

498 A gives men pre-wedding jitters

NIRMALA RAMCHANDRA

WEDDING blues and bridal nerves have always been associated with women. But nowadays lots of men are experiencing pre-wedding jitters. The reason: They are terrified of misuse of the anti-dowry law.

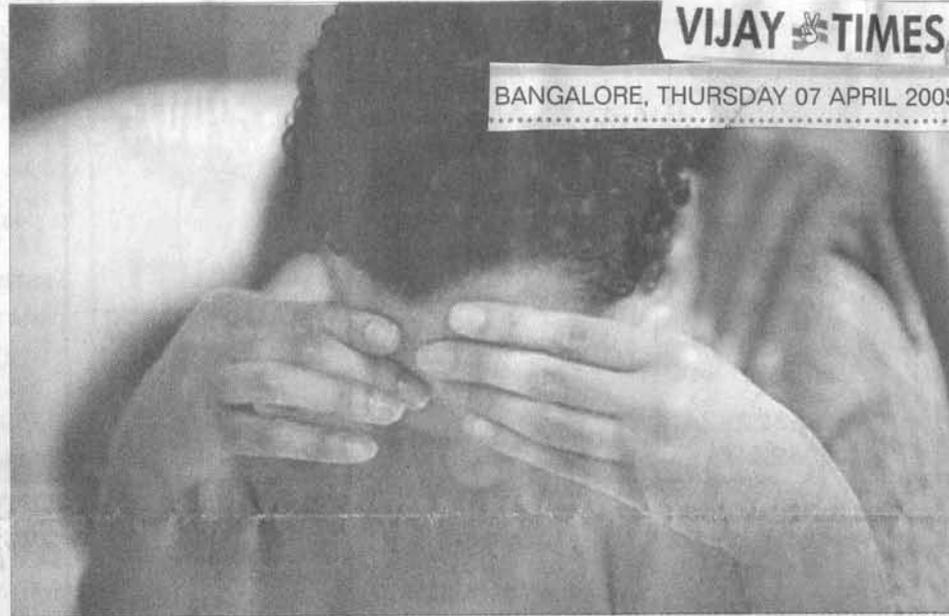
Romantic dreams have been replaced by nail-biting anxiety about being jailed in false case of dowry harassment, should the marriage turn sour.

"I get a lot of calls from to-be married men who ask me what steps to take to avoid being implicated by their wives in harassment cases in case the marriage fails. Cases of women misusing Section 498A of IPC has made men wary of marriage," says H V Arun Murthy, who has set up Sanghyabalya, a forum to address problems of husbands and families victimised by anti-dowry laws. Sanghyabalya gets at least three calls and 15-20 emails per day from men seeking help from Bangalore and other parts of the globe.

So what advice does Murthy give such men? "There is no fool-proof mechanism to protect them. However, I advise them to register their marriages without fail along with joint declaration of the gifts exchanged," Murthy said.

Another alternative, which has already gained ground in Mumbai, is pre-nuptial agreement, where in couples decide who gets what should the marriage break up. Sometimes, this also includes custody of children.

"While this may sound very businesslike and distasteful, remember that countless men are being victimised for no fault of theirs. They are guilty by gender. If there is marital discord, man



is considered to be the culprit. Everybody sympathises with the woman. Many women are making use of this and the stringent anti-dowry law to settle personal scores or to get out-of-court settlements. The law was made stringent to protect women, but instead it has become a tool of blackmail," Murthy says.

Even women's forum agree that the law is being misused. Shylaja, a counsellor with Guild of Women Achievers, says, "Not all cases of

dowry harassment are true. Nowadays, more women are aware of the law. And some of them are abusing it to torment their husband's family for whatever reason."

According to Murthy, 90 per cent of dowry harassment complaints are false. This law has become a money-making device for mercenary women and the police, he alleged.

"I know there are countless women who are actually harassed for dowry and I'm all for pun-

WHAT THE ACT SAYS

Section 498 A of the Indian Penal Code (Dowry Prohibition Act) was enacted with the aim of protecting wives from marital violence, abuse and extortionist dowry demands.

The Section was introduced by Criminal Law (Second Amendment) Act of 1983. It says: "Whoever, being the husband or the relative of the husband of a woman, subjects such woman to cruelty shall be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend to three years and shall also be liable to fine".

It is a non-bailable offence, which means that a person booked under this section can be arrested once the complaint is filed.

ishing the perpetrators of such a crime. But we want to aid men and their families who are being tormented on false charges. What was given voluntarily as a gift by bride's family during wedding becomes 'dowry' if the marriage breaks down. Then the man and his family members are put behind bars without any trial," Murthy said.

"I just want to say that not all men are greedy alcoholics who beat up their wives and not all women are innocent."

Harassed husbands' helpline 56969850.



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Breaking News Last Updated on : 10/8/2005 11:30:00 AM
IRS officer alleges threats from his in-laws

An IRS officer from the State Dr. A. Mallikarjuna Rao, presently Assistant Commissioner of Income Tax at Delhi, alleged that his father-in-law and West Bengal cadre IAS officer Mr. P. Vanamali was threatening him of dire consequences and to kill him, as he had filed a case in the Court seeking divorce from his wife on grounds of adultery and cruelty.

Dr. Rao said that his wife Mrs. Meghana had abducted him and married him forcibly and his in-laws were threatening him that they would ruin his career if he opened his mouth against their daughter. Since the marriage, his career and entire life was under the virtual control of his father-in-law.

His place of posting, residence everything was controlled by his in-laws. He said that he has serious differences with his wife and whenever he brought it to the notice of his in-laws, they threatened him with dire consequences if he opened his mouth. Dr. Rao alleged he and his family members were threatened and manhandled by his in-laws because they were witnesses to certain shocking incidents in his married life.

He also said his wife had left her eight months old daughter with him and went to America for higher studies. He also said that he had approached a court for divorce on the grounds of adultery and cruelty, and requested the government to give protection to him and his family members from his father-in-law. Mrs. S. Vani, victim's lawyer, and his family members participated in the media meet.

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Man assaulted by wife, gets divorce

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NEW DELHI: It's not always women who suffer due to cruelty and assault by their errant husbands. A husband too has been able to get divorce from his wife on grounds of assault and abuse. Before the SC granted him divorce on the charge of cruelty and assault by his wife, the man had lodged complaints with the Mahila Samiti in 1993. He suffered a fracture after his wife slapped him and pushed him against a wall.

Rearing the two children himself as his wife, surprisingly, lives with her husband's parents, the man charged her with both both physical and mental cruelty. While the trial court granted him decree for divorce, his wife challenged it and sought restoration of conjugal rights.

She succeeded in the high court, which held that the allegations of abusive behaviour by the wife were not proved. The aggrieved husband's counsel argued that it was not necessary for a husband to establish from written statement that the wife was abusive. She had made the charge of adultery during the proceedings for maintenance, which she got — Rs 800 a month.

A Bench of Justices Ruma Pal and Arun Kumar dismissed the wife's plea for restoration of conjugal rights and upheld the decree for divorce that the husband had got about a decade ago.

Since the two children of the estranged couple were being brought up by the father, no maintenance could be paid for them. But as there was an increase in the husband's income, his wife should be given enhanced maintenance of Rs 1,500 per month from November 1.

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big impact on health if it is released at a time and place when people are present. So, it is necessary to look not only where the pollution is but also where the people are. Earlier human comfort in a building was primarily measured in terms of temperature, humidity and odour. Today, comfort is also measured by indoor air quality, lighting and background noise level. Defining air quality or acceptable air quality is not easy. According to the Tata Energy Research Institute (TERI), the indoor air quality refers to the physical, chemical and biological characteristic of air in the indoor environment within a building.

All indoor-generated pollutants result from human activity or choice. There are broadly four kinds of pollutants—those that are formed in the combustion process for heating and cooking, the ones derived from construction and furnishing materials or those related to human activity or presence..

The pollutants from the above sources may include radon, the environmental tobacco smoke, carbon monoxide which is a volatile organic compound, oxides of nitrogen and sulphur like the lead and respirable particulate matter like asbestos.

Kitchens are the places where most combustion-generated pollutants are present, affecting mostly women who spend several hours in cooking at homes.

A study conducted in east Delhi found that in houses where cooking gas was used as fuel, the concentration of pollutants was significantly higher indoors than outdoors. If improperly adjusted cooking gas appliance is used, the concentration of CO is higher in kitchen and living rooms.

The ventilation in Indian kitchens is generally very poor.

Another study found that women using mixed fuels (biomass and dung) have more respiratory problems than those using LPG. This situation prevails in all types of indoor environments, both rural and urban, the researchers said.



Life's hard knocks

Man complains against harassment by wife, in-laws

Our Correspondent

Ghaziabad, February 8

A Loni resident has complained to the senior police officers, alleging harassment by his wife, her father, brother and other in-laws.

Sandeep Panwar, a resident of Raj Nagar Colony in Loni, was married on April 5, 2000 to Lovely, alias Chanchal, daughter of Dharampal of Chohlda village in Bagpat.

According to Sandeep, his father-in-law Dharampal, brother-in-law Deepak and a relative Satyander came to his house recently. The trio beat him up, took away his wife and also some of his belongings.

He had filed a report with the Loni police the same day and lodged a written complaint with the SSP Ghaziabad also. However, the police have not taken any action so far.

On the other hand, Sandeep alleges, his wife and her relatives have filed a false dowry case against him in the women cell of the Delhi police by giving a fictitious address in Delhi.

Since then, he has been knocking at the doors of Delhi police and Ghaziabad police, but in vain.

Traffic held up

Sonepat: A large number of residents, including women, held up traffic on the Sonepat-Rohtak Road near Harsana Kalan village, about 8 km from here last evening in protest against the disruption in power supply in the village.

According to a report, the movement of traffic on this road remained affected for two hours and a large number of vehicles were lined up on both sides of the road, causing inconvenience to the

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'Mother-in-law played spoilsport': Ex-ADC Pandey

Staff Reporter | Thursday, October 06, 2005 9:15:32 IST

Says would not have uttered a word against his 'Srimati' but for allegations of singeing with cigarette butts...



