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Harassment laws used by wives to turn tables on NRI men

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NEW DELHI: If NRI marriages are a rage, here's a rider. We've heard about men inflicting excesses on their brides in foreign lands but the reverse may also be true with wives doing the vanishing act and making their men suffer under stringent Indian laws against torturing women, especially section 498-A of IPC.

Dozens of such men, some even from IITs, publicly poured out their blues at a teleconference on Thursday, prompted by a voluntary organisation that works to highlight male plight at the hands of their wives. The marriage of Naveen, an engineer in Florida, hit rock bottom in mere five months. "I just asked her why she was in touch with her boyfriend. She tried to harm herself with a knife. We returned to India and I suggested she stay with her parents for some time. As soon as I was back in the US, she filed a 498-A case against my family and me. My parents were jailed for three days," said Naveen, a case against whom is on in India and an Interpol Red Corner Notice pending abroad. Anupama Singh, the secretary of Rakshak that has raked up such cases, said the voluntary organisation has received over 700 such complaints, half of them from the US alone.

"We don't say all these are genuine cases, but many are. The government is not really concerned. It's futile to talk about the plight of men and their families by the women they marry. "In contrast, the cases of women being tortured by their husbands abroad have been overplayed with the government claiming that 30,000 brides — 15,000 from Punjab's Doab region alone — had been abandoned abroad," she said.

But in 2005, the government said in Parliament that only 100 such complaints had been received. The ministry of overseas Indian affairs (MOIA) recently revised the figure to 152. The trend, therefore, is more of vanishing brides and abandoned grooms abroad, Singh added.

On July 25, the ministry was told about the new concern at a presentation and MOIA secretary Nirmal Singh formed a committee to examine the issue. Rakshak members also met India's ambassador to US Ronen Sen and minister for overseas Indian affairs Vayalar Ravi, awaiting action from their side. Raj K, an IIT-Chennai alumni working as an investment banker in New York, married a British citizen of Indian origin and said his wife was abusive from beginning. "We separated one year later due to problems. Now she is demanding a huge sum as divorce settlement and her father has threatened to lodge a 498-A case against my parents and me," he said. Satya said strict penalties should be imposed for lodging false cases and affidavits against possible perjury must be taken from both sides in India.

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