

# 498 A gives men pre-wedding jitters

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**W**EDDING 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.

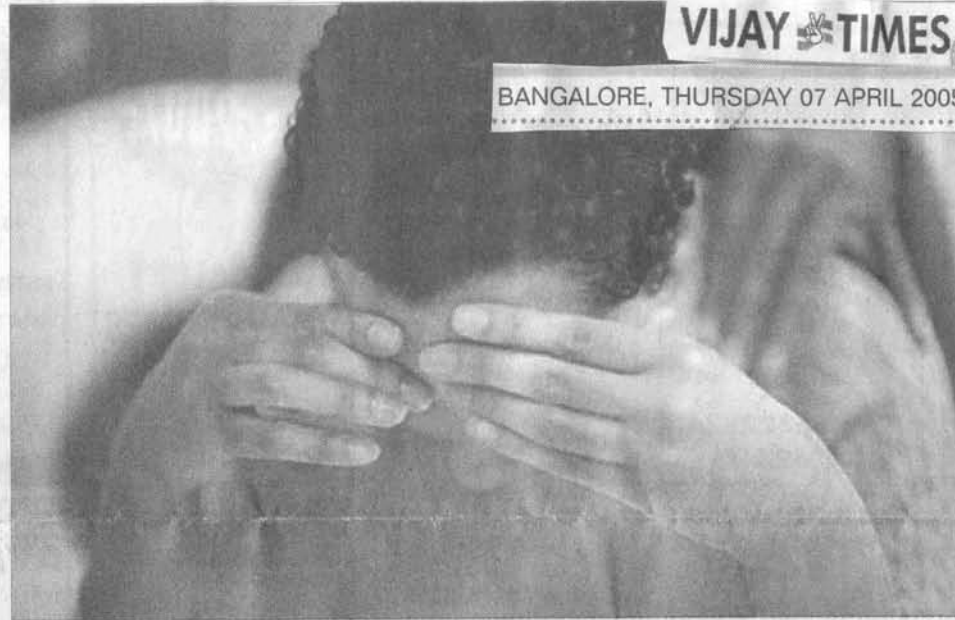
Romantic dreams have been replaced by nail-biting anxiety about being jailed in false case of dowry harassment, should the marriage turn sour.

"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.*