Deepak Pandey, IPS, who was formerly Governor's aide-de-camp (ADC), until two incidents put a spanner in the works of his promising career, called a press conference yesterday. Initially, it was traffic constable, Vishnu Patil, who had lodged a complaint against the senior officer saying he was harassed by Pandey when he was on duty. Patil had alleged that he was made to stand in the scorching heat in the Raj Bhavan campus and that Pandey had also threatened to transfer him (traffic constable Patil).

Following this, an inquiry was initiated and the issue was lapped up by the media. However, that was only the tip of iceberg of the hardship that Pandey was to undergo. A few days after this episode took place, his wife Nidhi lodged a complaint of harassment for dowry against the officer, resulting in an FIR being recorded and the subsequent suspension of Deepak Pandey.

Thereafter, Pandey was hounded by the media. However, yesterday he called a press conference since he could no longer stand the allegation made by his wife that he had tried to singe her with cigarette butts. Pandey revealed his side of the story to the media yesterday.

"I kept silent as I did not want to reveal that my 'Shrimati' was a psychiatric patient suffering from panic psychosis and personality disorder," he said, adding that he never had any serious issues on which to fight with Nidhi. He said that they were a happily married couple.

"We were a couple that people would refer to as an 'ideal couple'. Lekin na jane kiski nazar lag gayi," said Pandey. "Hamare beech mein kaha-sooni toh hoti thi, but that happens with every newly married couple. We were hoping to sort it out," said the ADC, adding that Nidhi's mother had played a major role in Nidhi making up her mind to sever ties with him.

"Bahut chotti-chotti batonko bahut galat tarike-sey pesh kiya gaya hai. Unki Matajine sab duniya ko galat bate batayi," said Pandey, adding that the first incident occurred on December 25, 2002 at Gadchiroli when Nidhi's parents had come to visit them. To avoid inconvenience Pandey in-laws were put up in a government guest house with all amenities. But they were unhappy about the lodging and conveyance arrangements made for them and the mother-in-law vowed to ensure that the marriage broke up. Since then, each time that Nidhi would meet her mother, she (Nidhi) would try to implicate him, with a new allegation, Pandey informed.

He said that incidents like his sister's marriage proposal with a man who was seen as Nidhi's prospective husband before she became an IAS officer and before she married Deepak Pandey, only added fuel to the fire. She was upset over the issue and in collusion with her parents decided to leave the house. However, even prior to that on January 30, 2004 she had made an application for her transfer outside Mumbai after returning from a 20-day sojourn at her mother's house in Lucknow.

"I kept silent as I thought she was upset over something and would return to normalcy," Pandey told reporters. However, she left the house on February 12, 2004 only a few days after the marriage of Deepak's sister and on April 19, 2004, an FIR of demand for dowry and harassment for the same was lodged at the behest of the mother-in-law, Pandey stated.

"Hamare aur Nidhi ke beech mein koi muddha nahi tha, na hai. It is not a mere coincidence that every time her mother had been around Nidhi had drifted towards separation and now she has decided to that," said Pandey, adding that he could prove all the allegations of assault, ill-treatment, demand of dowry etc. as false. Pandey also told the media that since he did not

possess any service revolver, there was no question of he having pointed it towards his wife with the intent of threatening to kill her, as alleged by her.

"There is nothing like demand for dowry. These things don't happen in IAS-IPS cadre. She was a gold medallist doctor and being an IAS officer, she was a superior officer, how could there be a demand for dowry," said Pandey.

Pandey also termed the cigarette-burns story as false. He said Nidhi was a gold medallist doctor but nowhere in her 26-page letter to the chief secretary nor in her initial complaint of demand for dowry and harassment had she mentioned anything about it. Demanding that both of them be made to undergo a lie-detector, narco-analysis and brain mapping test to find out the truth, Pandey ruled out the possibility of he having singed his wife with cigarette butts, but challenged that even if one allegation of causing of injury were to be proved, he would resign from his post. Pandey also denied allegations that he had behaved rudely with the police constable. He said the media made a hue and cry about the whole thing. In fact, it was the constable who, despite seeing his photo in uniform, had deliberately tried to belittle him. "I could have handled the issue much professionally," confessed Pandey, adding that when the days were bad, things tended to go awry. "I have knocked on every possible door in the last few months, including that of astrologers to keep the marriage," said Pandey.



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Mujhe meri biwi se bachao

Rajendra Chhabra

In a state where leaders from opposition are never out of their breath in criticising the Vasundhara Raje government for the increasing incidents of atrocities against women, there is an RAS officer working in one of the boards under the state government, who has been subjected to manhandling and beating by his wife. There are numerous instances of government officials who are slaves of their wives. The Saheb's PAs and PS's and other staff members are aware of many instances where the wife publicly humiliated their husbands before the office staff. Such stories spread easily in the departments and in the secretariat.

But there is one officer who faces the humiliation inflicted by none other than his own wife. It is not known what fate meets this officer in his home, but his wife often lands up in the office and the "Hitler Bibi" as she is described scolds her husband and in sheer rage tears the clothes of her husband and often beat him up. The staff members have seen their boss getting humiliated like this, at least half a dozen times in the past six months. Once in the presence of the minister of the official's department, the wife had beaten her husband. In sheer humiliation and in panic the officer ran away from the house to save himself. This incident of November 10, 2005 shocked even the minister and other high officials. This RAS (selection scale) officer had suffered such humiliation in the past also from the hands of his wife. On several occasions, the wife in sheer anger, threw paperweight at her husband by reaching office following arguments.

On several occasions, the officer ran away from office, yet the wife followed him. The clash and commotion are being caused on the issue of money. The officer has two official cars, but the wife keeps the keys of the official cars. The wife and children use the cars for personal use and in the past six months, the board has incurred an expenditure of Rs six lakh on cars and maintenance. This means the wife is burning fuel worth Rs 70,000 per month. Both cars are parked at the officer's residence even in the night and the wife controls the keys. The officer's parental house is not in Jaipur and every Saturday the wife and children visit the nearby city and use the cars for this purpose.

While the wife goes to the other city by husband's official car, the husband visits the nearby city travelling by bus. Once after having clashed with his wife, the husband was forced out of the house by his wife. He was not in proper dress and he had to buy kurta-pyjama from shop to enable him attend the office. The department's secretary knows about the sufferings of the officials. Once during an important meeting, the officer reached in kurta-pyjama and that too late. Later he explained the position to the secretary and he was surprised to hear the complaint. The wife has come and misbehaved with his husband several times in office and the higher officials have not taken up any cognizance of it. The misuse of the cars by the wife is a matter of probe as the expenditure of Rs 70,000 on petrol is more than double the monthly salary of the officer.

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Mid Day Poll

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threat to the Shiv
Sena?](#)**If you love Patel women, stay away**By: Anand Holla and Ketan Ranga
December 26, 2005

Four men, Ajay Nikam, Abhijit Sonavane, Raju Medige and Prashant Samudre, have been waiting for months for their wives to return. The three Maharashtrians and a South Indian, all married to Patel women (Gujarati), have paid a heavy price for choosing inter-caste marriages.

"The four of us became friends due to our common fate. We call each other every day to share our feelings," said Prashant Samudre, husband of Geeta, who was allegedly kidnapped by the notorious Babu Bajrangi on February 12 this year.

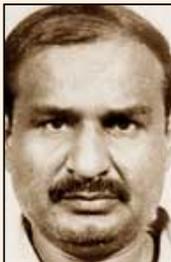
Madhavji Patel, Geeta's uncle, state president of Navchetan group, "I don't want to comment. We will reply to the notices. Bajrangi and myself are from the same community".

Teesta Setalvad, secretary of Citizens For Justice and Peace, "This was not just an isolated incident, but a part of an organised crime. I am just providing a helping hand to the victims, this being a very genuine case."

What happened

Babu Bajrangi allegedly kidnapped wives of Nikam, Sonavane, Medige, and Samudre on behalf of the girls' parents, as they married men outside their community without their consent.

On Thursday, the Bombay High Court served notices to the parents of the kidnapped girls, and the police forces of Maharashtra and Gujarat. The recipients have been told to file their response by January 23.

**Who's Babu Bajrangi?**

The National President of Navchetan Sangathan, a group that allegedly kidnaps Gujarati girls who marry outside the community and forces them to remarry Patel boys. He is the prime accused of the infamous Naroda-Patia massacre after the Godhra riots, in which at least 83 people were killed.

The four men who lost their wives**Abhijit Sonavane (24)**

Abhijit and Bhavna knew each other for four years before they got married. Even as Bhavna's parents repeatedly threatened Sonavane, they got secretly married. However, Bhavna's parents and relatives came to Sonavane's house and demanded their daughter come back.

In May 2005, when the Sonavane family had gone for a holiday to Panchgani, a group of 15 kidnapped the pregnant Bhavna. Two days later, the police told the Sonavanes that Bhavna was with Baba Bajrangi by her own will.

A mob of 400 people of Navchetan group accompanied Bhavna to Khandala court on June 13, where she said she did not wish to stay with Abhijit. Later Abhijit learnt Bhavna had filed for divorce under pressure.

Raju Medige (23)

Married Naval against the wishes of both families and her

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parents placed her under house arrest. In January, Naval's relatives began threatening Raju to sign divorce papers or his mother and sister's lives would be in danger. Raju finally gave as he was scared for the well being of his family.

In August, Naval called Raju to tell him that one Atul Patel who had come to Raju's house had plans of taking Naval to Babu Bajrangi. She said Bajrangi would ask questions like, "How many times have you slept with Raju?"

On August 28, the couple decided to meet at a spot and then run away. But Naval didn't turn up. Raju got a call at night and Naval told him she was in Naroda, Ahmedabad. She cried the whole time. Till date does not know where she is. He said, "I want my wife back from the clutches of Bajrangi."



Ajay Nikam (29)

Married Geeta on May 23, 2003 without their parents' consent after five years of dating. They informed their families in October 2004. Geeta's parents, uncle Madhav Patel and aunt Kamla got gangster Babu Bajrangi to abduct her. Geeta disappeared on November 30, 2004, a month after her parents were informed of the marriage.

