Chapter 8: Conclusion: Khap and the Emergent Realities

8.1 Introduction

This study was aimed at exploring the issue of khap panchayats as a ‘phenomenon’, something, which is influenced and in turn influences the “interstimulation” (Markey, 1925-26) between organisms and systems. The study was also to explore the forms and processes of responses of the stakeholders to the socio-historical forces and situations within and surrounding khaps. As stated in the introductory chapter, my research was not particularly about the crimes addressed as “honour killing”, but more about exploring the impalpable layers of social experiences surrounding the more visible patterns of “social punishments” or rather symbolic social actions.

The study started with field visits in a schizoid manner rather than in linear direction, keeping in mind the three standpoints of caste, power and patriarchy, as the research topic suggests. These elements I did not try to study in abstraction from the socio-cultural context in which they were raised, but rather intended to keep it close to its materiality through its own abstractions that play a role in everyday life. I tried not to fit the elements of my field of research forcibly into the moulds of caste, power and patriarchy from the outside; I wanted to explore whether these elements existed the way they have been talked about in media. Through this study I intended to instantiate the processual aspects of the cultural phenomenon and their interaction with the changing trends of the contemporary society.

The three central questions for which answers were explored through the research are: How did the present form of power get shaped in the khap regions of western Uttar Pradesh and what does it hold for the future? Secondly, what kinds of experiences are opened up by the interface between historical forces like the state, the khaps and civil society? Lastly, what are the spaces, forms and processes
of subversion by women and other marginal groups in the khap region of western Uttar Pradesh?

The above mentioned central research questions could not have been answered without taking into account the invisible processes and forms that make certain voices invisible and in the process discredit the existence of certain groups of people and their desires, aspirations and choices. The processes of discrediting of the desires and aspirations as well as the process and forms of making the desires visible are dealt with in the thesis in chapters four, five and six.

The thesis has been an attempt to bring out the habitual and normal-looking ways that self-execute the process of voicelessness or, at times, selective recognition of voices. Selective recognition of voices comes across in chapters five, six and seven, where the dominant culture or group extends visibility only to such realities that maintain its foundational claims and also makes it look accommodative and inclusive. The concepts of “back-stage dominance” and “veiled patriarchy”, mentioned in the thesis have emerged from the processes of selective recognition.

The thesis brings out the processes through which visibility is offered to the groups at the margins, but at the same time the thesis also tells how such visibility is rendered illusory on important occasions. This fact is brought out clearly through the documentation of lived experiences in chapter seven, where it is mentioned how the khaps, which happen to be primarily the cultural and political system of dominant groups like Jats, are extended to other marginal groups like the Dalit population of the region, making khaps appear as more inclusive and empowering institutions. The Jat population of the region explains boastfully that Dalits have their own chaudharies, capable of taking their own decisions and are represented in the khap system of Jats. As I observed during my field trips, this idea of independence and empowerment of the Dalit communities is quite illusory. The intention of bringing the Dalit communities within the khap’s fold, it seemed to me, was to impose the dominant cultural patterns and decisions under the garb of empowerment. And yet, despite the deceptive intention, once recognition is given even in very insignificant manner, the marginal groups get a chance to capitalise
on the situations in their own limited ways. This kind of dialogue and negotiation is explained in chapter seven of the thesis.

Phenomena like khap are, to an extent, representative of what is explained as the crisis of voice under neo-liberalism (Couldry, 2010). As the thesis explains, the phenomenon of khap appears as the crisis of voice at the interface between the various historical forces at odds in the present time and space. These historical forces happen to be of modern state, women’s empowerment, and justice for marginal communities on one side, and forces of traditional cultural systems, patriarchal practices and dominant communities on the other.

8.2 Gaps Covered

The research was needed for a better handling of the situation in the face of ill-conceived media reporting and misguided actions of state organs and institutions by looking into the emergent realities of khap-like phenomena.

As mentioned earlier also, caste, patriarchy and power are accepted notions. The major concern of this research has been the gaps in the understanding of the processes that go into the making of the identity and morality, which ultimately lead to the idea of honour, thereby keeping us blinded to the many realities and complexities of the phenomena of caste, patriarchy and power.

The various processes involved in the making of ‘honour’ and the processes involved in power accumulation, with caste and patriarchy as the motivating factors have been delineated as a continuous theme throughout the research.

