lower caste cultivators group is conservative, politically alive and being numerically strong, a reckonable force to arbitrate for its interests” (Singh, 1982). This statement stands true in today’s times; my field experience of this particular region also conveyed a similar message regarding
their ways of negotiation favoured by the numerical strength and a cabal- or camp-like pattern of settlements.

The farming communities of western Uttar Pradesh are considered to be more prosperous than their eastern counterparts and also find themselves culturally different. In May 1972, in Uttar Pradesh state assembly, a resolution was moved for the division of the state into three regions: Braj, Awadh and Purbi (Kluyev, 1981).

There have been demands from political parties for the division of Uttar Pradesh into four units: Braj Pradesh or Harit Pradesh; Awadh Pradesh; Purbi Pradesh; and Bundelkhand.

Map 1: The Proposed division of Uttar Pradesh into four units

3.2.2 Influence of being in Delhi’s Vicinity

The vicinity of western Uttar Pradesh regions to Delhi -- being the national capital and strong center of economic development -- has led to a migration of its population to Delhi. Economic ties have been growing between Delhi and the rural areas of Haryana and western Uttar Pradesh where green revolution happened (Kluyev, 1981). The regions that come under khap in western Uttar Pradesh have had certain kinds of opportunities and experiences -- good or bad -- specifically because of being so close to Delhi. These regions happen to confront directly and on the regular basis the so-called forces of modernity in terms of opportunity as
well as the cultural shocks due to their proximity to the national capital of the 
country. Parveez Mody, while commenting on the issue of elopement of young 
couples from the khap regions, says that if you have such a place like Delhi so 
close to you it is easy to elope and get lost in the plurality of identity (Mody, 
2008). If you have such a region as your backyard you will feel the heat of the 
 happenings, fast and with greater intensity.

Muzaffarnagar is about 126 kms from Delhi. Commuting to and fro is not a 
problem. It is believed that in recent times, the closeness to Delhi has been 
influencing the youngsters even from villages by its progressive line of thought 
and making them more attracted to the western way of living. Almost every house 
has one or two members connected to Delhi in one way or the other. Delhi being 
just round the corner gives the chance to lobby effectively for economic and 
political negotiations. Media attention is readily available, as most of the head 
offices of news channels, newspapers and magazines are based in Delhi, which is 
almost next-door to this region.

3.3 Methodology for the Selection of the Field

It is believed that crimes in the name of honour against men and women are carried 
out with more ease and with sanctions in and around the regions where caste and 
cultural set-ups exist in a more organised form -- like the khap areas. This is the 
reason why it becomes relevant to study these areas, which have dominant cultural 
organisations like khaps. For this reason I decided to do an ethnographic study of 
the areas under khaps of western Uttar Pradesh.

In order to understand the state’s statistics I have used certain official data 
on area and population. The table given below gives the statistical information of 
Uttar Pradesh:
Table 1: Some basic statistical information on Uttar Pradesh

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Area</td>
<td>2,40,928 Square km</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>19,95,81,477</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(a) Males</td>
<td>10,45,96, 415</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Females</td>
<td>94, 985,062</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decennial Growth rate (2001-2011)</td>
<td>20.09 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex Ratio</td>
<td>908 per thousand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Density (persons per sq. km.)</td>
<td>828 per thousand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Population (0-6 years)</td>
<td>29,728,235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child sex ratio (0-6 years) (As per census 2011)</td>
<td>899 per thousand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Literacy Rate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persons</td>
<td>69.72 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) Male Literacy</td>
<td>79.24 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Female Literacy</td>
<td>59.26 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Districts</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cities &amp; Towns</td>
<td>689</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development blocks</td>
<td>820</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nagar Nigams</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Members of Lok Sabha from U.P.</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Members of Rajya Sabha from U.P.</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Members of U.P. Legislative Assembly</td>
<td>404</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Members of U.P. Legislative Council</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census 2011 Provisional Data, Statistical Department U.P. & Directorate Census, Lucknow.

Uttar Pradesh has 18 divisions, 75 districts and 820 development blocks. In Uttar Pradesh there are three districts where most of the khaps are based. The districts are Meerut, Baghpat and Muzaffarnagar. Among the three, Muzaffaranagar looked like the best field for the research on khaps.
Map 2: Location of district Muzaffarnagar

Muzaffarnagar district belongs to the Saharanpur division of Uttar Pradesh. Muzaffarnagar district comprises of nine blocks and four tehsils.

