Supreme Court’s Decision on Khap Panchayats

Why in news?

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Supreme Court has ruled that Khap panchayats has no right to interfere in any marriage.

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What are Khap Panchayats?

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- Khap panchayat is the union of a few villages, mainly in north India though it exists in similar forms in the rest of the country.
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- These village councils run by unelected elders turned in to a quasi-judicial body promotes conservative, anti-women values in the name of preserving Indian culture and tradition.
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- Most cases are reported in northern states such as Uttar Pradesh and Haryana, where caste councils wield enormous power in village life.
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- Khaps have not only continued to flourish, but also have found patronage from mainstream political leaders.
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- Viewing communities as vote-banks and so-called khap leaders as the key actors which can swing the community’s votes, political leaders have steered clear of them.
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- Taking a cue from the political leadership, the police, bureaucrats and administrators have also not crossed paths with the khaps.
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How badly Khaps interfere in the freedom of youths?

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- Indian society is unwilling to accept the choices made by young women when it comes to their marriage.
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- Often the perpetrators are relatives seeking to punish young couples for bringing "shame" to the family.
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- There were 291 honour killings in India between 2014 and 2016, as per data from the National Crime Records Bureau.
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- The regressive marriage diktats and intimidation tactics like ostracism, social boycotts, etc. issued by the khaps denies adults basic freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution.
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- In few villages the khaps had even banned mobile phones for women.
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What was the recent ruling of SC is about?

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- Supreme Court directed the Khaps to stay away from marriages between consenting adults.
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- The Supreme Court told the khaps that they had “no right to interfere” in fact, nobody had the right to interfere in any marriage.
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- SC clarified to the Khaps that not to fancy themselves as conscience keepers of society, which is absolutely illegal.
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- The SC also mentioned that solution for consanguineous marriages must be derived from counselling such couples rather than encouraging hostility against them.
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Source: Financial Express, The Hindu

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