After the abduction, Ajay received threatening calls from Ahmedabad asking him to forget Geeta. But a determined Ajay went to Ahmedabad, where Bajrangi's men met him. There, he was forced to sign divorce papers at gunpoint.

Nikam said, "In whatever conditions and circumstances, I want my wife back"



Prashant Samudre (26)

Runs a hotel in Miraj, Sangli district, and on May 5 he married Geeta, who went back to stay with her parents, as both intended to complete their studies. She went missing in February after she went to a restaurant after receiving a call. Later, she called Prashant from Ahmedabad and told him she could not break free from those who held her.

But when Prashant reached Naroda he was chased away by eight people. On reaching Miraj, he got a divorce petition. But later in April he came to know his wife was illegally forced to marry Shivalal Patel in Mumbai.

Another girl, Bharati Patole who had run away from Bajrangi's clutches, she complained to the Karnataka police of the sinister racket.

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Kidnapped by her parents?

Aspiring actor, embroiled in filmi marriage drama, says he is unable to get wife back from her family

Yogesh Sadhwani

Aman Koiri (26), a television and film actor, says his wife Jigna Thakkar (21) was whisked away by her own parents after he was beaten unconscious by hired goons. Armed with the marriage certificate, Koiri has made many attempts in the last two months to reunite with her but in vain.

While police officials who tried to 'extricate' Thakkar from her parents' house say that she refused to come back, Koiri says she has been threatened with her life and his if she does. "She calls and tells me she wants to be with me. But I am unable to do anything," he says.

Koiri, who has acted in a few television soaps and a yet-to-be released film called Kasam Pyar Ki, says they got married at the Arya Samaj in Mulund on August 18 this year. "We did not inform her parents as they would definitely have opposed the marriage. My father was also against it as she is from a Gujarati family and we are from North India," he says. However, he informed his father and sister about it on the day they tied the knot.

After the marriage, the couple decided to stay apart till the Ganpati festival was over, said Koiri who lives at Yashodan Nagar, Thane. Jigna went back to her house so that her parents would not have to face any embarrassment during the festival.

On September 13, the two moved in together. "I had decided I would move out of my father's house once Jigna came to stay with me. But as I hadn't rented a place till then, I brought her to my father's place. I had told him I would leave in a couple of days after I had found a house," says Koiri.

On the same day, Thakkar called her parents and told them about the marriage.

"A few hours later, her father called to say that Jigna's mother was seriously ill and had been admitted to a hospital. He pleaded with her to visit her mother," says Koiri. But sensing that something was amiss Jigna refused to go, says Koiri.

"The calls continued through the night and even Jigna's brother spoke to me. I got carried away and persuaded Jigna to meet her mother. She agreed to go on the condition that they would meet at a restaurant and not at her parents' house," says Koiri. The next day, the couple went to Aditya Hotel in Bhandup along with a lawyer. "Initially, Jigna's parents were nice to us. But then they started insisting that

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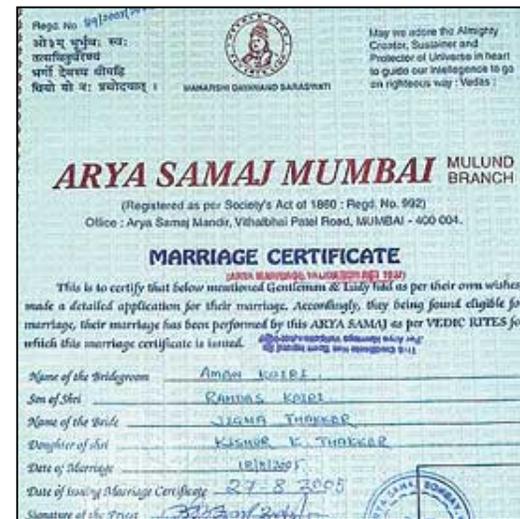
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Aman Koiri and Jigna Thakkar at their wedding in August this year



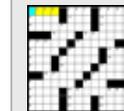
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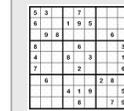
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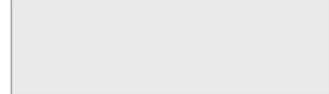
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she go back with them. When I protested two goons came in and beat me up unconscious. The family dragged Jigna away," says Koiri.

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Koiri has a marriage certificate but no wife

When Koiri came back to his senses he started driving towards Jigna's house but stopped after a call from his lawyer. "My lawyer said the police was at the restaurant and they would help me get her back," says Koiri. He narrated the story to the police, who registered a non-cognisable offence against Thakkar's parents and sent two constables with Koiri to her house.

"Jigna wanted to come with me but her parents threatened her in front of the cops. The cops said they would try again the next day," says Koiri. But she was not home the next day, he says.

Koiri was shocked with the next twist in his love-tale. "On September 20, she came to the police station and told the police she didn't want to be with me any more," says Koiri. But in a matter of days he received a call from her. "She told me her parents had threatened to kill not only her but also me," says Koiri.

When Mumbai Mirror contacted Kishore Thakkar, Jigna's father, he refused to talk because there were relatives at his house. Sub-inspector Sadanand Longte of Bhandup police station, who investigated the case, could not be contacted as he was on sick leave. Other officials said they couldn't do much as the girl had refused to go to Koiri.

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Chennai: When Sachin Tendulkar steps on to the field on Tuesday in the third one-dayer against South Africa, he will become the[More](#)

Subsequent to the notices issued by the Mumbai Police to the Publisher and Editor of Mumbai Mirror and in view of the sentiments expressed by some activist NGOs pertaining to the contents in the November 12- 18 issue of Mumbai Mirror Buzz magazine, we have requested the venders and distributors of the magazine as well as our own sales colleagues to stop sales of this issue, and to return the undistributed material back to us.





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Petitioner claims wife has abducted his son

Umesh Mohite | Wednesday, March 01, 2006 10:24:38 IST

Father seeks justice in High Court, files for habeas corpus and restoration of child's custody..

Mohammed Khalil Ahmed Bhamla has been fighting for restoration of lawful custody of his son, who according to him, has been abducted by the child's mother. In his petition before the Bombay High Court, he seeks that a writ of habeas corpus be issued directing the police to produce his 10-year-old son Abdul Razzak before the court. He also seeks that the police should also submit a report of investigation and what efforts were taken to find out the boy's whereabouts since Sep.11, 2003 when he was abducted from school by his (the child's) mother.

Bhamla married in July 1994 and went to Dubai the following month accompanied by his wife. A year later, the couple had a son. Four years later matrimonial bliss prevailed. In 1998, Bhamla's wife came back to Mumbai to stay at her in-laws house but soon started staying with her parents from May 1999. After a year, the petitioner wrote a letter to Halai Memon Jamat seeking their intervention in the matrimonial discord. However, Bhamla's in-laws sought divorce in the meetings called by the Jamat.

In July 2000, petitioner' wife along with the child accompanied the petitioner to Dubai where the petitioner had been working for 15 years. The couple left for Dubai together but the petitioner was not aware that back home the in-laws filed a suit in family court. He knew it only after he received a summons from family court on reaching Dubai. However, the couple continued to cohabit in Dubai till April 12, 2004 when the petitioner's wife left the petitioner's house leaving behind her son but no address where she could be traced. She even filed a petition in Dubai court seeking maintenance and divorce.

Petitioner's wife whose passport was expired and allegedly lost had visited Mumbai for dissolution of Muslim Marriage Act, 1939 and Immigration Authorities at Sharjah disclosed the same at the time of cancellation of her residential visa. Meanwhile, the petitioner had sent his son with his brother to India. In April 2003, the Dubai Court asked petitioner to pay Dharams 500 to his wife for meeting the expenses of the minor son, but the lady filed an application seeking only divorce not the liability of her son.

On September 11, 2003 the petitioner's wife abducted her son on his way back from school in Byculla and her advocate sent letters to police and the school that the child's custody is taken by the mother as per the directions of court in Dubai and Bandra Family court. Petitioner rushed to Mumbai on Sept. 23, 2003 and tried to lodge complaint with Byculla and Nagpada police but they refused to record his complaint. Even the ACP and DCP did not help.

The Bandra Family court, despite false submissions by the petitioner's wife, asked to produce the petitioner's son. The same was done but the wife of the petitioner made false statements about his address in Mumbai and with whom he had been staying, whether he goes to school or not, etc. The court however, asked for inquiry and report from police and after that a case under section 363, 365, 368 r/w 34 IPC was recorded against petitioner's wife and her relatives for alleged kidnapping/ abducting with intent to secretly and wrongfully confine petitioner's son. Petitioner's wife was arrested and is on bail. However, his son remained in the custody of his in-laws.

The petitioner coming to high court prayed for his son's welfare is not being taken care of by his wife and her relatives who only seek to extort money from him (petitioner). He argues that according to law, he is the legitimate parent and should be in possession of the son. But his wife and in-laws have not only confined his son but were concealing his whereabouts even from authorities. They have been misleading the courts and as such he should have access to the child, the matrimonial issue should be resolved and action in criminal cases lodged by him against his wife and in-laws be taken. He also sought the court's permission to amend his petition so as to add the demand for restoration of child to his custody. The court allowed the petitioner to amend petition adding plea for restoration of the custody of minor son in the prayers.

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'Reverse dowry' gang haunts bachelors

Radha Sharma
[Monday, June 19, 2006 11:31:00 pm TIMES NEWS NETWORK]

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AHMEDABAD: Marriage proved a nightmare for Devrat Patel of Satapar village in Rajkot district of Gujarat.

Devrat, who could not find a bride in his community, was a sitting duck for marriage agents on the prowl looking for desperate bachelors willing to pay a price for a wife.

Kingpin of this racket, Mukesh Ahir, and his cronies got Devrat married to one Payal for Rs 60,000. Days later, Payal left for her parent's house and just disappeared.

"Devrat and his brother Chamanlal were forced to sell their land and house to repay the Rs 40,000 debt taken for buying the bride. They have also left the village," Devrat's uncle Rawat Kala told *TOI*.

The demand for brides from communities hit by a low sex ratio is leading to this unique gang of social criminals.

The modus operandi of these gangs is simple: locate boys desperate for marriage, sell them girls for a price as high as Rs 30,000 to 90,000 in marriage.

