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## NRIs raise voice against anti-dowry law misuse

Rajeev Ranjan Roy | New Delhi

The growing 'abuse' of Section 498A of the Indian Penal Code seems to have raised alarm bells among abandoned non-resident Indian husbands and their relatives. They have demanded that the Centre adopt a judicious approach to check the abuse of law and expose the organised scandal.

Section 498A of the IPC which entails punishment of upto three years, aims at protecting women against harassment or cruelty at the hands of spouses or their relatives.

"The law is being blatantly abused by unscrupulous elements. The non-resident Indian (NRI) husbands are being duped, cheated, humiliated, harassed and ruthlessly exploited for immigration purposes by the so-called vanishing wives. In many cases, the husbands are blackmailed, subjected to financial extortion and are even put behind bars on false charges," Anupama Singh of Rakshak Foundation said on Thursday during a media interaction.

Rakshak is currently looking into the complaints of around 700 abandoned NRI husbands and there are another 3,000 cases involving resident Indians. The Foundation on Thursday also organised a tele-conference with family members of abandoned husbands from the US, the UK, Switzerland and United Arab Emirates. They narrated harrowing tales of torture and torment heaped on them.

The family members of abandoned husbands alleged that instead of looking into the veracity of the allegations of harassment, the Centre was considering further gender biased legislation based on faulty assumptions and unsubstantiated statistics. "The Centre claims that there are 30,000 abandoned brides, but the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs has only 150 complaints," the sister of an abandoned husband said.

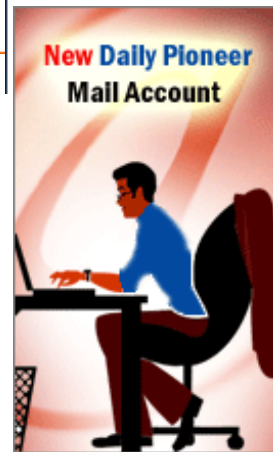
An alumna of the Capital's Maulana Azad Medical College where she currently teaches as assistant lecturer in the Department of Medicine, Singh said her colleagues at Rakshak Foundation and 498a.org, another organisation, would intensify their concerted efforts to expose the racket behind the vanishing NRI brides.

"Many of abandoned husbands end up losing their jobs, social status, visas and in some cases even their lives, apart from the trauma that their families suffer. There is hardly any attempt on the part of the Centre to look into the different aspects of charges of harassment by women against husbands," she said.

The participants felt that the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs, expected to act as a liaison between NRIs and the motherland, is steadfastly pursuing an anti-NRI agenda by acting under undue pressure and influence from different quarters.

"The Ministry's persistent refusal to even consider the issue of abandoned and cheated NRI husbands comes as a shock and surprise to the NRIs. The Government must respond to the situation judiciously. The law is being abused like anything," Satya, an abandoned husband said from California.

Rakshak is now contemplating a series of meeting and representations to the different authorities in Government. Simultaneously, she and her colleagues wish to create awareness about the situation by bringing abandoned husbands and their families together.



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"The Centre does not listen to the voice of the harried husbands' conscience, but prefers going by baseless and false allegations. Let's not alienate the NRIs from the nation," she said.

"Things are assuming a critical proportion. It has become a scam in which these NRI women first marry the rich and later abandon them by taking recourse to anti-dowry and other gender biased laws. We urge the Government to adopt a holistic approach to the problem. The vanishing NRI wives are an industry in which the men are the losers. The Government must wake up before it is too late," Singh warned.

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