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The Sentiment of Honour (*Izzat*) in Haryanvi Society

(Paper)

Newspaper headlines and media reports routinely highlight the manifestations of sentiment of honour in Haryanvi society but in off-putting light. Families kill their girls and boys for the sake of their honour/izzat. Why this sentiment of honour is so strong among Haryanavis? In Haryana, landownership, possession and control over wealth, and women are generally associated with izzat (honour), which is essentially a male honour. For regulating this honour, a virile man, who is bodily strong, expressed in local terms as *musal bargā* (physically strong like a pestle/pounder) is considered necessary to command, control, and possess his land, money, and women. If a male needs to inflict violence to safeguard these 'possessions' or his honour, it is not only accepted, it is valorized. Applauding violence, it is proudly maintained that '*maar āge bhiūt nācce*' ('after beating, even a ghost dances'; that is, 'thrashing straightens out even the wicked'). So, to study this sentiment of honour in Haryanvi society an effort is made here. The oral traditions of the region have been used in the paper to appraise various facets of this sentiment.

The phrase though borrowed from Pierre Bourdieu study of Kabyle Society, but it has strong emotional tendencies, a unique identity of Haryanvi society in regard honour/*Izzat*. What is a sentiment and how honour is a sentiment? The term 'sentiment' may refer to values and attitudes; and values in terms refers to interests, pleasures, likes, preferences, duties, moral obligations, desires, wants, needs, aversions and attractions, and many other modalities of selective orientations (Pepper 1958, p. 7). In a lecture entitled, 'Du Sentiment de l'honneur' on 8 May 1906 organised by Ecole de la Paix in a series of public evening lectures in Paris, Emile Dürkheim discusses Montesquieu's idea of honour as the principle that constitute the dynamic and social bond of 'monarchies'. He sees Montesquieu's 'honour' as 'a private ambition, of individuals or social classes,' in which they are driven by a concern for 'their own standing' but also by a 'passion for freedom and dignity' (Pickering and Miller, 2003, pp. 5-6). Therefore, Honour is a sentiment, a manifestation of this sentiment in conduct, and the evaluation of this conduct by others, that is to say, reputation. It is both internal to the individual and external to him – a matter of his feelings, his behavior, and the treatment that he receives (Julian Pitt-Rivers, p. 503). *Izzat* is a common word used in Haryana for honour. The translation of this concept by the English word 'honour' is useful if it is remembered that the analogy is only approximate.

Izzat, for a Haryanvis is the value of a person in his own eyes, and in the eyes of his society. It is the estimation of his own worth, his claim to pride, but it is also the acknowledgement of that claim, his excellence recognized by society, his right to pride. An act of saving his face or grace brings strong reactions and instant emotional outburst to Haryanvi. If at all there is a challenge to his *izzat*, than it invites a strong emotional outburst which is why the phrase 'Sentiment of Honour' is used.

The Jats: Creator of Regional Ethos and Norms

Haryana is an agrarian society majorly dominated by the Jats. In such a rural milieu, the norms as seen to be operating were necessarily in relation to the main caste group which wields dominance. The Jats in Haryana occupies third/fourth of the land (Socio-Economic Census 2010-11), they constituted twenty five percent of the state population (Census 2011) and almost thirty percent of jobs in government sector (Haryana Backward Classes Commission Report, 2018). However, following the model of the dominant caste in a given region described by M.N.Srinivas, the status of Jats as a 'dominant' caste can be easily established in Haryana. The Jats not only clearly emerge as the 'dominant caste' in social, economic and numerical terms, but in the politics of this region they are the strongest group (Prem Choudhry, 2011, pp. 35-59). This ubiquitous domination by a single caste set the tone and shaped the customs and attitudes to be followed by the people in this region. The emergent customs followed amongst Jats regardless of various strata came to be accepted and projected for the entire state, especially as many of these customs could be seen to be followed by nearly all lower castes as well as classes. In her study of Karimpur, Uttar Pradesh Susan Wadley says, "Villagers constantly work to gain and maintain honour/ijjat. Being of high caste or wealthy are ways to gain honour. But proper behaviour, concern for others, and having virtuous women are most valuable sort of honour that extends to the whole family, village and jati" (Wadley, 1994, p. 96). Even the Haryanvis, especially Jats are so overpowered by the thought of losing *izzat* that a slight provocation by anyone could turn into a bloody duel.