The four tehsils of Muzaffarnagar are: Sadar (Muzaffarnagar); Jansath; Budhana; and Khatauli. The nine blocks of Muzaffarnagar are: Kookra; Baghra; Purkazi; Charthawal; Morna; Jansath; Khatauli; Budhana; and Shahpur.
Map 3: The tehsils of Muzaffarnagar

### Table 2: Muzaffarnagar Statistical Data: Census 2011, Government of India

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>Urban</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population (%)</td>
<td>71.25 %</td>
<td>28.75 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Population</td>
<td>2,952,200</td>
<td>1,191,312</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male Population</td>
<td>1,565,004</td>
<td>628,430</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Population</td>
<td>1,387,196</td>
<td>562,882</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex Ratio</td>
<td>886</td>
<td>896</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Sex Ratio (0-6)</td>
<td>862</td>
<td>866</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Population (0-6)</td>
<td>471,375</td>
<td>174,687</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male Child(0-6)</td>
<td>253,186</td>
<td>93,619</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Child(0-6)</td>
<td>218,189</td>
<td>81,068</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Percentage (0-6)</td>
<td>15.97 %</td>
<td>14.66 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male Child Percentage</td>
<td>16.18 %</td>
<td>14.90 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Child Percentage</td>
<td>15.73 %</td>
<td>14.40 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literates</td>
<td>1,695,394</td>
<td>721,945</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male Literates</td>
<td>1,032,545</td>
<td>415,983</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Literates</td>
<td>662,849</td>
<td>305,962</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Literacy</td>
<td>68.34 %</td>
<td>71.01 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male Literacy</td>
<td>78.71 %</td>
<td>77.78 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Literacy</td>
<td>56.70 %</td>
<td>63.50 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: muzaffarnagar.nic.in
The 2001 Census data had shown the worst districts in the zero-six years bracket in terms of sex ratio as mostly falling in western Uttar Pradesh, bordering Delhi. The Districts were: Baghpat - 847; Agra - 849; Ghaziabad - 851; Bulandsahar - 868; Hathras - 881; Aligarh - 886; and Bareilly – 899.

3.3.1 Methodology for the Selection of Khap and the Villages

This study is an ethnographic study of regions that come under khap Panchayat in Muzaffarnagar district. The proposed study envisaged the study of a particular territory. khaps’ concentration is highest in the states of Haryana, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. There are 365 khaps in total cutting across different states. In Uttar Pradesh, the western region has the maximum assemblage of khaps: there are about 20-25 major khaps in western Uttar Pradesh, comprising of Jat gotra, Gujjar gotra, Saiyyad (Muslim) khap, Tyagi Brahmins’ khap and Rajput’s khaps. Out of these khaps of significance, 18 khaps are of Jat gotras in this western region of Uttar Pradesh.

From among the Jat gotra (clan)-related khaps, I chose Baliyan khap – a Jat-dominated khap of Muzaffarnagar district in western Uttar Pradesh – as the focus of my research. Baliyan khap consists of 84 villages, and out of these 72 villages are within the boundaries of western Uttar Pradesh and rest of the villages of Baliyan lie in Haryana and Rajasthan.

The reasons behind selecting Baliyan khap are: first of all Baliyan khap is a large and influential khap, in terms of number of villages and area that come under it; secondly, it is related to Mahendra Singh Tikait who was a strong farmers’ leader and chaudhary of Baliyan Khap. It is said that Mahendra Singh Tikait and khaps became synonymous to one another.

After selecting the khap, I travelled across almost the whole region, which comes under the khaps and also a few villages that did not come under khap areas - - to get a better understanding of the khap areas. I talked about the questions that I was looking for, to the people on the field after being in their confidence. After
that, I paid visits to the concerned villages to crosscheck the situation. This helped me further in zeroing in on the villages of relevance to my research.

The research takes into consideration the entire region falling under Baliyan khp as per the nature of the study but for the sake of better comprehension, a few villages, which happened to be most representative of the region, were focused upon. In this process I got around 14 villages that could help me build upon my work. The villages were Shoron, Sisauli, Budhana, Bhonra Kalan, Purbaliyan, Bhanera, Taoli, Narottampur Mazara, Jaga Heri, Pinna, Baghra, Hyder Nagar, Charthawal, and Phugana.