Within days of the wedding, the girl leaves for her parents' house and vanishes into thin air, leaving the bride-groom high and dry.

In fact, Gujarat police have busted at least eight such marriage rackets recently. These cases have been especially rampant in badly-hit districts like Mehsana and Rajkot...

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Radha Sharma

[Monday, June 19, 2006 11:31:00 pm TIMES NEWS NETWORK]

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"Cheating under the guise of marriage has become rampant due to shortage of girls in certain communities. The problem is much bigger as majority cases go unreported due to social embarrassment or plain shock," says SP Rajkot (rural) Ajay Chaudhary.

In Mehsana district, police busted six rackets where a gang duped gullible bachelors.

One such racketeer couple from Vadodara, Ashok and Sharda Vasava, struck Opera village in Unjha, which has the lowest sex-ratio in Gujarat.

Girish Patel and Jitendra Patel were married off to Suman and Jyoti respectively after the boys agreed to pay Rs 35,000 each.

After few days, the two girls disappeared with jewellery, valuables and clothes from their husbands' home. It later turned out that the girls were married before.

In Visnagar, Mukesh Patel was similarly duped by an Ambaji-based gang that had got him married to one Leela for Rs 30,000. Police officers said three other rackets were busted in Mehsana taluka.

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Man pays price for saving family's honour Wife 'pushes' daughters into flesh trade Kanchan Vasdev Tribune News service

Mandi Ahmedgarh, November 13

Standing up against the "intentions of his wife to force his teenage daughters into flesh trade in the garb of working with an orchestra group" cost a man dear when his wife thrashed him and threw him out of his house.

Des Raj Verma (55), a resident of the Dehliz road here, who repairs sewing machines by moving from one village to another is paying the price of trying to save his family's honour.

After being bashed up by his wife and a brick kiln owner of a nearby village, Mr Verma, a heart patient, is now staying with his mother and requesting police authorities to take action against his wife.

His three daughters, one of them a minor, had been working with an orchestra group for the past two years and the matter had been a bone of contention between the couple.

The latest provocation came on Friday when Mr Verma objected to the staying of two persons overnight in his house.

"This was enough for my wife. She attacked me with a wooden beater and was joined by the two men. I was thrown out of the house and had to spend the night in the fields nearby," he said while talking to Ludhiana Tribune here today.

After taking refuge at his mother's house the next day, this "destitute husband" went to the police station the next day to complain against her.

But a rude shock awaited him there as he was detained by the police "at the behest of his wife, who enjoys good relationships with policemen". He was allowed to go home after a social worker vouched for him.

Narrating his tale of woe, Mr Verma said: "Tired of day's hard work, when I reached home on Friday night, I found a brick kiln owner and an SAD leader relaxing there. When I objected to this, my wife asked them to teach me a lesson and finish the matter for ever."

He was mercilessly beaten up by them and thrown out.

When he along with his mother Krishana Devi approached social leaders and some councillors, they showed their inability to intervene in their matter, as, according to them, the suspects could harm them later for opposing them.

To add to the insult, his wife, backed by her "brothers", thrashed him again today.

"She has threatened to get me eliminated. I understand that my days are numbered. But I plead the authorities, including the Chief Minister and the DGP, to save my daughters from the clutches of the gangsters who are conspiring to sell them on the pretext of sending them abroad," appealed the unfortunate father.

The Ahmedgarh police said it had received complaints from both parties and was investigating the matter.



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'Sati Savitri' turns her pati into a bawarchi

Actor's husband files complaint with cops alleging that she forces him to do household chores; she says there are no problems between them

Rashmi Rajput

Nowadays, Shradanand Mishra feels that if he wants to see his wife Pratichi in a Sati Savitri avatar, he has to switch on the television and watch Saat Phera (Zee TV). She plays an ideal housewife in the serial.

In real life, he alleges, she is just the opposite. She allegedly forces him to do household chores, cook for the family, rebukes him in public, threatens to divorce him and demands money for furnishing their house.

Mishra, a senior manager with Maharashtra Seamless Limited, is fed up of her 'high-handed ways'.

But it was not always like this.

IT WAS A LOVE MARRIAGE

Shradanand and Pratichi studied law in the same college in Varanasi. They fell in love and got married 14 years ago. They have a 11-year-old daughter.

Pratichi worked as a radio anchor in Varanasi until five years back when she decided to pursue her dream to make it big as an actress. Hence, the family shifted to Mumbai.

It was not easy for Pratichi, but after a lot of struggle she managed to bag roles in some serials.

All along, Shradanand was supportive of his wife and was happy for her.

'SUCCESS BROUGHT CHANGES'

But, he says, things started changing a year back when Pratichi started bagging better roles in serials like Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi, Lavanya and Saat Phera.

Shradanand alleges that she began to feel uncomfortable taking him to the parties and started asking him to get in shape. She also stopped doing household chores.

Eventually, Shradanand ended up having to cook for the family.

"I cook lunch and dinner for my wife and kid. When I fail to prepare lunch, I organise pizzas for the family," he says. "I have even stored the numbers of vegetable vendors on my cell phone."

"She has been misled by her friends from the television fraternity. As a husband, I used to ask about her whereabouts when she did not return home late in the night. Her friends used to tell her that your husband shouldn't interfere with your life," he alleges.

"They tell her that she would have made it big in the industry if she had come to Mumbai 10 years back. Pratichi feels that I am responsible for this loss," he adds.

"Last year, she threatened to divorce me, but changed her mind later. From the last 7-8 months, she has been demanding Rs 2.5 lakh from me saying she had spent that much on the interiors of our Kandivali flat. I cannot pay this huge amount, as I am already re-paying the loan for the flat. She has also purchased a separate flat without my consent."

Fearing the worst, he registered a non-cognisable complaint with the Samata Nagar police on May 24 saying he should not be held responsible in case she takes some undesirable step.

'WE HAVE NO PROBLEMS'

When contacted, Pratichi said, "All the allegation made my husband are bogus. I doubt that he has filed a complaint with the police. Somebody is playing a prank on us. I am staying with my husband and we have no problems."

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Pratichi Mishra, in her role as Ambika Singh in Saat Phera.



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Shradanand Mishra and Pratichi on their wedding day



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Help! My wife beats me

Battered wives make news and draw protests. **Hemchhaya De** looks into the predicament of abused husbands who often prefer to suffer in silence



Manohar Gangurde, 26, killed himself by swallowing poison in Mumbai last year because he couldn't bear being 'tortured' by his wife any more. The trouble started when he lost his job and his wife and her family members subjected him to harassment of every conceivable kind.

This is one of the very rare instances of domestic violence against men that make it to the media. Even when they do, they are never treated with the same kind of seriousness shown towards violence against women. They get media attention only if a big name is involved, as happened in the case of Rebekah Wade, editor of UK's best-selling tabloid *The Sun*, who was arrested last month for allegedly assaulting her husband.

So how serious can it be when men are at the receiving end of domestic violence? Take P. Barman, who teaches electrical engineering at a premier Calcutta college. He had to suffer mental and physical torture by his wife because he refused to leave his ailing mother and live separately. His wife used to pour boiling water on him. She complained to a women's organisation that she was being tortured by her husband. Consequently, Barman was beaten up by members of the organisation.

Prafulla Sen, another battered husband, likes to call himself a "victim of the discriminatory practices of the law." His wife is "irascible, addicted to alcohol and has had illicit relationships," he says. Sen put up with her for 14 years because he thought that a divorce would affect his 10-year-old daughter. But one day when he returned from work, he found that his house was being emptied by his wife and she had locked his 85-year-old mother out of the house. Sen immediately lodged an FIR with the police. "No one from my neighbourhood came to help me," he says. However, a few days later, Sen was arrested under Section 498 A when his wife complained that he was subjecting her to mental torture. What followed was a long court battle. During that period, his wife "had an affair" and forced his daughter to testify against him, says Sen.

Lawyers feel that there is now a greater acceptance in society of the fact that women can be as guilty of abuse as men. Says Joy Sengupta, criminal lawyer, Calcutta High Court: "Earlier, assaulting and brutalising the spouse used to be the exclusive domain of the husband. It is not so now. We do come across allegations like the wife hiring goons to beat up her husband and throw her in-laws out of the house."

For men, though there is no equivalent of a special women's cell, there are several organisations in the country that provide a platform for harassed husbands to voice their grievances. Platforms like the Piritto Purush Pati Parishad (Forum for Harassed Husbands) in Calcutta and Akhil Bharatiya Patni Virodhi Morcha (All-India Anti-wife Front) in Delhi offer support, legal or otherwise, to men. Interestingly, Calcutta's Piritto Purush Pati Parishad is headed by a woman, Aruna Mukherjee, a senior advocate at the Calcutta High Court. Says Mukherjee, "I have been practising law for many years. I have seen innumerable cases where women misuse Section 498 A. I always felt that there should be a forum for men. Hence, the Parishad was conceived. Women do cause great harm to men and contribute significantly to the breakdown of marriages."

Mukherjee identifies some principal causes of harassment. These could range from having

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extra-marital affairs to making tough demands on their husbands. Agrees Ram Prakash Chugh of the Patni Virodhi Morcha that was founded in 1988. "Many of them misuse dowry laws to punish their husbands and in-laws," he says.

Sociologist Bula Bhadra believes that domestic violence against men is yet to become a public issue. "If we go by the numbers, it's still a private issue. I believe anyone can be abusive. We need to look at the bigger picture. We have to take into account the power relations — whoever is in the dominant position in a family structure, be it a man or a woman, will tend to use his or her power to inflict hurt on the other. But as women are gaining more power today, we can see a 'fear psyche' working among men."

Mukherjee feels that more and more men are now coming forward to seek counselling. "A man is afraid of being called weak if he admits in public that he has been assaulted by his wife," she says.

Chugh claims that since his organisation was formed, about 20,00,000 aggrieved men, including judges, bureaucrats and army officers, have got in touch with him. "They are so scared that they can't give their names or come out in public," he says.

Though the misuse of Section 498 A is believed to be the main culprit behind the harassment of men, the legal situation is not entirely hopeless. Says Sengupta. "It's not that easy these days to arrest a man and his family members on the basis of just a complaint lodged by his wife. Unless the investigating agency is absolutely certain of a prima facie case against the accused, he should not be put to unnecessary harassment or incarceration."

