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Women trapped in divorce as parents fall for alimon(e)y

AJANTA CHAKRABORTY

TIMES NEWS NETWORK [THURSDAY, JULY 15, 2004 12:14:43 AM]

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July 10, 2003: Susmita Bose weds software engineer Subimal Sen.

January 2, 2004: Susmita and her parents are at the marriage counsellors' seeking a divorce.

February 3, 2004: Subimal, who was away in the US, flies down to sort things out. But the Boses are adamant. Sen is asked to make a choice: A complaint under Section 498 A of IPC (cruelty towards bride), or a hefty one-time alimony. Sen opts for the latter option.

March 21, 2004: Divorce was agreed upon, and Susmita got richer by Rs 10 lakhs that she was granted as alimony.

A pretty long tale has been cut short here to take a look at one of the latest social trend. "When it comes to choosing between their daughters' happiness and money, some parents, I'm afraid, are increasingly lured by monetary gains. They force their daughters to seek a divorce instead of sorting out trivial marital issues," said Justice Dilip Basu, chairman, Legal Aid Service (LAS), West Bengal. "We've seen at least 10 such cases over the last one year. The first word uttered by the parents is divorce," added Justice Basu.

Sociologist Ruby Sain echoed, "I've seen this happening to a colleague. She threatened to file a case under Section 498A. The groom's family got scared and settled for divorce after paying up Rs 4 lakhs as alimony."

Additional commissioner of police (I), Partha Bhattacharjee, said, "During my stint with the CID, I came across several cases where Section 498A was misused. The law is absolutely needed because a large number of women genuinely need it. But the flip side of things also must be taken into account."

According to Justice Basu, LAS has managed to stop some of these divorces by talking to the daughters. "But more and more parents are coming to us as we also help people get divorce by mutual consent. This takes only six months, whereas a normal annulment case may take five years," said Justice Basu.

Sanlap, an NGO, is currently doing a research on the misuse of Section 498A. Citing another such case in Sonarpur, Rama Sarkar, a member of Gana Unnayan Parshad, said, "The groom was ill-tempered. The couple

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often had fights. Three months after the marriage, the girl's family came here to file a divorce suit without giving the marriage a second chance. I think this is a dangerous trend."

Lawyer Bishnu Charan Ghosh, who's handled about 100 such cases, agreed. "Parents are suddenly all too eager to get their daughters divorced. Hefty alimony may be a good reason," said Ghosh.

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