Out of the above villages, first eight belong to Baliyan khp and rest to other khaps. From those villages I extracted four villages of Baliyan khp. The four villages selected are Shoron, Sisauli, Narottampurm Mazara and Taoli of Muzaffarnagar. Shoron and Sisauli are Jat-dominated, Narottampur Mazara has substantial Dalit population and Taoli is a Muslim Jat (Mula Jat)-dominated village. Village Sisauli happens to be more important for the study than village Shoron as it is the seat of the chaudhary of Baliyan khp. Sisauli has about 38% Jat population, 30% Mohammedan population, 15% Scheduled Caste population, 15%, Vaishya and 2% others. Narottampur Mazara inhabits about 30% Jat population, 24% Chamars, 18% Mohammedan population, 21% Jhinvar population, 6% Goswami and Bhangi, Nai and Barhai make up 1% of the population. Taoli comprises about 65% Muslim-Jat population, 10% Mohammedan (non-Jat Muslim), 10% Chamars, and 15% of the population includes Brahmins, Baniya, Garhariya, Jhinvar, Kumhar, Valmiki.
Shoron belongs to Shahpur block of Budhana tehsil; Sisauli’s block is Shahpur in Budhana tehsil; Taoli and Narottampur Mazara belong to Baghra block in Sadar tehsil. In the selection of these villages I made sure that I do not get affected by the bias of villages located near the main roadways (and thereby end up choosing convenient ones), though everyone who was helping me in Muzaffarnagar suggested to go for nearby villages. My aim was to select villages that represented the three prominent communities of my concern, which were Jat,
Dalit and Muslim Jat also known as Mula Jat in that region. I selected two Jat-dominated villages because: first of all, khap is predominantly the cultural set-up of the Jat community; and secondly, these two villages hold a lot of significance -- in terms of one being the seat of the chaudhary of Baliyan khap, and the other having a historical relevance. ‘Shoron’ has a large historical khap panchayat ‘chaupaal’ where huge gatherings have taken place and some major decisions have been taken. Sisauli is the seat of the chaudhary of Baliyan khap.

3.3.2 Nomenclature and the Establishment of the Selected Villages

The villages selected are Sisuali, Shoron, Taoli and Narottampur Mazara. Sisuali is about 26 kms from Shiv Chowk of Muzaffarnagar city. Shiv Chowk is the central place of Muzaffarnagar city, which is about five kms from the bus stand. Sisauli was established by the Baliyans of Dhawani Nagar, as per the inhabitants’ belief. These people are believed to be the devotees of Lord Shiva, that is why later the village came to be known as Shiv Puri. It is believed that the people of this village used to celebrate the festival of Holi at a large scale and with a lot of enthusiasm and due to this it came to be known as Shiv ki Holi, which later became Sisauli. Sisauli is believed to be established by Rajkumar Rav Bijerav. It is believed that emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar used to bring his family and children to the Holi festival at Sisauli.

Sisauli has a very old, famous temple of Lord Shiva. There is also a small temple of Kali Singh who is believed to be the saviour ancestor of this region. People go to worship him. People consider him as God because of his valour and good deeds and his contribution in the survival of the community. All across the Jat-dominant region, one can see temples of the ancestors who are believed to have saved the people of this region in one way or the other.

Shoron is about 14 kms from Muzaffarnagar city’s Shiv Chowk. Shoron is believed to have completed 2728 years of its establishment. It is believed to be established by Raja Shonichar. Raja Shonichar is believed to be belonging to Dharmaraj Yudhishthir’s 20th generation. Shoron is also known as Shoram and Soram. Shoron has the historical khap Chaupal building with beautiful architecture. Chaupal is believed to be around 200 years old.
Third village is Taoli, which is around 8 km from Muzaffarnagar city. It is Mule Jat- or Muslim Jat-dominant village. It is said to be established by Teluram in Samwat 1360. Teluram was from Barwala, which is a nearby village.

Fourth village is Narottampur Mazara, which is about 10 kms from Muzaffarnagar city’s Shiv Chowk. It is believed to be established by the people of one Narottamdas of Barwala some 500 years ago.

In order to cover all the aspects of the culture of the region, I also had to cover a village with maximum population of unmarried men, as this fact was protruding every now and then during the course of my research. More importantly, some people of the region wanted me to cover this aspect as a major problem. For this purpose I went to the last village of Baliyan khap region – Bhonra Kalan. Bhonra Kalan is about 29 km from Muzaffarnagar city.

3.4 Social and Cultural Structure of the Field

An attempt is made to understand the field on two levels: geographical locations and, secondly, on the level of cultural locations. It is important to understand the field as a cultural/value area.

The villages of Muzaffarnagar are understood as the khap colonies. The region is believed to be dominated by the so-called martial races. Jat population is quite influential in matters of political and economic negotiations. The people of this region take a lot of pride in their cultural value system. They have strong ties with their lands. Those who sell their land are considered to be of low morals and are looked at with derision.

The Jat community inhabitants of this region believe that they belong to the purest race existing. They talk and write about it. They say that it takes a lot effort in controlling the purity of the race and culture. According to them no other community could maintain the purity of its blood the way the people of this region could do. They are die-hard believers of the gotra system for marriage alliances. It is found that the gotra system of the Jats is different from that of the Brahmanical gotra system. They have a saying ‘goti so bhai, baaki sab asnai’ (whoever belongs
to the same gotra is treated as brother by everyone).

The region boasts of having huge respect for the elders. They feel that losing respect for the elders is a major cause of cultural downfall. A saying regarding this comes from this region – “baa adab baa naseeb, be adab be naseeb” (respectful and polite people are blessed and disrespectful people are cursed).