Meanwhile, the battle between the sexes continues.

(Some names have been changed on request.)

Additional reporting by Anirban Das Mahapatra in New Delhi.



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[Wednesday, December 07, 2005 03:26:27 am TIMES NEWS NETWORK]

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CHANDIGARH: For Kuldip Babbar who fought a five-year long legal battle in courts to prove his innocence, it's payback time.

After a local court acquitted him and his family of all charges of dowry harassment last year, Kuldip Babbar, 42, has now moved court against the UT police, his former wife and 16 other witnesses seeking damages worth Rs 2 crore (Rs 50 lakh each for his aged father, two sisters and himself) for defaming and falsely implicating him and putting his family through a harrowing time for more than five years.

Babbar has also sited mental harassment, loss of livelihood and income and expenditure incurred while defending the 'malicious prosecution' as reasons for seeking the damages.

Admitting the petition, Civil Judge (Senior Division) RK Bhankar issued notices to the UT IG, SSP, SHO (Sector 19 police station), Reena and other defendants, summoning them for appearance in court on February 14, 2006.

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Babbar, a former resident of Chandigarh who married Reena, a resident of Jalandhar in 1993, says that he and his wife developed differences soon after the wedding on account of an alleged extra-martial affair of his wife.

Their differences grew and the fights became more frequent after which Reena in collusion with the landlords of the house in Sector 21 where the family was staying lodged a dowry complaint in the Sector 19 police station.

She alleged that Babbar and his sisters had beaten her up and tried to set her on fire. In his petition Babbar has alleged that after the false complaint was made, his father and sisters were harassed to no end, especially by certain investigating police officers who were allegedly bribed by Reena and her family.

He has also submitted in court some tape recorded conversations of the telephone calls his wife made to certain officials seeking their help to falsely implicate his family.

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Want divorce? Add extra sugar to tea Clip

Tushar Tere

[Friday, March 24, 2006 09:28:35 pm TIMES NEWS NETWORK]

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VADODARA: Nitin Shah (name changed) recently divorced his wife simply because she kept eggs in the refrigerator. As a vegetarian, he found this offending enough to ask for divorce.

In fact, if you thought using a bathing soap your wife doesn't like may lead to just a small argument, think again. Chances are that she might be planning to divorce you because she can't stand that fragrance!

"The reasons for which couples seek divorce are very frivolous and laughable these days. In such cases, both partners are well-educated and come from good families," said advocate Shabiya Sindhi, who fights divorce cases.

"I got a case where the husband wanted a divorce as his wife would add more sugar to his tea. He alleged that she wanted him to die of diabetes.

I had a tough time convincing them, but they got divorced," added Sindhi, who gets about 10 such cases every month. The Vadodara district court gets hundreds of such divorce cases every month. Of these a majority end up in divorce.

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Advocates say many couples are not even ready to go for counselling. "Financial independence and low tolerance levels are responsible for such break-ups. Both husband and wife are not ready to adjust or compromise with each other.

The cosmopolitan and stressful lifestyle has also led to rise in such divorces," said advocate Sapan Teredesai. "A couple got separated without spending even one hour with each other after marriage.

The girl, who had recently graduated from the home science faculty of MS University, wanted divorce as the business run by her husband was in his brother's name. The court passed their divorce orders few weeks ago," said Sindhi.

"In most cases, couples are at loggerheads for quite some time and a small argument gives an outlet to their simmering tension that finally leads to divorce," said sociologist N Rajaram.

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Nation

Battered husbands join hands to take on 'better' halves

Press Trust of India
 Posted online: Thursday, June 16, 2005 at 1143 hours IST
 Updated: Thursday, June 16, 2005 at 1218 hours IST

Kolkata, June 16: Men facing a hard time from their spouses but have none to turn to, can take heart. 'Pirito Purush Poti Parishad' (forum of oppressed husbands) is here to take up their cause.

The organisation, which has 1500 members, takes up the cause of men who suffer mental and physical torture at the hands of their wives, and offers help ranging from counselling and legal advice to fighting their cases in court.

"Women having to face torture from their husbands and in-laws is quite common in the country, but incidents of men being on the receiving end are gradually on the rise, specially in urban areas," says the organisation's president, Aruna Mukherjee.Æ

"For women there are many laws to deal with such problems and many bodies like the Women's Commission and the women's grievance cell, while there is no facility for men who face problems from their wives," she told PTI here.

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"It's not that we entertain the problems faced by men only, but also those of women," Mukherjee, a practising advocate at the Calcutta high court, said of the organisation that was founded in 1992.

"Thirty per cent of the members of our organisation are women," she said with obvious pride claiming that these women have come forward for the



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cause of suffering men.

Demanding amendment to section 498a of IPC (punishment for subjecting a married woman to cruelty), which is "loaded in favour of women", Mukherjee claimed that there were several instances when women have been found to take advantage of this law for wrong causes.

"As a lawyer, I have seen the Act being misused by women, while many women who have really suffered cannot even approach police stations or courts," Mukherjee said.

"Charges under section 498a be either made bailable, or a new section under

498B be introduced wherein males would be able to lodge complaints of domestic torture against their spouses," she suggested.

"We want the guilty, whether husband or wife, to be punished, but not the misuse of law," the elderly lawyer, who comes from a conservative North Kolkata locality, said.

Mukherjee, who has authored a book named "Narir Swadhikar" (women's rights), claimed that in the name of 'women's liberation', a lot of wrongs being committed by a section of women, "breaking up many families on the slightest pretext or issue.

"Our aim is to create a healthy society, where people are happy and families stay together," she said.

"We enquire into complaints received from men and verify whether they are genuine and then act on them," Mukherjee said adding that a panel of lawyers helps these people face domestic problems that they encounter.

Claiming that the organisation receives over 150 complaints from men a month, she said, "We deal with cases neutrally. We first enquire whether the man is speaking the truth."

Asked why being a woman, she was fighting for the cause of men, Mukherjee said "in the 19th century, when women in Bengal were suffering a lot, great men like Iswarchandra Bidyasagar and Raja Ram Mohan Roy took up cudgels for them, so now when some men are suffering due to women, we women should come forward and stand by them."

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Begun in chatroom, IPS officer's love story ends in courtroom

JAYA MENON

TO EDITOR EMAIL PRINT

Posted online: Wednesday, March 01, 2006 at 0151 hours IST

CHENNAI, FEBRUARY 28: Even as Lucknow-based IPS officer Laxmi Singh was preparing for her March 2 wedding, her personal life hit the headlines here after her relatives allegedly shot her lover, a 48-year-old married man, in Chennai on February 20.

While a Tamil Nadu police team, headed by DCP A Arun, went to Lucknow last Saturday to interrogate her brother, Digvijay Singh, and mother, Nayantara, Laxmi's love story is likely to take another pot-boiler turn when the team returns to the city, bearing an arrest warrant against both her family members for their alleged involvement in the shooting.

On Saturday, Arun's team filed Advertisement an FIR in Lucknow against Nayantara, Digvijay and 20 others, alleging that they had intimidated and roughed up the team during interrogations.

"We knew Digvijay Singh possessed a licenced weapon. We demanded to see it. Experts can find out whether it was used recently. But he refused and a scuffle broke out," Arun said. He is to be take his team back to Lucknow soon, after filing a charge sheet and obtaining an arrest warrant for Digvijay and his mother.

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“While obtaining the arrest warrant, we will tell the court here that the Lucknow police had refused to co-operate,” Arun said, adding that the family appeared to be influential in Lucknow and were using their powerful contacts to hinder the Chennai police team from doing its duty.

The 32-year-old Laxmi caught public attention in Chennai when her lover, Nagarajan, a businessman, married with two children, was shot at by two men near his Anna Nagar residence in the city on February 20. Laxmi and Natarajan had apparently got to know each other through an Internet chat room. He had lied to her about his age and marital status. But their relationship continued even after they met and Laxmi learned of his marriage and children.

The Chennai police believe that Digvijay Singh and Nayantara were behind the attack, as they were strongly opposed to the liaison. Nagarajan is said to be recuperating.

In an attempt to put an end to the ugly controversy, Laxmi said in a press statement on Monday that there was no truth in the Tamil Nadu police allegations against her brother and mother.



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T-zone gets most water projects

Hyderabad, Dec. 20: Minister for major irrigation Ponnala Lakshmaiah on Tuesday said Telangana would be the biggest beneficiary of the ongoing and proposed irrigation projects as part of Jala Yagnam. Speaking to mediapersons here, the minister said the existing irrigation facilities, other than minor and well irrigation, in Telangana region was 22/75 lakh acres, of which 19.22 lakh acres were irrigated under major irrigation and about 3.53 lakh acres under medium irrigation. As part of Jala Yagnam, it was proposed to take up 27 major and medium irrigation projects in Telangana region to create irrigation potential of 46 lakh acres.

"Out of Rs 27,123.87 crores value of projects awarded so far in the last two years, Rs 14,682.57 crores, accounting for 54 per cent, had been allocated in Telangana area only. Out of one crore acres of irrigation potential, including 22 lakh acres of stabilisation, to be created in the State, about 46 lakh acres was from Telangana region. This indicates that the government is committed to improving the living standards of the backward Telangana region," he said.

Mr Lakshmaiah said on December 31, Chief Minister Dr Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy would be laying foundation stone for Dummugudem lift irrigation scheme and Indirasagar lift irrigation scheme, both aimed at irrigating four lakh acres in Khammam district. He said in Khammam district, only 4.28 lakh acres of irrigated area and there was only another 4.5 lakh acres of cultivable area. The new projects would benefit the entire farming community in the district, he said.

Don't dig roads for meet: Sonia

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Hyderabad, Dec. 20: DNA fingerprinting of bloodstains found on the clothes of the victim and suspects helped police to crack a murder case. On the basis of this evidence, police on Tuesday arrested Mohammed Ham-eed alias Abu, 22, a resident of Kishanbagh and Syed Saber, 22, of Gulbarga in Karnataka, for killing a person in Mangalghat. They were produced before court and remanded to judicial custody. The murder took place on November 4. Hameed and Saber were walking along the road in an inebriated condition and a person bumped on them accidentally. "The duo got angry and there was a scuffle. They slit his throat and smashed his head with a boulder," said the West Zone Deputy Commissioner Amit Garg.