The processes of subversion of the accepted notions of honour and power, leading to a legitimacy crisis between state and khap-like cultural systems, have been documented, which were not given due attention in previous academic works and in various media. The processes of subversion, that happens to be the potential challenge to the accepted claims of dominant reality, are mostly bypassed. The understanding of the challenges to the foundational claims keeps developing as the thesis progresses and comes out more clearly in the chapter seven of the thesis.
The phenomenon of khap is also seen from the perspective of ‘culture steading’ within the democratic configuration of a state like India. The thesis attempted to lay bare the complexities of multiple marginalities faced by women and their struggles as insiders of both cultural communities and that of the state through the forms in which the struggles or subversions are taking place on the ground.

Power as a concept has earlier been looked into mostly as ‘power in things’, ‘power through mobilisation’, or ‘power as an immanent affair’ as referred to earlier in the thesis. In this research, though, power is seen as an entity in itself, and that is how in the last chapter, chapter seven, I arrived at the idea of “tragedy of power”.

8.3 Approaches of the Thesis

The multiple methodology for this study included ethnography, phenomenology and grounded theory because they keep the human element visible in research and do not make the research a top-down approach. Constructivist-interpretive paradigm, which happens to be part of grounded theory, keeps the collaborative approach alive in research with the belief that human beings are capable of narrating their life experiences and their position in their given social context (Butler, 2005).

In grounded theory, patterns are observed and connected that develops into a theory or concept. In my research also, with time certain patterns started emerging from the chapters. Chapters started moving from the narrative of realism to the narrative of romance, finally culminating into the narrative of tragedy. From the unfolding of the thesis chapters in this manner and through the decoding of the themes running through the thesis, the idea of “tragedy of power” emerged.

Narrative style of inquiry and writing is used in the thesis in order to bring out the complex patterns of social processes, forms and responses to situations surrounding the phenomenon of khap. It is believed that denying the potential of narration or ignoring the capacity of the people to narrate is like treating them as if they are not humans (Couldry, 2010). The purpose of the thesis was to explore the
voices and the emergent realities of the phenomenon of khap through narratives, imbedded in their time, space and context. Paul Ricoeur says that narratives work by ‘grasping things together’ and making a configuration visible from a sequence (1984). It is said that we must be ready to forego the needs, experiences and other such realities that we cannot explain. That is why it becomes imperative to look into the processes and things that make certain conditions and situations invisible, as they happen to be out of the realm of narration. My thesis has been an effort to understand the processes that obstruct the imagination of the ‘self’ and make narration inconceivable.

8.4 Findings

The foremost finding of the thesis has been in the form of the emergent theory of “tragedy of power”. Where does tragedy occur? Tragedy occurs at the meeting-point of two or more historical forces. The historical forces happen to be at “irreconcilable odds”, as seen in the analysis of khap phenomenon. These historical forces -- forces of both state and khap as institutions; forces of gender empowerment and patriarchy; forces of dominant as well as marginal castes/cultures -- cause a tragedy of power of institutions, tragedy of power of gender, tragedy of power of caste. These forces ultimately cause predominantly the “tragedy of power”.

Power can’t have just two possible outcomes -- either the rules, regulations and constraints imposed by the centre are successful in meeting its goals, or, as the second outcome, their organisational impact is minimised or deflected by the degree of resistance met. With the development of chapters, a pattern emerged. Chapters three and four show a realist perspective. Chapters five and six appear to be falling within the narrative framework of romance. Chapter seven emerges within the narrative framework of tragedy. It shows the tragedy of power. This is one of the theoretical findings. When the historical forces meet, they happen to be at irreconcilable odds. They are irreconcilable because none of these forces give up on their “essential status” (Shanske, 2007). If they give up their essential status, they lose their sense of existence, which they cannot afford to. These historical
forces are power, when they collide or interface with each other, cause a tragedy: tragedy of power.

The above-mentioned theory emerged from the unfolding of the social patterns surrounding the phenomenon of khap. khap, caste and patriarchy as historical forces -- and well as other historical forces as mentioned above in the form of state, civil society and justice for marginal groups -- keep colliding with each other with the intention of not losing their essential status. Through this collision, the essential status might not be lost, but a path for the possibility of new and multiple essential status gets carved. This is the tragedy of power in which the essential status of power is not lost but still becomes redundant and new forces are created. This process goes on like a chain reaction and makes the ‘tragedy of power’ the only permanent and immanent phenomenon. The tragedy framework is not restricted to the idea of irony; rather tragedy narrative gives a tool for analysis that offers a perceptive reflection on human action, and chance. Tragedy not just tells what happened or why it happened but also tells what the phenomenon or situation portends for the future (White, 1973). Therefore when ‘tragedy of power’ is visualised, it not only takes into account the many future possibilities but also envisions the many, already present, alternate possibilities within a phenomenon.