In this region one can see small temples of the men whom they call as ancestors who saved the people of the community in many ways. Here people worship these ancestors with great belief. There is this very famous temple of Dallu Devata believed to be from Harsauli village near Muzaffarnagar. On Sundays, people gather in large numbers to worship him and seek his blessings. They consider him God, though some people tell that this man is worshipped because he fought against the invaders and saved the women of the community from being defiled by the Muslim rulers.

The unpleasant picture of the region gets visible through media reports, which bring out the incidents of killings of young men and women for ‘honour’. The reports have been narrating the history of killings in the name of honour in Saharanpur division of Uttar Pradesh. Saharanpur division lies in western Uttar Pradesh and comprises of the three districts viz. Saharanpur, Muzaffarnagar, Shamli (Prabudhdanagar). The area under Saharanpur division has been quite notorious for such activities of killings in the name of honour.

A report in the newspaper Janwani on 10 May 2012 narrates certain cases of killings in which young boys and girls were punished for committing the crime of love (Correspondent, 2012). It narrates how Sunita and Sateesh of village Khandarawali had to bear the brunt of messing with the so-called honour and prestige of the families by having a love relationship with each other. The couple was found guilty of bringing disrepute to the families and posing a bad example for other youngsters of the region. For this reason their own family members beheaded both Sunita and Sateesh.

The report says that after the aforementioned incident hundreds of girls
disappeared from the region in a few years’ time. It is believed that most of these girls became the victims of honour-related killings, for the fact that they could never be found, as the family members themselves never wanted to pursue any case for their recovery.

The field of research is believed to be ripe with such cases of deaths and symbolic punishments revolving around the choice of one’s partner. These cases occur in many places but the concentration of such cases in a particular region calls for attention. The difference between murders and symbolic murders -- like murdering and roaming around with the head of the dead person -- had to be understood. The concern of the thesis was to understand the processes that go into the motivation of the latter variety of murders. These murders are committed in the name of honour and deterrence.

There was an incident, which explains the moral code and atmosphere of the region regarding marriage by choice. People gauge the situation and add fuel to fire in the already sensitive cases. It is believed in May 2012, the D.I.G. of Saharanpur, S. K. Mathur, uttered blazing remarks regarding the elopement of young couples. A person named Shaukeen, along with a few people from village Kaserwa Khurd under Adarsh police station, had come to appeal for the recovery of his daughter who had allegedly eloped. It is reported that the D.I.G. told him that one should commit suicide if his daughter elopes or brings bad name to the family. It is believed that he was also heard saying that if his sister did something of this sort then he would either kill her or commit suicide himself. These insensitive and suggestive remarks were highly condemned; later the officer said that his words were twisted and presented.

In another incident a girl named Farhana, 19 years of age, was found dead; the case was registered at Shahpur police station on 17 November 2012. Farhana was from Taoli village, which is one of the villages of Baliyan khap with majority of the population belonging to Muslim Jat (Mula Jat) community. The family was not happy with the girl’s love relationship. They said that when they confronted the girl they found that she was unapologetic and incorrigible. The neighbours and others in the community were looking at them with disdain, according to them. In
the course of the investigation, it was found that the girl’s uncle Mustafa was supposed to take her to her maternal grandmother’s house in Dudhaheri village, but on the way murdered her on Lachchera road near Mansurpur village.

Mustafa was arrested but he remained unabashed and said that his niece was inviting this. He said in an interview taken for television report that she was maligning the family’s image and this had to be stopped. In his words, “Woh badchalan ho chuki thi.” Mustafa admitted that he murdered his niece first by strangulation and then by gunshot. He said she was bringing shame and disgrace to the family.

On my field visits, I realised that the local journalists also shared the same set of biases as were prevalent in the region regarding marriages by choice and how the girls should behave. Some of them believed that the modern-day technologies like mobile phones and Internet bring indecency in girls and lead to moral degradation. On the issue of gotra as well, the Jat journalists show a mild acceptance of the cultural code regarding gotra system. The local media also hailed late Mahendra Singh Tikait an influential farmers’ leader and Chaudhary of Baliyan khap for his oratory and fiery speeches.

The lawyers who belonged to Jat community in that region shared the sentiments of the region regarding the choice of partners. They say that even the judges feel sorry for themselves, as they have to sometimes pass judgments against the khap system. They say that the legal practitioners and judges feel ensnared in the western style of judicial system and Constitution. The ex-DGC (District Government Counsel) of Muzaffarnagar Mr. Rajendra Singh says that social belief system and norms even judges believe in, but they have to change their judgements due to compulsion when they sit on the dais.

3.5 On-field Methodology

The nature of the problem and the issues that I was attempting to study needed to be understood through multiple approach design or multimethodology, in order to understand the reality in its embeddedness as confronted by the members of the
various caste groups and women. The multiple methodology required for this study were decided upon as Ethnography, Phenomenology and Grounded theory.