Both of them suffered injuries in the scuffle and their hair follicles and skin was found in the nails of the dead person. The duo did not confess the crime, but police booked them after matching the DNA of the bloodstains on their clothes with that on the clothes of the deceased. Goshamahal Assistant Commissioner K. Sridhar Rao said that the victim was not identified. "We took the body to OGH mortuary and conducted an autopsy," he said.

"We picked up Saber and Hameed who were found lying in an inebriated condition 20 yards away with bloodstains on their clothes," he added. Since it as dark, nobody witnessed the murder. "But I think we can nail them with the scientific evidence. We are investigating it further," said Mr Sridhar Rao.



Bride runs off with lover after marriage

Hyderabad, Dec. 20: A bride eloped with her boyfriend, who is reportedly two years her junior, carrying money and ornaments, a week after she was married to another man. The incident took place at Banjara Ka Darwaja of Golconda. Ms Kavita, 20, was married to Mr Yadagiri on December 11. Her parents were getting set for the Satyanarayana vratam, a mandatory puja here, when Ms Kavita eloped on December 18 with Mr Naresh, alias Chitti, 18. Her parents lodged a complaint against Mr Naresh, alleging that he kidnapped her.

Golconda police registered a case of kidnapping under Section 366 of the IPC (kidnapping, abducting or inducing a woman to compel her marriage). Ms Anasuya, wife of Mr M. Krishna, alleged in her complaint: "We performer her marriage on December 11 with Mr Yadagiri. On December 18 we were about to perform the (Satyanarayana) vratam. Suddenly our daughter Kavita, 20, went missing. The boy took her away without her consent."

Ms P. Jeeva, the bride's aunt, said: "She went away with Rs 32,000 worth of gold, Rs 4,000 cash and half kg of silver ornaments. Her parents had spent Rs 2 to 3 lakh on the marriage. The parents of Mr Yadagiri, the groom, are now demanding that we send the girl to the family or compensate them for the marriage expenditure."



FIR on colleges with false claims

Hyderabad, Dec. 20: A division bench of the High Court on Tuesday asked the State government to register FIRs against corporate colleges which issued false advertisements. The bench asked the police to complete the investigation in this matter within a month and to proceed as per the provisions of law.

The bench passed the orders while responding to a letter written by Giri Kumar from Nellore complaining that due to the advertisements, parents were pressurising children to get ranks. The bench passed orders in a PIL seeking enquiry into the advertisement by Sri Chaitanya Educational Institutions claiming that their candidates had secured certain ranks.



Assembly session ends amid uproar

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Tuesday, February 14, 2006

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NEWS

Complaining hubbies turn to Mahila thana for solace

Manish Sahu

Lucknow, February 13: Three years ago, I married Sunita (name changed). We had a son. A few months back, she went to her father's place and now she is not ready to return. She has taken away all the jewellery and the baby too. She wants me to leave my parents and live separately as she can not live in a two-room apartment with my parents. My parents are old and dependent on me. She is not ready to return home and now demands a major share in my salary. She often calls up to ask if I am ready to accept her proposal or not. When I refuse, she threatens to lodge a complaint of dowry harassment. I am under tremendous pressure. This is what Ashutosh Tiwari (name changed) stated in a complaint lodged at the Lucknow Mahila Thana.

The Mahila Thana gets at least three such cases every week and those filing the complaints are the harassed husbands of women who threaten to use the Dowry Protection Act to their convenience. However, with no provision under the law to convert such a complaint, made by a husband, into FIR and book the wife, all that the cops can do is try and mediate between the two parties. After that if the wife is not convinced, the police is left with no option but to dispose of the complaint.

A similar complaint, on the other hand, by a woman against her husband invites a non-bailable offence with imprisonment up to three years.

Mahila Thana Station Officer Vijay Laxmi Pandey says, "In most cases, it begins with an ego problem which finally leads to a threat of dowry complaint. We try our best to solve these cases by providing a non-police station like atmosphere to counsel the couples."

In several complaints, the husband states that the wife has threatened by saying that all laws are in their favour and they can do anything. Pandey says in most of the cases the husband blames his in-laws accusing the wife of acting at their behest. They complain that the in-laws want to interfere in their life. They want the husband to listen and follow their advice, she added.

"Cases of dowry harassment in love marriages are also on the rise. Growing differences between couples after few years of marriage is the reason in most cases and evidences provided against the husband are often found to be very flimsy during investigation," says Pandey.

"At times, the husband pre-empted a complaint from the wife who may have threatened to move the Mahila Thana. On such occasions, I get to know beforehand the husband's side of the story and if I realise the wife's complaints to be flimsy, I just make a case of minor ill-treatments against the husband," she says.

According to lawyer Rohit Kant, "The Section 498 A (3/4) Dowry Protection Act and 406 of Indian Penal Code are the two Sections which come handy in filing complaints against husbands. The vice-a-versa doesn't work."

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Men seek help. Is women's panel listening?

Aditya Ghosh

Monday, February 13, 2006 02:21 IST

MUMBAI: Counsellors at the Maharashtra Commission for Women, setup to help women harassed by men, are having a tough time these days. Besides women, they have men queuing up with complaints against their partners, wives, girlfriends and even mothers-in-law. And of the complaints filed by women, many are turning out to be false.

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"In quite a few cases, women are filing complaints which are not only motivated but quite misleading — just to harass men deliberately," said the MCW Member Secretary Sudha Bhave.

Counsellors are investigating the matter before making a judgment. "In one case, a woman complained against her husband saying that he was not keen to live with her. "After investigation we realised that the husband was unnecessarily being made a villain," a counsellor said.

In another case, a woman complained against her brother for harassment in a property dispute. "We found that the woman had never discussed the matter with her brother and did not even turn up for hearing. On the contrary the brother came on the scheduled date and we found it was a falsified complaint," said Bhave.

But what is really intriguing is the rapidly increasing male turnout. The number of cases filed by men has gone up and now comprises 5 per cent of the total complaints with the commission. "Quite a few men are coming to us seeking to redress various kinds of agonies they are facing from women, be it their wives, mothers-in-law or even bosses," said counsellor Vaishali Thakur.

In a recent case, she claimed, a lady boss harassed a man so much that he sought help from the commission which counselled both parties to sort out the crisis.

But is there a technical problem in helping the men in distress? Though set up with the aim of helping women, the commission believes it can help men as well.

"We have decided that the commission will deal with any dispute which 'involves' a woman," Bhave claimed. She added, "Our main job is to counsel both parties so that the dispute is resolved. As we were counselling men all this while, we will counsel women as well now. We call both the parties and try to understand who is troubling whom."

The cause for the shifts, of men filing complaints and women misusing the law, probably has to do with the fact that the "law favours women heavily".

"A strong law is required in most cases, but sometimes at the commission, we have seen how a woman has harassed the man by exploiting the law and issuing false statements to the police," said a counsellor.

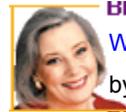
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by **MARJORIE ORR**

SUTRA

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Lily Tomlin



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Domestic abuse Bill: Men deserve protection too

Lina Mathias

[Sunday, February 17, 2002 09:42:20 pm TIMES NEWS NETWORK]

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• the protection of men's rights organisation says the proposed legislation on domestic violence "targets the male and will destroy the family." • in a recent judgment, the supreme court ruled that an act committed with the intention to cause suffering to the opposite party, including husband, would be grounds for seeking divorce. the proposed legislation against domestic abuse, cleared by the union cabinet but awaiting introduction in parliament, is called protection from domestic violence bill 2001. it is this proposed civil law that pomero finds "draconian." says pomero president arun sethi, "already, we are at the receiving end of section 498a of the ipc and now this proposed legislation insists on ignoring men who face cruelty from their wives." the controversy over 498a began in 1984 when women's organisations succeeded after a long battle in getting it introduced. it allows a man and his family to be jailed on the complaint of a woman subjected to cruelty (physical or mental) and harrasment for dowry. pomero claims that this section is "misused" by 80 per cent of complainants. lawyer-activist flavia agnes argues that barely 100 cases are filed under this section every year and the conviction rate is abysmally low. sethi says he doesn't want 498a to go but wants 498b to be introduced in order to protect the husbands, and 'husband' in 498a should be replaced by 'spouse'. it is, however, an organisation led by men which comes out most strongly in favour of women and the need not only for 498a but also the proposed bill. says secretary of men against violence and abuse (mava) harish sadani, "we found that this so-called misuse constitutes 0.06 per cent of the cases filed in the last 14 years. anyone who knows the social stigma that a woman who goes publicly against her in-laws and husband faces, realises that she has to be goaded beyond endurance to go to the police. the wider social situation is so obviously loaded against the woman that it is ridiculous to talk about misuse. we stand for gender equality and take up cases even of men who are harrassed by their wives" family court lawyer sheela ramnathan concurs: "false complaints can be lodged under any section, not just this one. besides, police check medical records, letters and testimonies of neighbours and relatives." argues a male lawyer, "it is power, authority and economic status which largely determine a person's response to situation, irrespective of the gender."

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Shradhha Sharma

[Thursday, January 05, 2006 02:16:58 am TIMES NEWS NETWORK]

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CHANDIGARH: At a time when the debate about the blatant misuse of the Dowry Prohibition Act is gaining ground, a recent Sessions court judgement acquitting a husband in a dowry death case has once again focused attention on the issue.

While acquitting Manimajra-based businessman Ravinder Goyal (36) of charges of dowry death, destroying evidence and subjecting his wife Shilpa to cruelty, the court of Additional District and Sessions Judge MM Sharma has observed that this was not a case of dowry death and that as per the evidence presented in court, Shilpa always had suicidal tendencies and that "she was taking the minor conflicts in her matrimonial house between her and her mother-in-law too seriously."

Shilpa reportedly killed herself in November 1999.

