

# Embattled NRI Grooms Call for Change to Indian Law

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SAN LEANDRO, Calif. — The members of 498a.org, a group of nonresident Indian men who say they have been victimized by India's anti-dowry laws, are calling for an overhaul of the laws they say have destroyed their families.

***“The very ministry that is expected to act as a liaison between NRIs and the motherland is steadfastly pursuing an anti-NRI agenda.”***

— **statement from 498a.org**

They also maintain that the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs, a ministry created to serve NRIs, has turned a blind eye to their concerns. The group held a press conference in New Delhi Jan. 3 in anticipation of the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas, which was held in New Delhi Jan. 7-9.

“The highly publicized Pravasi Bharatiya Divas has become a platform for bashing NRI grooms,”

said a statement issued by the group.

The group is named for the section of the Indian penal code which makes it a crime for a husband (or his relatives) to demand dowry or inflict cruelty or harassment on his wife.

But many Indian men here maintain that it's they who have been victimized by their wives

and their families in India, who falsely claim that the men have demanded dowry.

The men say they are plunged into expensive legal quagmires in the United States and India, and they also face child custody disputes which overwhelmingly favor the mothers.

According to 498a.org, which is based in the San Francisco Bay Area but has members around



*Ashish Mukhi of the nonprofit organization Save Indian Family, which protests India's dowry laws, meets the press in New Delhi in 2007. NRI bridegrooms here in the United States continue to lobby for changes in India's laws, which they say encourage greedy brides and their families to extort money from their husbands. (AFP/Getty Images)*

the world, “Every year, hundreds of NRI men are duped into sham marriages by unscrupulous brides, wherein unsuspecting grooms are ruthlessly exploited for immigration purposes. Worse, many of them take advantage of gender-biased laws by filing false cases of domestic violence and dowry abuse to harass and extort money from their husbands. Particularly

tragic are situations where children are abducted to India and the NRI is denied access to his children despite court orders.”

“The government's apathy to the plight of these innocent Indian men and their families is best exemplified by the ministry specifically created for NRIs, the MOIS. The very ministry that is expected to act as a liaison between NRIs

and the motherland is steadfastly pursuing an anti-NRI agenda,” said the statement.

Members of 498a.org have issued the following suggestions:

- Make gender-neutral laws that applicable to both husbands and wives, and remove “gender bias” from existing laws;
- Impose stringent penalties on those who fraudulently misuse existing anti-dowry laws;

Strengthen implementation of international laws related to child abduction and children's rights.

- “India should become signatory to the Hague Convention on Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction so that child abductors of either gender are brought to book,” said a spokesman.

• Indian courts should honor the jurisdiction of foreign courts if the party's home is abroad.

The minister for Overseas Indian Affairs, Vayalar Ravi, did not respond to an **India-West** reporter's request for a comment by press time.