Data collection during field visits was to be done with the help of qualitative methods such as field research, non-participant observation of the various processes and conditions in the region, group discussions, in-depth interviews, unstructured interviewing and collecting of documents from the field.

Interview transcripts, field notes, chat room conversations, other texts and memoing, was decided to be done with the help of Grounded theory and Constructivist-interpretive paradigm as part of inductive method approach, which helps in seeing the emerging patterns from the data, which are not imposed from outside.

As anticipated, there were constraints in conducting such research work during field visits. Given the nature of the problem under study, it required a sustained contact with the field. Continuous interaction with the community members was felt necessary -- observing their everyday life, participating in their affairs, and conversations -- to understand the real dynamics of issues surrounding the phenomenon of khap.

3.6 Entering the Field

While travelling for the first time, I took a local cab in Muzaffarnagar. I started talking to Vineet, my cab person, despite his initial reluctance. In the first look he didn't seem very friendly. He was a bit grumpy and apprehensive to open up to me, yet I decided to try my luck and build a conversation. To my surprise, gradually he opened up and started talking, to the extent that I struggled to take down notes of some important insights he was giving.

Later Vineet became so friendly that he accompanied me to all the places and made things convenient for me. He started behaving like my bodyguard. The reason I wanted to talk to him was that I had realised he was from one of the villages in Muzaffarnagar and I thought he might flush out some insights or give a different picture of the scenario that I was covering. The moment I asked him
about his khap affiliations he immediately pointed at the back glass of the cab. I turned around and saw that Baliyan was written there, which was also coincidentally the khap I had chosen for my research. The way Vineet pointed towards the name of his khap, in style and attitude, written on the glass of his cab, told a lot about the pride that the people took in their khap affiliations, especially if they were large in number and covered a large area. Baliyan khap obviously instilled into its members a strong sense of pride and honour, being a large and influential khap comprising of 84 villages.

I saw healthy looking sugarcane fields and high-tension electricity wires criss-crossing the agricultural fields. On the way one had to trail behind the bullock carts carrying sugarcanes to the sugar mills. High-tech machinery like cranes could be spotted picking up sugar canes from the fields.

Finally, when I reached the village areas and spoke with the inhabitants, I felt that I was already losing track of my research. It felt as if I was hijacked for some ‘brainwash’ mission. They wanted to clear all my preconceived notions if there were any. One of the first few things that started pouring in was the anger on media regarding the supposed misrepresentations of khaps. The community people wanted to get the basics of their culture across to me in the very first interactions. The sense of pride was the initial feeling that was coming across. They wanted me to see the place around like a tourist first -- the historical sites and the places that kings like Akbar used to visit whenever he came to this region. I was made to understand that I am one of those privileged few who get to visit such places and share the experience as experienced by the great men of the bygone ages.

Very soon I realised that the field would not be easy with my ‘gaze’ and that I would have to face reverse gaze. I felt that the inhabitants of the field would equally probe me. I was being asked in detail about my caste affiliations and gotra. The tough questions about my belief system were being asked.

People started enquiring about my faith in God and if I believed in any particular deity. The inhabitants of the region talked a lot about their Lord Shiva and kept showing the temples on the way and also in the villages. One could notice
a number of Lord Shiva temples in all the villages. Jats are devotees of Lord Shiva. The historical Old Shiva Temple of Sisauli is the biggest and most famous of all.

The hospitality sessions seemed to be unending. Multiple rounds of very sweet tea, gur and ‘chhai’ (buttermilk as spoken by the community members) or chhanchh (buttermilk) kept interrupting the flow of the conversation; at times it also worked in favour, as it gave me more time to interact.

Full milk tea is their pride. If there was more water than milk then it was reordered, and one had no choice but drink it. The thing is that they served with so much of love and courtesy that one wouldn’t want to hurt them by declining their offers. They mock the city lifestyle, and say that the eating habits in the city are unhealthy and city folks have weak stomachs, as they are not able to digest pure milk properly. Milk is an integral part of their lifestyle and food habits. They claim to be having good physique due to good food and milk. Once I had gone to the house of Baliayan khap’s mantri (minister), Subhash Baliyan in Sisauli. He got me the tea from freshest milk possible, straight after milking the cow (though buffalo’s milk is considered superior).

Another incident that I recall is of Mansurpur village: I went there to meet the leader of the women’s wing of Bhartiya Kisan Union, Sohan Biri. She ordered for tea and when the tea arrived I felt happy and relieved, as that was the first house, which served tea with lesser milk comparatively. After tasting it Sohan Biri shouted at the person who got the tea and asked to make tea again. This time it was hundred percent milk and sugar. Sohan Biri was quite pleased as she could serve me real milk tea -- the trademark of the region.