The Concept of Honour

In local usage in Haryana, *izzat* is conferred as a sign of the recognition of the excellence or the worth of a person or whatever raises him/ his reputation in the eyes of another and gives him reason for pride. In other contexts, it may indicate certain qualities or conditions on which the reputation of an individual, or a group, is dependent, commitment to such values that are upheld as respectable social norms form the basis of his/her honourable position. The ethics of honour defines and shapes an individual's self-respect and self-identity in a particular group or society (Jain & Sharma, p.35). Gender historian, Prem Chowdhary observes that the concept of *izzat* arose during the colonial period in Haryana, when the 'inferior castes' were barred and recruitment was only from the higher social strata of this region, so that military service had come to be associated with general *izzat*. Therefore, the British not only bestowed economic

benefits in a climate of severe unemployment and lack of development, but also social, which was to have telling effects on gender relations in Haryana. (Chowdhary, 1994, p.35).

Caste and gotra consciousness are two distinctive forms of sentiment of collective honour in rural Haryanvi society. Caste that emerged as the basic organizing principle of the determinant of social order and hierarchy in India involved meticulous and inbuilt mechanisms of power and honour, as well as dishonor or humiliation. An individual's identification with the caste has been so pervasive that humiliation and dishonour of the individual meant discredit to the entire group. Acts of impropriety or violation of caste rules by an individual brings ignominy and social opprobrium to all the members of the caste. The practice of ostracization was a mechanism that was adopted to keep its honour and purity intact. Caste continues to be a highly volatile issue, especially in the rural areas, as far as operation of the notion of honour at group level is concerned. Another distinctive form of collective honour in Haryanvi society has been clan or gotra consciousness and a sense of dominance from past that they cherished as members of a particular khap. Honour associated with and derived by virtue of his/her membership of a particular family, gotra, caste, community, and region has underscored social and political behaviour in India. With this background, projection of khaps superiority and its glorious traditions has remained central to the code of honour amongst the Jats in Haryana. The behavioural patterns and norms for different members of the family are, therefore, regulated and controlled by a code of conduct prevalent in the society for centuries. A demeaning activity of any member of the family tarnishes the name of the entire family. Preservation of the *izzat* of the entire family is the collective endeavor of all the members

The intellectual personages - the village elders and Lok Kavis (Poets) and Gaykas (Singers) in Haryana transferred knowledge of traditions from one generation to another. In rural society of Haryana four things are called *amrits* (Nectars of life) of life which is aptly represented by a local proverb:

Budhon ki Kahi, Dudh aur Dahi;

Bhaiyon Ka Saath, Mata Ka Haath.

(Sayings of the Old men, Milk and Curd;

Support of the Brothers, and Blessings of Mother).

The guidance of elders and support of brothers is most sought after socio-economic needs of a Haryanavi. Opinions of old teaches the young lads their customs and norms of rural environment. Whatever the elder says, it is rooted in everyday lives of Haryanvis and hence his experiences bring the credibility of shared experience. The old persons of community addresses the social, cultural and economic concerns of young in strikingly customary, traditional and normatic manner. These norms and manners are carried out through the feelings of *Bhaichara* (brotherhood) and norms of *Biradari* (community). In this type of socio-cultural milieu, elders

and brothers is most essential support in times of adversity. The sentiment of izzat is therefore a social and community bond formed from the early childhood. These emotions about izzat become strong when the person attains responsibilities of his own family and society.

Respect and precedence are paid to those who claim it and are sufficiently powerful to enforce their claim. A verse of Pt. Lakhmi Chand's ragini (Haryanvi Folk Song) draws attention to the emotion of *Izzat* in Haryana very appropriately, it says that:

'Le Ke dede, kar ke khale,

Us tae kon jabbar ho se;

Nugra manas nazar badal ja,

Samajhani ki maer ho se '

--- Pt. Lakhmi Chand's Verse (Ragini)

(If you work hard and honestly pay back what you borrow from others, no one can be honourable than you. If a dishonourable man turns hostile, it will be a tough time for the honourable).

