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Q8(a)

Explain the thematic linkages between 'Patriarchy' and 'Honour killing' in India, citing some recent cases

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2023 · Sociology GS 2 · 20 marks · Systems of Kinship in India

Systems of Kinship in India: Lineage and descent in India; Types of kinship systems; Family and marriage in India; Household dimensions of the family; Patriarchy, entitlements and sexual division of labour.

Core demand of the question

- Explain the thematic linkages between patriarchy and honour killing in India, citing some recent court-reported cases
- Stay unsensational. Use public judgments and known facts only

Revision summary

Patriarchy stores family and caste honour in control of women's and men's marriage choice.

Honour killing punishes alliances that break endogamy, gotra or status rules.

Manoj-Babli, **Nitish Katara** and Shankar-Kausalya are court-reported illustrations.

Shakti Vahini 2018 rejects khap punishment and affirms adult choice.

The theme is structured power, not inexplicable rage.

Introduction

Patriarchy here is a structured control of women's sexuality, marriage, and movement, and a ranking of men who 'own' family honour. Honour killing is the extreme punishment when a match or friendship is said to soil that honour. The theme is not private madness. It is caste-kinship power using violence to keep endogamy.

Body

Thematic linkage

- Uma Chakravarti's Brahmanical patriarchy stores caste purity in the daughter's body; the son's forbidden love is punished when it mixes rank.
- Srinivas's endogamy and Dumont's hierarchy explain why the 'wrong' alliance is treated as a group wound, not a couple's choice.
- **North Indian village exogamy and khap-type councils add a territorial rule:** the same village or gotra can be named as incestuous even when the law sees two adults.
- Men who kill are often kin claiming to restore male honour; women relatives may be coerced into silence. Patriarchy is a system, not only a father.

Court-reported cases, without spectacle

- The Manoj-Babli case (Kaithal, Haryana, 2007; convictions thereafter) showed a married couple murdered after a khap-linked diktat against their match; courts treated it as murder, not as custom.

- The **Nitish Katara** murder (2002; later convictions of Vikas Yadav and others) was prosecuted as killing to block an inter-status relationship; the Delhi courts recorded honour as motive, not as defence.
- The Shankar-Kausalya case (Tamil Nadu, 2016; trials and appeals in the public record) concerned an inter-caste marriage and the killing of the husband; it showed the pattern is not only north Indian.
- **Shakti Vahini v. Union of India** (Supreme Court, 2018) directed states against honour crimes and illegal khap punishments, stating that adults have a right to choose a spouse.

What the cases teach together

- Law now names honour as an aggravating social motive. Local power still tries to outrank the **Special Marriage Act** and **Lata Singh's** line that an adult may choose.
- **The Rudolphs' traditional council meeting modernity is visible:** khaps use press conferences and then face IPC murder charges.
- **Beteille's disharmony is lethal here:** constitutional equality versus ranked kinship.

Limits of a court-only view

- Many coercive confinements never become FIRs.
- Actionable prevention is housing for couples, swift police against illegal gatherings, and ending impunity, not sermons alone.

Flow diagram

Patriarchy control of marriage -> Endogamy caste village rules
 Endogamy caste village rules -> Honour as group claim
 Honour as group claim -> Killing of couple or partner
 Adult choice courts -> Honour not a legal defence

Conclusion

Honour killing is patriarchy enforcing caste and kin rules on marriage. Public cases from Haryana, Delhi, and Tamil Nadu, and the Shakti Vahini directions, show the courts rejecting honour as a right to kill. The linkage remains because endogamy still organises status.

Facts & figures

Manoj-Babli

2007 Haryana murders of a married couple after caste-council opposition; courts convicted accused persons.

Nitish Katara

2002 Delhi killing prosecuted with honour-related motive; convictions in the public record.

Shankar-Kausalya

2016 Tamil Nadu inter-caste marriage killing of Shankar; trial courts recorded caste-honour context.

Shakti Vahini 2018

Supreme Court directions to prevent honour crimes and illegal khap sanctions.

Lata Singh

Supreme Court support for an adult woman's right to marry by choice.

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