The emphasis on pure milk and good physique is not just related to health issues. It has much more meaning to it. Such claims are indicative of “social act that is imbued with layers of meaning and symbolism” (Dates, 2009). Food habits have been related to self and identity (Lupton, 1996). These are quite evident in this area among the dominant Jat community, which condemns many things modern and also things related to city life. This is their form of assertion of superiority in one way. It is understood that “symbolic association of food with other attributes is integral to the definition of good and bad foods” (Lupton, 1996,
Milk is believed to be a token of purity, strength and reality (Barthes, 1972, p. 60), which also comes across in the way people in the said area talk about milk and show their passionate attachment to it.

The Jat community of the said region seem to be averse to the modern city life -- which comes across in their obsession of comparing city life with their own lives -- but at the same time they say that they are liberal in many things and also condemn the so-called orthodox approach of ritualistic practices like the tradition of terahvi bhoj (ritual practiced by family members after thirteen days of a person’s death. It is a rite de passage) and also claim to promote the practice of fewer people participating in wedding ceremonies and not burdening the bride’s family with the responsibility of feeding a lot of people coming along with the groom. They also claim that in 1956, khap panchayat assembly took a major decision in favour of the women folk. This decision was to relieve them of their heavy dressing and allowing them to wear more comfortable clothes like Kurtas and Shalwars (ladies’ pyjamas).

People there come across as very congenial but the problem arises when everyone wants to take you to his or her house to extend hospitality. Saying ‘no’ seems to be out of question as they literally transport you to their house. Sometimes it derailed the process as I ended up being in places that were not supposed to be part of my research. Your sources on the field try to have a bigger claim on you and want you to visit their near and dear ones. Everyone wanted to tell something or the other about the region and khaps or maybe about Mahendra Singh Tikait. People wanted to make sure I didn’t miss any point or detail, which might be a source of pride to them in any way.

The youngsters didn’t talk, especially in the evenings. Reason was that in the evenings all the senior members of the villages come out of their houses and sit together to smoke hookah or play cards and chat around. This deterred the young members to have a conversation in the open with me, as in these regions elders are meant to be the spokespersons on behalf of the whole community. Even if I got hold of the young men walking around, they explicitly directed to the elder members saying, “Please talk to baba” (paternal grandfather).
Hookah comes alive in the evenings or late afternoons. Elderly persons of the locality start pouring in the houses and settling on morha (stool made of jute), on the veranda-like open space within the premises of the house. A hookah with a very long pipe is kept in the centre surrounded by the people. No one moves from their place, rather the hookah pipe is simply passed on and circulated around. The brotherhood that the hookah culture symbolises seems to produce sclerosis with regards to customs and choices. It is the place where cultural code is shared and passed on along with the hookah pipe.

The main material symbols that stand out and are truly representative of the khap culture are pagari, hookah, dhoti, topi, morha, and ranasingha (trumpet sort of a musical instrument). The sound of ranasingha is taken as the indicator of the beginning of the khap meeting: khap panchayats are always inaugurated with the music of this instrument. People take pride in talking about the afore-mentioned cultural symbols.

Every time I went to the field, I had to prepare new set of questions after analysing the data and narratives for further research. Responses were giving rise to new questions every time and bringing up further issues that remain invisible otherwise. After the review of the literature available on caste, village study, power relation, gender relation and literature on khaps, an unstructured questionnaire was formed and used during the fieldwork. It was my personal feeling that if I used a structured questionnaire, I might not be able to document the real issue; I found conversation as the best way to start an interview.

It was also expected beforehand that I might have to confront male chauvinism, and that the men might not allow me to talk their female members. I tried to talk amiably by not giving aggressive or offensive arguments I finally did get to talk to the women folk of the houses. I tried to maintain a cordial relation so that I might be able to go into the depth of the problems and bring out the real dynamics of caste, patriarchy and power in khap Panchayat.

Another problem comes in due to the influence of rationality and reason on the intellect as one tends to be canting in the direction of supposedly rational and reasoned takes on life away from the influences of cultural beliefs and practices.
This brings in biasness against cultural beliefs and practices. In order to avoid the problem of value biases in research, one needs to empathise with the logics of the particular culture, though, without getting influenced by it in the process.

On the field I faced certain obstacles due to the anger among the inhabitants of the khap region towards the media coverage of khap panchayats. They accused the media for the mishandled coverage of the issue of khap Panchayats, and their skepticism caused some inconvenience in conversations in the beginning. The conversations seemed to flow but without any useful content and insight. There was always a risk of offending the people of the region by asking too many penetrative questions. Breaking the ice became very difficult in some cases. Sticking to the focus of the research became strenuous. In such cases, there are always chances of getting derailed as the field gives several points of digression. Getting to talk to the female gram pradhans was extremely difficult as the husbands of the pradhan handle all the work and only rarely people get to see the actual female pradhan. The very idea of talking to the women folk used to make the men a little skeptical about the purpose of interaction. In fact, women themselves used to get skeptical when I used to express a desire to talk to them.

