

.Saturday, January 05, 2008

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Updated: 03:53 am .

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Harassed NRI men spurned by Govt

Rajeev Ranjan Roy | New Delhi

No redemption is in sight for NRI husbands victimised and deserted by their wives in the garb of anti-dowry laws. Overseas Affairs Minister Vayalar Ravi on Friday refused to look into their plea for Central intervention to prevent the misuse of the legal provision.



"NRI women face even graver problems and Section 498A of IPC is to protect them from dowry and other harassments," Ravi said in reply to a query from *The Pioneer* at the curtain raiser media conference on the forthcoming Pravasi Bharatiya Divas 2008.

"Very few cases of abuse of Section 498A of IPC have been reported, while the number of dowry harassment cases runs into thousands. My advice to them is: Sort out differences and live a happy life. Otherwise, only courts can decide on such matters," Ravi said.

The Minister's advice to the harassed husbands was followed by a fervent appeal to NRIs to generously invest in India to launch a movement against poverty in the countryside and upgrade other infrastructure facilities in areas like health and education.

"It is sad that the Centre is not willing to take up our case, but wants our investments. We expect the Government of India to make gender-neutral laws that are applicable to both husband and wife and remove the gender bias from the existing laws," reacted S Kumar of 498a.org, an organisation fighting against the law abuse.

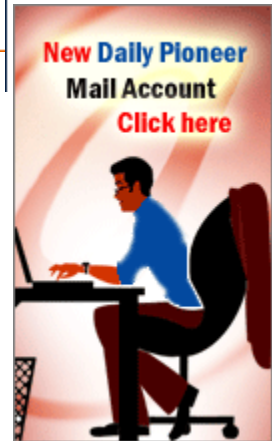
"The stringent penalties should be imposed so that they act as a deterrent. We are not satisfied with the Centre's response vis-à-vis our plight. The Government must look into the merit of our grievances too," Kumar said on phone from California, USA.

The Section 498A of IPC, entailing punishment up to three years, aims at protecting women against harassment or cruelty at the hands of husbands or their relatives. "The law is being brazenly abused to dupe and cheat NRI husbands," Anupama Singh of Rakshak Foundation said.

"In last two years, many NRIs and NGOs such as Rakshak Foundation have written several letters to the Ministry, met Vayalar Ravi, Secretary Nirmal Singh, MPs, deposed in front of several high level Government committees. Still there is no help from any quarters," Singh said.

"For five years, I have been fighting court cases in India in an attempt to get my children back and defend myself against a false dowry harassment case," said Anand, a New York-based NRI. He explained how his wife married him only to get into the US.

Sajjan Kumar, an NRI in Russia, recounted how he and his family were implicated in a false dowry death case when his wife accidentally fell to her death in Moscow.

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"Russian police vigorously investigated the case and found that my wife's death was accidental," he said.

"However, when I reached India with wife's body, my whole family was arrested at the airport and put in jail for dowry harassment and dowry death. I spent 40 days in jail for dowry allegation of mere Rs 25,000," he added.

"There are many such shocking tales. We just hope that good sense prevails upon the Government and looks into their woes. Many families are being destroyed, but the Centre continues to be apathetic towards them," Singh said.

No respite in sight

- Minister for Overseas Affairs Vayalar Ravi refuses to look into harassed NRI husbands' plea for amending anti-dowry laws
- They want a gender-neutral law so that it is not misused
- "NRI women face even graver problems and Section 498A of IPC is to protect them from harassment," says Ravi
- Very few cases of abuse of Section 498A have been reported

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