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Now, an all male fightclub

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Battered husbands are gearing up for an e-battle, their grouse being the "gender-biased" section 498A of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) — the dowry law.

Web surfers should not be surprised if they stumble on to blogs like Indiataalking, genderindian, chaoticlaw, menempowerment, marriageinmind, harassedhusband, don'tkillus, politicalgender, batteredmale and indianbakrablospots. The screaming headline, 'We are dowry law victims' posted on victims-of-law.blogspot.com is full of

heart-rending tales of hundreds of battered husbands facing unending legal battles along with their aged parents.

According to Mumbai-based PR Gokul, there are 70 active blogs and five major websites dealing with men who have got the wrong end of the stick from their wives. Dubai-based Rudolph D'Souza puts the figure of blogs at 200.

Already, demands for setting up men empowerment organisations (currently, there is not a single one, whereas there are 100 women's organisations in the country) are getting louder as the closely-knit group of battered men move on from e-mail exchanges to sharing monthly meetings and trips to Shirdi for spiritual solace.

Mumbai's Jinesh Javeri says, "I am positive about life even after a bitter experience. Blogging is like my diary to the world. It has proven to be a good anti-depressant for me."

Javeri says that of a total of 58,319 dowry cases registered in the country in 2004, as many as 10,491 (18 per cent) could not even be charge-sheeted as the grounds were frivolous. Of the 47,828 (82 per cent) charge-sheeted, only 5,739 (9.8 per cent) were convicted. In other words, 24,127 (41 per cent) were acquitted as they were innocent, needlessly harassed due to faulty investigation, false complaints and bad prosecution. The Centre for Social Research has indicated that 98 per cent of cases filed under IPC section 498A are false.

Rudolph D'Souza, who has been honoured by the men's largest online international organisation honornetwork.com, for his dedicated service to fellow victims, says that he has been exchanging at least 200 mails every day for the past one year. He also claims that he has been spending eight hours daily for the last seven years to listen and guide others.

His hunt for justice started after his arrest (he was falsely implicated) in 2000. In his endeavour to know more about 498A, he searched sites and later hosted all information that he had collected on free sites.

Now he has a yahoo group called 'misusedowry act'. "I spent almost Rs 7 lakhs, lost two jobs, but will not give up," he says. "I have had to come back to India nine times to attend court hearings."

PR Gokul launched his first site in July 2003, a couple of months after he

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was falsely accused in a dowry and harassment case. Gokul, who is now director of Protect Indian Family, an NGO that was registered in March last year, says, "Usually when a man tries to talk about his harassment, no one listens; many laugh at him. Few men expressed themselves when the movement started in 2000."

Active members of the misusedowryact yahoo group formed NGOs like Sangabhalya and Asha Kiran in Bangalore in 2003, which together formed the Save India Family group in 2005. Around the same time, victims from the US started another website, 498Aorganisation.

The online male lobbyists now feel that they are being heard much better in the media, by the judiciary and in circles of authority and society.

Their future plans include media/public campaigns, judicial campaigns and political campaigns to bring about changes in the gender-biased laws so that it 'protects' the 'victims' and curtails misuse of it.

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