There were also constraints in terms of recording the narratives. The research needed the use of media tools such as audio and video recorder to retain data. The data was analysed and revisits to the field were conducted to fill the gaps. In order to maintain objectivity, the attempt was made to record the narratives of the people; due to unfavourable circumstances, though, recording became difficult at times.

Unfavourable situation was faced, for instance, when I once visited the house of a Dalit woman called Omi in Hydernagar. Hydernagar comes under ‘Desh khap’, which is Tomar’s khap. Tomar is one of the Jat gotras. Omi’s son had eloped with a neighbourhood girl belonging to the same community. Omi had to face severe social boycott but she was not saying anything about it and continuously praising the Jat farmers whom she called ‘kisaan’. She was looking stressed but she said kisaans really helped her in tough times. I sensed some
problem but could not really figure out why was she all praise for the Jats. This incident I have analysed in later chapters.

In another instance in Sisauli, a woman named Om Kali, aged around 60 (as told by her), belonging to \textit{jamadaar} community, did not want to talk as most of the time young Jat men were roaming around on bikes and looking at her while she talked to me. Finally they came up to us asking what the matter was. I had to make an excuse and ask them to let us talk in private, saying our talk was not related to men and it might cause some embarrassment. These men left but went and stood at some distance, which still made Om Kali uncomfortable. Then she in very low tone whispered something. I realised she was saying ‘\textit{chairman ke yahan le chalu, wo humara aadmi hai}’ as in if I wanted to talk to the chairman of Sisauli Nagar panchayat, she insinuated that she could take me. Then I realised that she was more scared of those men standing around watching over her because they were from the faction of the Jats in opposition to the chairman Surendra Singh, who was also a Jat. These men were from the camp of the chaudhary of baliyan khap and Om Kali was from the chairman’s camp. Recording the conversation in the audio format was not possible in this case.

There were also problems while visiting villages where Dalit communities were in greater numbers. There, people got too cynical about the intention of the interaction. They felt that I needed some spicy information from them to simply write against the dominant and powerful Jat community. They felt that they should talk to me together in a group rather than individually so that the most vocal person could check the others who tried to flush out too much information.

It was difficult to talk to the families of the couples who had eloped. The families came across very hostile initially, but later, after a few words of solace and comfort, they opened up to me slightly. It was difficult to make them realise that the intention was not to mock them for the steps taken by their youngsters.

In this area of my study I came across a fact, which sounded strange initially. The fact was that in that region once the administration used to maintain a register in order to record the details of unmarried men. On enquiring about this fact I came to know that there was the problem of life threats to unmarried men.
from their own families. It was assumed that unmarried men did not have anyone to pass on their share of property and they might end up giving it to someone outside the family or maybe to their favourite person inside the family. Therefore, in order to prevent the property from going outside the family and for its equal distribution, other brothers connived to murder their unmarried brother. The unmarried men of the region felt this kind of threat. Unmarried men also felt that they were ill-treated at times and did not get their due respect.

I was suggested to visit these villages where there were more number of unmarried men and listen to their issues. I felt some awkwardness in the village where I had to talk to unmarried men whose marriageable age had passed due to certain reasons. The people sitting around were smirking and joking about the plight of the unmarried men, which was making me as well as those men, quite uncomfortable. I did not know how to start a conversation with the unmarried men and their fears. Somehow I started talking about their families, work and property with them. Then they started opening up about their real issues.

Another trait that came across was alcoholism among the dwellers of the region. Evenings were dedicated to drinking. For the same reason, it was difficult to meet people in late evenings. I was recommended not to talk to people after dark. Though alcoholism is a common trait cutting across castes, it is believed that alcoholism became rampant among the Jats after the prosperity that came to the region and the landholdings that they could manage. It is said that it took away their diligence.

In various literatures it was said that women of Jat community work very hard on the field but when I surveyed the field I did not find anything of this sort. Without even asking people told me that now Jat women don’t work on the field, that almost no one from the family works on the field. They mostly hire people from other states or from the lower castes. People say that the affluence of Jats has led to laziness.

Purdah (veil) system is also hardly visible in the region. Literature on Haryana khap areas conveyed the message that purdah is the norm of the society, as seen in Prem Chowdhary’s work, “Veiled Women” (Chowdhry, 1994) but in the
khaps in western Uttar Pradesh it is fast disappearing. People in the region even joked about it saying that it is more than enough if girls do purdah (cover their faces) in front of father-in-laws, in this age of fashion. Covering of the face was a rare sight in the region. Covering just the head with saree or dupatta is more regular.

The houses of Jat inhabitants were quite big, well built and spacious. The houses had most of the facilities and proper sanitation. The Jat dominant villages had broad roads.