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Dowry Act-scared parents disown sons

Raman Mohan
Tribune News Service

Rohtak: The fear of dowry cases is driving parents to disown their sons before their marriage as a precautionary measure should marital bliss turn into nightmare.

A large number of public notices published in newspapers testify to the fears of the misuse of the Prohibition of Dowry Act. The local Tribune office books 10 or 15 such public notices every month. Inquiries from other nearby towns and local dailies show a similar trend. Advertising agencies estimate that about 3500 such public notices appear annually in various newspapers all over Haryana.

Dilawar Singh of Kilo village, near here, issued a public notice last week disowning his son, Rajinder Singh, who is due to marry a girl from a family in Putthu village on the Delhi-Haryana border next month. He said the notice was a mere formality. "Should trouble arise, all my family members, except the son, would be safe. Otherwise, the 'bahu' could name the entire family in her complaint", he added.

Another father with similar fears is Gaje Singh, a resident of Chikenwas village in Hisar.

He said he had gone a step further by getting the name of his son struck off the ration card. "This will strengthen my case. I will raise a temporary wall in the compound and allot a room to the newly weds till they have settled down to my satisfaction.

Otherwise, my son will remain a member of the household for all practical purposes", he said.

Inquiries from a cross section of the rural society show that the Dowry Act is generally viewed as a draconian law, which is being misused. Parents say the law itself is now the cause of trouble in family.

Newly wed daughters-in-law, they say, are taking shelter behind the law to have their way. Boys' parents are, therefore, keen to safeguard their interests.

Kailasho of Gugheri village, near here, who has two sons, said she was lucky that neither of her two daughters-in-law had given her any trouble. "My neighbour's newly wed daughter-in-law is, however, different. A few days ago, her mother-in-law objected to her going around the village without covering her head. The daughter-in-law told her to mind her own business.

When the mother-in-law raised the issue in the presence of family elders, the daughter-in-law threatened to lodge a complaint with the police on the pretext of harassment for dowry. That silenced the entire family. Nobody dares question the daughter-in-law now", she added.

Lawyers, however, say disowning a son before marriage does not by itself provide parents immunity from the law. Mr P.K. Sandhir, a Hisar-based lawyer, said, "Disowning without sufficient grounds does not carry any legal sanctity. The parents must be able to prove that the son had been wayward for long. Besides, circumstantial evidence in a dowry case must establish the non-involvement of parents if they are to prove their innocence". He was of the view that such notices serve no purpose.

Mr Bharat Bhushan Batra, a local advocate, agreed with Mr Sandhir, but added that such a notice could be relevant in certain cases. "A public notice is meant for everybody. If a notice has been published before marriage, the girl's family is expected to be aware of the fact that the boy stands disowned. This can strengthen the parents' plea of innocence should such an eventuality arise. However, circumstantial evidence will still hold the key," he said.

The number of dowry cases registered in Haryana reflect the fears in the mind of parents. According to Mr A. S. Ahlawat, SP, Hisar, an average of six cases are registered every month in the district.

Between October and December last year, 18 cases were registered. Mr Ahlawat agreed that the law was being misused. "There are instances where a case is registered 10 years after marriage. Obviously, dowry is not the root cause. But the police has to take cognizance and probe all allegations", he added.



Girl restored to parents in child marriage case

Kiran Deep

Panipat, January 31

The Child Marriage Restraint Act is being violated with impunity in Bihar. The fact came to light when an 11-year-old girl was found from a factory in Kacha camp here today. The girl, hailing from Bihar, had been forced to marry a youth by her parents due to abject poverty three years ago. She had been staying with a 24-year-old youth, Vinod, in a hut on the factory premises for over two years.

Some persons staying on the premises of an other factory became suspicious when they found that Vinod always locked her in a hut before leaving. They informed the matter to a local Crime Prevention Society. When a team of the NGO visited the hut and asked the girl about her whereabouts, she started weeping and expressed her desire to go to her parents' house. The matter was reported to the police.

The police took Vinod into custody. He said he had married the girl with her parents' consent. He was not aware of any law in this regard, he added. Giving reason for the marriage Vinod said his parents had died and so, he had to marry as early as possible.

However, when the girl was asked about her marriage she expressed ignorance. The police then contacted her father in Jalandhar. He works as a gatekeeper there.

He confirmed the marriage and expressed ignorance regarding any law. He added that child marriages in Bihar were a routine. Later, the police released Vinod after questioning him for more than an hour. The girl was sent to her parents' house.





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Gee! It's harassed men's turn to come crying

RASHEED KIDWAI

Bhopal, Sept. 11: The Madhya Pradesh women's commission is flooded with complaints from men.

Panel member Rajo Malviya said she is "sympathetic" to the complainants and willing to hear them out. But since the commission is only empowered to seek justice on gender lines, she is unable to fight for them.

Member-secretary Shail Srivastava read out several complaints of men protesting against harassment, denial of conjugal and property rights and "false" dowry cases. Some of the complainants were men from the weaker sections who had married upper-caste women, Srivastava said.

Govind, a Dalit who married a Jain girl, turned to the commission after the marriage soured. In his plea, the man said he was harassed by his wife's family and was "tired of doing household chores". He had found no support within his community, having married an outsider.

Ramesh, a journalist with a Hindi daily in Jabalpur, had fallen in love with a girl and eloped with her. But within days, the girl's family took her away. She was married off in the neighbouring town of Katni but failed to adjust with her husband and in-laws. Harassment and abuses followed. Unable to bear it, the girl returned to her parents. Ramesh has filed a complaint with the women's commission and is fighting her case. The hearing is on.

Meena aka Mehroonnisa is fighting for her child's right to his father's property, in accordance with Islamic law. Meena had married a Muslim man, who abandoned her and their child who has now grown up. But the commission is unable to help her because the child is male. The matter is likely to be referred to the Bhopal qazi.

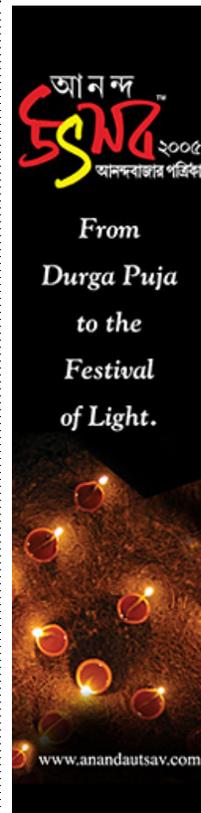
Scores of complaints have come from the state's tribal regions where women have traditionally had an upper hand. Among many tribes, there is no child marriage and no stigma on widowhood. Tribal women generally enjoy the right to decide on marriage and can divorce and remarry easily. Instead of dowry, there is bride price. Often, the women are economically independent.

According to the commission's records, several tribal men are now complaining about women's promiscuity and high bride price and are fighting for child custody.

Srivastava said: "As we are not empowered to solve their problems, we try to give sympathetic hearing, prepare their case file and send them to other forums like the human rights commission and the schedule caste-scheduled tribe commission."

The commission also tries to help the men by counselling women. "Discrimination in any form or shape is reprehensible," Srivastava said. "During our sessions and tours, we impress upon women to be just to all."

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Harassed by wife? Contact the men's cell

Rituparna Bhowmik in New Delhi | November 11, 2005 12:16 IST

Tiny signboards hang precariously on the central verge at many a traffic junction in New Delhi, inviting the attention of passers-by.

'Are you being harassed by your wife? Contact the men's cell,' the board, which also has a mobile number, says.

One phone call later, you learn that it is a one-man crusade against wives who harass or blackmail their husbands and the crusader is a lawyer-- willing to extend a helping hand.

"There are no laws to protect a man from being harassed and blackmailed by his wife. The anti-dowry laws are highly biased towards women. How does a man protect himself against constant nagging and suspicion?" questions R P Chugh, a Supreme Court advocate who started a men's advocacy group Crime Against Man Cell aka Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Husbands way back in the 80s to take head on cases of 'false charges of dowry harassment and torture'.

[Teach in wife's presence, dance teacher told](#)

Chugh claims, without naming anyone, the top notch of bureaucracy and judiciary of Delhi have, at some point or the other approached him with marital woes, complaining of harassment by their wives.

Chugh says he has long been campaigning for a legislation for 'Protection of Rights and Dignity of Married Men' is immediately required.

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Today in News

"Almost 87 per cent of women lodged in Tihar jail have been booked on anti-dowry complaints," Chugh claims quoting media reports.

Citing a recent case, Chugh says a woman from Haryana was quick to slap a dowry harassment suit on her husband when she was allegedly caught in a compromising situation with her husband's colleague.

Most crime against men go unnoticed as a man's ego does not allow him to admit that the wife regularly attacks him with an assortment of household items, Chugh says.

The lawyer has taken a war of sorts against the society to defend the 'dignity and rights of men in married lives', and holds dharnas every year on Human Rights Day.

"The Dowry (Prohibition) Act safeguards women's rights but unfortunately it can also victimise an innocent man whose wife wants to blackmail him or draw heavy compensation," he says.

Although crime against women and domestic violence is a reality, through his chequered career in law, Chugh says he has defended numerous men against false claims of torture, dowry harassment and destroying marital harmony.

A similar 'brother' organisation, which reportedly is thriving in Kolkata has also seen men coming out more often to register their protest against 'exploitation' by wives, he says.

"I have a number of cases with me and the complaints vary from silent resistance-- of refusing to speak to their spouse after a row-- or constant nagging or actual physical violence," he says.

Chugh says that many of the rape charges filed against men are 'fake' and are simply examples of 'a woman scorned'.

However, while feminists have criticised his radical views over the years, Chugh says it hasn't deterred him from pitching for men and will not either in future.

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Harassed husbands come together

TIMES NEWS NETWORK [WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 04, 2004 12:41:45 AM]

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HYDERABAD: Harassed husbands will meet behind closed doors at Padmaraonagar on Sunday to learn a few tricks and techniques of keeping their wives happy.

If they don't keep their spouses in good humour, they know they face the risk of annoyed wives slapping a dowry harassment case against them. Quite a few women, who are aware of how stringent the law is on dowry cases, are filing cases under section 498-A of the Indian Penal Code. From then on, begin the woes of husbands to save themselves from being put behind the bars.