The reputation of a dangerous man is liable to assure him precedence over a virtuous man; he may not be thought privately to be honourable, but while no one is prepared to question the matter, he is treated as though he were and granted the precedence which he claims. On the field of honour might is right which is aptly represented in few of the proverbs of Haryana, this are cited below:

jorā jis kā gorā

(The strong hold/own the land.)

jis ki lāthī us kī bhainś

(Might is right,) [lit. Whoever's staff, his buffaloes?]

thādhe ke sir pe kāī rāh

(The mighty chart a different route/the mighty wear the crown.)

thādhe ki bīr sab kī dādi,

hīne kī bīr sab ki bhābhī

(Strong man's wife commands respect. Weak man's wife is familiar to all.)

~~hānī ke māl māi ke kātā khā sakāi sūi~~

The justification for all of this is that ‘might is right,’ and that ‘might’ is with the strong, not with the weak. The victor in any competition finds his izzat enhanced in Haryana by the humiliation of the defeated.

Symbols, Gestures and Values of Izzat

They are certain phrases and local similes around which the thoughts and sentiment of izzat revolves around in Haryana. These represents the symbolic codes, gestures and values attached to *Izzat* and *be-Izzati* (Honour and Shame) for a Haryanvi ---

मुँछ का सवाल (Challenge to his Izzat)

इज्जत का बट्टा लगा दिया (Destroying one's Izzat)

मुँह काला कर दिया (Dishonouring self & Family)

भीतर मर ले (Go and Die Inside)

सातल पीटना (Challenging the by beating ones thigh)

खोवा मारना (Rubbing Shoulder-Making a Challenge)

These metaphors which describes people's thought about the sentiment of Izzat. To be without Izzat is to be a person of no social value. In Haryana, *hooka pani* is a metaphor used for social banishment. The most common punishment for dishonor (*beyizzati*) is consequent ostracism—the denial of respect through the termination of social intercourse (Mody, pp.197-98). For which he is ready to kill or get killed describe his imagery of this concept which is strong sentiment in rural Haryana.

Repositories of ‘Honour’ / ‘Izzat’: Zar, Zenana and Zameen (Wealth, Women and Land)

In Haryana - land, wealth, and women are repositories of Izzat and male is the regulator of these. Ownership of land is one of the biggest sources of security in the villages. It is not only a source of wealth but also control over it determined the distribution of status and authority in most Haryanvi Villages (Gilmartin 1988). People in this region still refer to their land as their *patlaj*—a word which has a meaning similar to *Izzat*, that of power, honour, and respect (Talbot 1988). Land provides them with political and socio-economic resources to exert pressure over the other marginalized sections of the village community. Land owners wield authority within their own caste and among other castes due to wealth and superior position. This phenomenon was also recognized by the British officials who had recorded as early as in 1901 that certain Jat clans and families could claim the status of social superiors; to the rest of Jats, it depended on the amount

of land they held? (Chowdhry, 1983). For most of the rural Haryanvi's, the concept of *izzat* has been constructed from possession or control over land and wealth during colonial period.

Ideology governing land and wealth created relationships in rural areas which divided the society in controllers and controlled. Inheritors of Land are controllers and those who are denied rights of land are controlled. Dominance consists solely in the economic power derived from ownership over land, observes Louis Dumont. He further says that the requirement of numbers can be met by exercising '*power to grant land and to employ members of other castes either in agricultural capacities or as specialists, to build up a large clientele, not to say an armed force*' (Dumont, 1970, p. 162). These 'superior' castes were also politically dominant, for they followed elite occupations, and the means of production were concentrated in their hands (Ali, 1988, pp. 10-11). The sections of society which lacks in possession of land are marginalized sections of society and possess no *izzat* in rural social environment. About 10 per cent of rural households are reported to be entirely landless, and a large percentage to be near landless (Singh 2017). With little or no owned land, they are at the mercy of *izzatdars*. This created a social milieu which governs the notion of *Izzat* in rural areas. Local political leaders, *khap* ideologues and rural notables – so called *izzatdars*, are the frontrunners in all social gatherings to uphold the *izzat* of family, caste and villages in matters of disputes be it related to marriage, land or breaking of some social or cultural norms.