One of the other findings of the research was the misleading concept of empowerment, which could be called “proxy empowerment” or “misplaced empowerment”. Change in the nature and language of patriarchy and dominance, could be called “veiled or subtle patriarchy”, as explained in Chapter five of the thesis. The idea of “backstage dominance” appears to be emerging in the khap region and executed through the institution of khap. Backstage dominance gets visible in the action and motive of bringing rest of the communities especially the Dalit communities under its canopy, with an intention of calling the shots on their behalf.

The language and forms of resistance were also explored in the research work. This brought out the fact that many a times the language and form of resistance remain the same, contributing to the concretisation of existing rules of patriarchy and dominance. In chapter six, for example, the concept of purity is
used by Dalit communities to venerate the women saints belonging to their community as Satis; they claim their Satis to be different from the Satis of the upper caste as, according to them, the Satis belonging to Dalit communities stay unmarried and hence are more ‘pure’.

This kind of resistance gets caged in the same language pattern that fuelled patriarchy and dominance towards the marginalisation of certain sections. The language of resistance of the kind mentioned here cannot be a long-term solution and merely gives a sense of satisfaction through mockery. Although ‘mockery’ is also a form of subversion and holds its own, provided it does not further create similar marginalisation. For this reason it calls to study subversion keeping in mind the concept of intersectionality.

The current situation of khaps alludes to the idea of Pragmatism. “Pragmatism shifts the basis of power from foundational claims to shared experiences, which make power radically contingent (Allen, 2008) – that is contextually dependent on human relationships and experiences” (Ansell, 2011, p. 126). There are possibilities of either subverting the rules or using the rules against the rule maker from within the system as shown by some Dalit chaudharies. The emergence of “triadic relationship” due to the presence of audience in the form of media or the outside world contributes towards new dynamics and changed reasoning within and outside the khap institution.

The thesis also brings out how the problem of khaps is wrongly located. The demands regarding state action in case of khap system happen to be jerrybuilt and crudely envisaged by civil society. Community and region-specific gotra system is also wrongly understood. The gotra system in the region is different from the Brahmanical gotra system as explained in chapter six of the thesis.

The research located the individuals or personalities embodying within themselves multiple time periods, who show a potential to alter the future for themselves. These individuals happen to embody the complexities of the phenomenon of khap.
8.5 Future Studies

My research wasn’t based on case studies, but I did come across certain relevant case studies in the field through which social change could be studied.

Some of the future studies can be based on such case studies. Studies can be done, for examples, on the kind of histories, literature and songs that are presently being produced in the region by different communities in the present time. An ethnographic study with respect to the ‘ethics of the region’ furthering the research around the framework of ‘moral theories’ is possible. A phenomenological study on the younger generation across castes and religion in the region would give insights into the details of future trends and aspirations of the region. It would be helpful to understand how the youths of the region visualise their lives vis-à-vis the external world.

Study of the group dynamics of the region with the framework of social change -- and not simply with the idea of political implications -- could contribute both linguistically and sociologically to understanding “prejudice” as a phenomenon in the khap areas. The elements of prejudice and its impact kept popping up during the research. A separate study taking prejudice as a phenomenon would be beneficial to the discipline of sociology as well as political science.

A study of the region through idiographic methods -- explaining the phenomenon historically and biographically -- would contribute to an in-depth understanding of the social and cultural mindset and behaviour of the region and communities.

8.6 Conclusion

The dissertation has attempted to explore the subtleties of the forms and processes of control and assertions and also brought out the emergent realities hinting an alternate set-up or an alternate future of the phenomenon of khap. The linkages of the phenomenon of khap to its external circumstances have been explored in the wake of interventions by media and civil society.
The motivations of legitimacy of both -- the state as well as the cultural set-ups like khap -- have been explored and analysed through this research. The various subtle forms and processes for maintaining the honour and identity with caste and patriarchy as the motivating factors have been identified. The thesis emphasises the importance of, and need for, detailing the forms of subversion by women and other marginal groups, which are showing the potency to challenge the normalcy of the regional and cultural norms.

The research tells about the opportunities of alternate participation and the voices that get shaped at the interface of various forces like the cultural organisations, the state, and the civil society. This study will be beneficial in understanding other similar situations and contexts with an understanding of the forms and ways of subversion and negotiation by the disadvantaged.

Finally, borrowing from Judith Butler’s concept of the “material”, it would be apt to summarise that the thesis has been an attempt to bring out the invisible processes and categories that are part of the “material” practices happening below the level of dialogue and discussion and has also explored how they happen to be resisted (Butler, 1990).

References