When one enters the Jat-dominated villages and talks to people at length, locally understood and believed histories of the region and the community start pouring from all corners. Every inhabitant seems to be aware of and conscious of the grand history of khaps and Jats. An elderly person from the region who is also writing the history of khaps and Jat community, Dr. Virendra of Shahpur village, summarises and brings out the feeling of superiority in a befitting manner through a saying – anpadh Jat padhe jaisa aur padha Jat khuda jaisa” (an illiterate Jat is like an educated one, and an educated Jat is as great as a god). Dr. Virendra says that earlier Jats did not understand the importance of writing and that is why they could not write their own history; other historians, in the meantime, destroyed their history. He says, “Jaton ne keval hal uthaya aur bandook uthayi, kalam nahi uthayi.” (Jats only used plough and gun but never used their pen). Dr. Virendra’s thoughts get reflected in other people’s words as well when they say, “baktam ki koi nahi, likhtam ki sab” (what you say does not make a difference. It matters and becomes relevant only when you write).

Another common thing that I came across was that almost everyone, across age and gender, gave arguments regarding gotra system using science as its base. It is believed that children start understanding the gotra system when they are somewhere between the age of 14 and 17 years.

Young Jat men of the villages exude a strong sense of pride. Vineet the cab person and other young members of the khap explain the general attitude prevalent in the area by saying, ‘naukari chhor dete hain naak ke liye. Kuch nahi sochte’, (people leave their jobs in arrogance and don’t even care about it due to ego
issues). When I traversed the field I found this trend of inflated ego as a common trait throughout. Youngsters of this area often said in a lighter spirit that they did not consider anyone above them – “apne se upar to kisi ko mante nahi”. This trait also comes out as one looks at the interactions on the web pages and sites that members of Jat community have formed.

The sense of pride also gets revealed in conversations regarding the gotra system of the inhabitants of khaps of Jat community. They took so much pride in their system of gotra that they had a condescending attitude to the concept and practices of the Brahminical rishi gotra system. They feel that their system is most original. I shall put the idea across by quoting a member of Baliyan khap, Neeraj Baliyan. Neeraj Baliyan is a young, well-educated person who was doing his PhD in Chemistry but left it for some personal reasons. He says:

“Baliyan matalab raghuvanshi. Rishi vishi gotra kuch nahi hota. Rishi ho chahe muni ho jati baad mein bani hai aur khap purani. History ko unthayein to apko pata chalega pehle Arya aye hain uske baad ye sab caste.” (Baliyan means raghuvanshi. There is nothing like rishi gotra. First came the khap system and then came other caste systems. If you go into the history of things then you realise that Aryans came first and then came the other caste systems). This kind of vanity in their belief system and practices and contempt for other communities system remains quite evident throughout.

The Muslims and South Indians were the two regular targets in almost every conversation: I was often pointed out that both these communities allowed marriage between maternal uncles and nieces. The people kept posing themselves superior to such communities.

The elderly men lamented the disappearance of the old habits and cultural symbols, and it came out through the conversations with the elderly people in the villages. When I talked to the people on the field about their culture they had three words to say – dhoti, topi and hookah. They lamented that these three symbols were going to be wiped out soon by the modern symbols. It would be justified to put their feelings in their words, “dhoti topi, hookah, ab bees-pachchis saal mein nahi milna” (we will not get to see these things in next 20-25 years). Regarding
women’s clothing and ornaments they took pride in saying that their grandmothers used to wear lehenga (like a skirt) of the length of around 52 yards and worked on the farms. They said by way of appreciation that women also used to wear bank kade, haath mein matthi and men wore, tagari, gale mein dora, kano mein murki. People moaned that after some time only European or American pants would be available and their cultural symbols are going to disappear soon.

People also remember Mahendra Singh Tikait with a lot of reverence. They feel the region was blessed because of him. He is called the king without a crown: “Bina taj ka Badshah”. In another praise he was called nature’s gift to the mankind – “Kudarat ki di hui cheez the Tikait ji.”

The feel of the field at times cannot be put in exact words, but a few anecdotes and experiences may help in giving some idea of the background, which is proposed for the analysis. The social structures get visible through the various on-field experiences. Why people want to stay attached to those social structures and what they wish to do when such set structures are threatened by the uncomfortable wind of the so-called modernity is also revealed to some extent through first-hand experiences on the field. Turner explains this tussle between traditional structures and modern ways life in the following lines:

“With a process of de-traditionalisation, objective and sacred institutions suffer erosion, and modern life becomes subjective, contingent and uncertain. In fact we occupy a world of secondary or quasi-institution, which are fragile and subject to constant change. Institutions, which are exposed to persistent reflection, cannot provide humans with necessary psychological relief.” (Turner, 2008, p. 10)

Turner also says that in modern societies, people have personalities that are flexible, like the institutions in which they exist (Turner, 2008, p. 10). This flexibility that Turner explains could also be seen as a threat to the traditional patterns of living and status quo. The processes to maintain the traditional patterns as well as the processes of subverting them are explored in the later chapters.
References