It is well established that in India women and a family's honour are closely connected. Susan Wadley observes, Most importantly, 'families can lose honour through their women...by having daughters or daughters-in-law who elope, become pregnant prior to marriage, or are seen outside too often'(Wadley, 1994, p. 99). All over North India, immodest behaviour of women leads to loss of honour for the woman, her family, her village and her parents. Women are often projected as cultural emblems of Haryanvi society and culture. Prem Chowdhry, a gender historian of the region accepts that the dominant peasant cultural ethos sanctifying customs and attitudes in relation to women in rural Haryana (Chowdhry, 1987, pp. 2060-66). In Haryana, an ideal woman would be a judicious blend of traditional qualities - skills, knowledge of religious rituals and practices and modern through education and employment (Chaudhari, pp. 281-93). Changes in her attire and demeanor are therefore hastily condemned as threat to culture and tradition, a response typical of patriarchal society.

According to Campbell the intrinsic principles of honour refer to two sex-linked qualities that distinguish the ideal moral characters of men and women. These are the masculinity of men, and the shame of women. (Campbell, p.276). More specifically, it refers to the *mardumsumari* (manliness) of man and *sharam* (virtue of sexual shame) of woman in Haryana. Men are courageous, austere, possess masculinity and pride, but lack patience. Women are fearful, lacking in resolution but have greater depths of love; they are sensitive to shame and are modest and patient. The power of woman's sexuality, the weakness of her will and the physical strength of a man, are the important factors involved in sexual activity. For this reasons women are expected by their kinsmen to have 'shame', in the sense that in speech, gesture, attitude, and

dress, they must, as far as possible, cloak the existence of their sexuality. The *izzat*-shame linkage to women also poses a constant threat to man's honour as she may provoke man's heart with sexual passions. Thus, the whole burden of the shame of sexual relations is shifted on the female sex. For the same reasons the family watches over their women with the greatest care, especially unmarried girls (Ibid, p.277).

Izzat is maintained through the proper transferable of a girl's sexuality from father to the husband through carefully arranged marriage. It also invokes practices of veiling, separation and avoidance, and associated forms of appropriate behaviour that are purely gendered. "*Women maintain a family's honor. Not men. If she cannot keep her honor, it is solely her fault,*" says Balwan Singh Nain, A Farmer and Member of Sarv Jaateeya Venani Khap (The Tribune, 12 Oct. 2012).

For men, izzat lies in the maintenance and defense of the honour of the patrilineage against external threats, be they in the realms of politics, kinship or religion. For women, it lies in the 'shyness' and shame of female sexuality, such that a woman's sexuality is both undermined and controlled. A Hindi proverb rightly puts forth the notion of izzat attached to women:

tiriya to hai sobha ghar ki, jo laj rakhe apne narki

(Women who keeps izzat of his men, Is beauty of her house)

In Haryana's rural milieu, it is the physical strength of a male that enables him to exercise control over his land, women and wealth which are central to his existence. It is the male honour which is essentially associated with these repositories. For this honour, a strong body and physical strength, expressed in local terms as *musal bargā* (physically strong like a pestle/pounder) is considered necessary to command, control, and possess his land, money, and women. A local proverb aptly says this:

zamīn joī zor kī,

zor ghathī hor kī.

(Land and wife can only be held by force. When force fails they pass into other hands.)

A common refrain in the region regarding these repositories of izzat has been:

zar, zenana, or zamīn, jhagde kī jar haiñ

(Wealth, land, and women are the root of all quarrels)

If a male needs to inflict violence to safeguard these 'possessions' or his honour, it is not only accepted, it is valorized. Applauding violence, it is proudly maintained that '*maar āge bhūt nācce*' ('after beating, even a ghost dances'; that is, 'thrashing straightens out even the wicked').

So to sum up, the sentiment of Honour is so high in rural Haryana that daily newspapers and media reports are fully of new items - related to deaths of young couples and banishment of lower castes from villages. The sentiment of honour is governed by the principles of dominant caste, khaps and local customs and traditions. The repositories of this sentiment are land, wealth and women. It is the male honour which is implicit in the concept of masculinity. For this honour, a strong body, manliness, physical strength and virile man is desired. These types of mentalities bequeath in to malpractices like preference for male progeny, lower sex ratio and violence against girl child and women in Haryana, which a cause of concern.

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