At the 'Seminar on victimisation of husbands and their family members' being organised by Raksha, they will be given tips on how to humour their wives so that the situation does not get out of hand and they become victims of the misuse of law by their wives.

The men will be given tips on how to lay a strong foundation for a lasting relationship with their wives.

Individual counselling is also being done by Raksha. For instance, a police constable came seeking help as his wife was beating him. So vexed was he that he wanted to commit suicide. He was advised against it and instead asked to please his wife so that it would convey to her that he really cared for her.

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"At the seminar, we will give specific advise to each harassed husband on how to get over their problems and not complicate matters for themselves by overacting to a situation," Raksha president C V L Narasimha Rao said on Tuesday.

Rao said a lot of men are desperate for help. Take the case of a 23-year-old who found love on the Internet and got married soon. His wife's parents, however, did not approve of the marriage and convinced their daughter that she should leave him. If he did not, they threatened to file a

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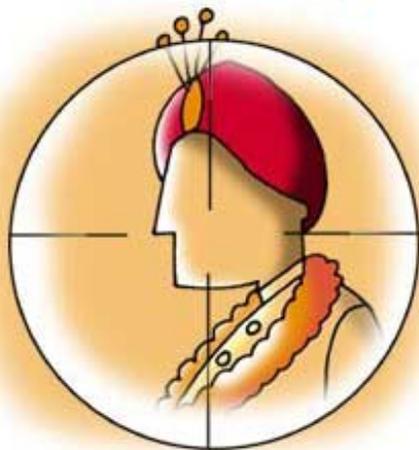
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The Rediff Special/M D Riti

December 23, 2003

Hope for victimised husbands



My cousin has been falsely implicated in a dowry case," says Vandana, who has just come off a night shift. "He met a girl at a *swayamvaram* in Chennai, where all participants had to give an undertaking not to take dowry. He took a snap decision to marry her.

"It was an interstate match: she is from Kerala and he is a Kannadiga. The relationship went bad barely a month after they got married, and she walked out on him.

"Then she filed a dowry case against him and he was locked up in police custody for nine days. No charge sheet has been filed till now. All it takes is for a woman to lodge an FIR [*first information report*] in a dowry case, and the accused man is arbitrarily arrested.

"Will someone help my cousin find justice?"

rediff.com was answering a call at a helpline launched in the second week of June for victimised husbands in Mahalakshimpuram, Bangalore. The helpline is yet to gain police recognition, but desperate people, many of whom turn out to be women talking on behalf of cousins or brothers, are calling in.

The helpline was launched by H V Arun Murthy, a freelance writer originally from Bangalore, who was living happily in Delhi until he was summoned by a court as an accused in a dowry case filed by his sister-in-law. Murthy says his brother married a girl from an orphanage. The marriage went bad very fast and has now ended in a dowry harassment complaint that put Murthy, his brother, and some other family members in jail for a short period.

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"Who could have paid dowry for that girl? The orphanage authorities?" demands an angry, white-haired, single Murthy.

An architect couple, Girish and Pankaja, who are his friends, offered to share their office space with him and Murthy promptly set up the helpline. On Tuesdays and Fridays, between 7 and 9pm, he, lawyer Sathya Venkatesh, and a counsellor sit in the tiny office to field calls. They receive between eight and 10 calls in that time slot.

The phone line was not dedicated; it was the office number of the architect couple, who also fielded calls and passed on the information to Murthy.

The forum, Sangabalya, now operates from the first floor of a commercial complex in Munneshwara Block, Mahalakshimpuram. It already has 60 members, about half of them women. They hold fortnightly meetings, which at least 75 per cent of the members attend. Murthy hopes to turn it into a non-governmental organisation soon.

Venkatesh, who had for a long time felt that someone should help victimised men, volunteered his legal services.

"The courts are always sympathetic to women," he told *rediff.com* "Even our laws do not recognise the possibility of wives and daughters-in-laws ill-treating husbands and old in-laws. I know of so many cases where section 498-A [of the *Indian Penal Code*] has just been used as an instrument of blackmail. But public sympathy is all for the perpetrators of the crime. More than 90 per cent of dowry cases filed are dismissed. But no punitive action is taken against the women who file the cases, even though it is sometimes proved that they lied under oath."

The association considers Delhi high court Justice J D Kapoor's observations in a dowry case that he dismissed two months ago a vindication of its stand. "There is a growing tendency to come out with inflated and exaggerated allegations, roping in each and every relation of the husband." Justice Kapoor noted while recommending a review of anti-dowry laws. "If one of them happens to be of higher status or vulnerable standing, he or she becomes easy prey for bargaining and blackmailing."

Sangabalya has clear objectives: its first goal is to help all men who have had false complaints filed against them under section 498-A, which makes "cruelty by husband or relatives of husband" a non-bailable, cognisable offence.

According to the forum, many men in bad marriages complain that this section, used in tandem with the Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961, has become a stick for wives, sometimes aided by unscrupulous policemen, to use to extract money. In many cases, they say, this results in the wrongful imprisonment of husbands and their relatives.

Women's groups readily admit that because many husbands and in-laws who harass women for dowry get off free, they make sure that the men endure as many days of police or judicial custody as possible right at the beginning, so that others hesitate to follow in their footsteps.

"If you spend even a day or two in custody, you lose all respect in society," says G Narendra Kumar, a technical officer in the Aeronautical Defence Establishment, who is now under suspension pending a dowry case filed by his wife. He was arrested from his home some months ago, as his wife looked on, following a complaint filed by her. "I have been suspended, and the police are not even telling my company whether I have been charge-sheeted," Kumar says.

The forum is committed to preventing the misuse of the law from destroying the institution of marriage. It wants to promote reconciliation at all times, no matter how late. It also works towards getting divorce and child custody cases disposed off quickly, within the statutory six months. It tries to provide counselling and emotional support to men caught up in these cases, as it feels that they generally do not have access to such help. It also means working towards ensuring punitive action against those who make false complaints and swear false affidavits.

So far, they have only settled two cases successfully, and persuaded the couples to go in for a healthy divorce.

As soon as someone calls the helpline, his complaint is heard and he is called for a face-to-face discussion during which a lawyer and a counsellor are present.

Another issue the forum is fighting is the arbitrary manner in which interim wife support is provided. "After living with my wife for barely a month a decade ago, I have been paying her interim maintenance for the past decade," says Narayanaswamy, who works for a national cooperative bank. He had been wrongly advised that he would suffer if he filed for divorce, but Venkatesh asked him, in the presence of *rediff.com*, to file for divorce immediately.

During its short existence, the forum has already noticed certain patterns leading to what Murthy and his fellow victims insist are false police cases. First, this is an entirely urban phenomenon; secondly, in such cases, the woman usually walks out within the first few months of marriage; thirdly, the disputes are often over money matters or living in joint families; fourthly, FIRs seem strangely similar, irrespective of the differing stories of the alleged victims. "Most of them accuse men who are non-smokers of burning women with cigarette butts," says Murthy. "They also say the women had bites all over the body."

Then there are cases like that of Abdul Kaleem, which make it obvious that the forum does not try to make moral judgements about whether the man was in the right. Kaleem's wife walked out of their eleven-year-old marriage four months ago with her two children, aged 8 and 10. "She simply disappeared with the children," says Kaleem, sitting in the helpline office, "and the police are now accusing me of having killed her!"

Kaleem accuses his wife of "wanting to be too independent, go out whenever she liked, and visit her mother every day", all fundamental rights that many women enjoy.

"We are supporting him because the police are harassing him and asking him to produce his wife before them," argues Murthy. "Besides, we feel he has the right of access to his children. How can his wife just disappear with them?"

Similarly, there is the case of the non-resident Indian son of the ageing Suryanarayan Jois. Jois claims his son never married the woman who professes to be his wife and is demanding a marriage settlement. "We lied to the marriage registrar that they were man and wife," Jois explains, "and showed him studio portraits wearing garlands and someone else's *mangalasutra*, just to obtain a marriage certificate for visa purposes."

Many days after this false declaration, when the couple was actually going through the wedding ceremony, the girl had an epileptic seizure. The Jois family immediately stopped the wedding, saying the bride had lied about her health.

When her family began agitating for justice, the Jois family got the 'marriage', which they claim never happened, annulled.

This was when the bride's family filed a dowry case against them. Jois appealed to the police to drop the case, but ended up paying various corrupt officers bribes totalling Rs 100,000. But he also recorded all these transactions and gave documentary evidence to the Lok Ayukta. No action has, however, been taken against the corrupt police officers yet.

"This case does have grey areas," admits Murthy, when asked why the helpline is taking up a case in which the family of the husband has actually lied to a registrar and committed an illegal act. "But then, our point is that this case is a civil matter, and is being converted into a criminal anti-dowry case. We agree that the family should be punished for trying to cheat the law by pretending the marriage took place before it actually did."

Karnataka Director General of Police T Madiyal prefers to give the organisation the benefit of the doubt. "We welcome any helpline or voluntary effort that tries to reach out to people in distress," he says.

Murthy and his friends are now trying to register themselves as a trust, which they hope will give them a better standing and solidity.

Many of the association's members are families of NRIs. There is, for example, the brother of a doctor working in the UK, whose marriage to a well-connected girl from Chennai ended in acrimony. "When my brother went to her house alone to return her jewellery and assets, she took them and then filed an attempt to murder case, saying he had beaten her and her relatives up," says Raghunathan. "Now my brother has to shuttle up and down from the UK for hearings. We have just settled out of court with her family for Rs 15 lakh."

Murthy says, "Judges are usually sent to family courts as punishment postings, and come ready to look at all cases as criminal cases. The police, too, convert many civil complaints that women file into dowry cases so that they become criminal cases, which are more lucrative. I often get cases of male victims... but always only when they are too poor to be able to pay the police anything to move their cases along."

As he puts it, "I decided it was time we had a collective voice and talked about the abuse of dowry laws by women. It's time someone pointed out that all women are not holy cows, and all men are not drunks and lechers. Let us start being fair to one another."

Sangyabalya can be contacted at 91-80-56969850. Their email address is victimsof498a@rediffmail.com.

Some of the names have been changed to protect identities of persons.

Illustration: Uttam Ghosh

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