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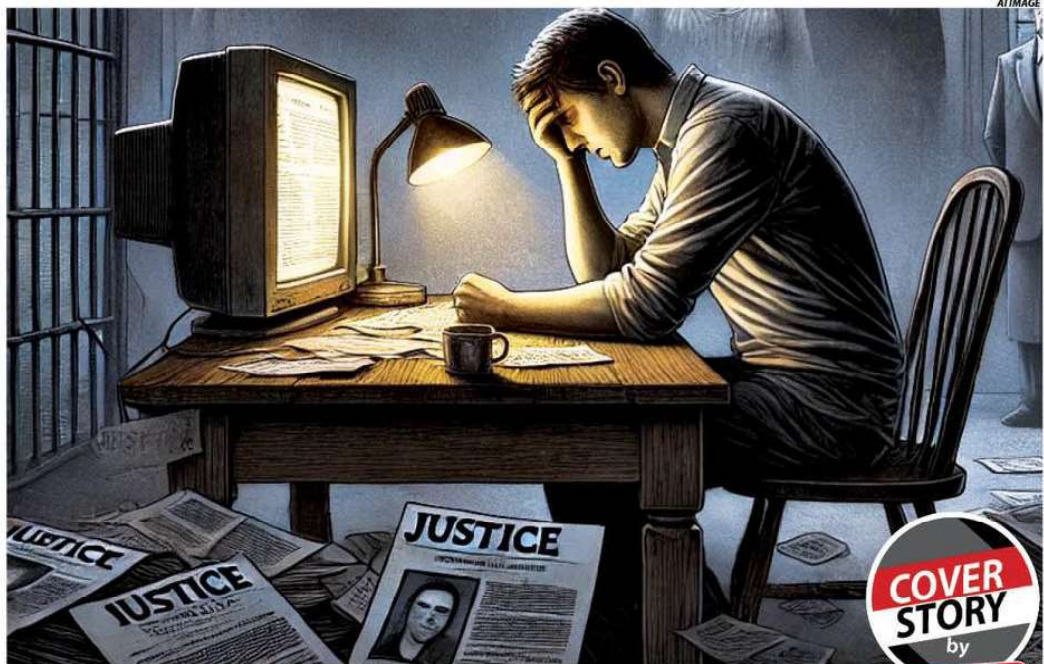
CHASING EQUAL FOOTING



Why are women directors still a rarity in Kannada cinema, despite some notable successes from female filmmakers? PAGE 11

PICK YOUR BRAIN!

A fan of puzzles and crosswords? Hop on the train and treat yourself to some brainstorming. PAGE 15



COVER STORY
by
BINDU GOPAL RAO

MARITAL MAYHEM

The suicide of city techie uncovers uncomfortable truths about the abuse of marital laws, raising questions about gender bias in legal systems

FULL STORY | PAGE 7

Bindu Gopal Rao

In the early hours of December 9, Atul Subhash, a city techie, ended his life, leaving behind a 24-page death note, each page etched with the words - "Justice is due". Alongside it was an 80-minute video recording in which Atul explained the anguish that drove him to take the ultimate step.

In the video, the 34-year-old recounted the relentless and unmanageable financial demands from his wife and in-laws—a pressure he said had become unbearable. Beneath the surface of his words lay a pointed critique of the judicial system, which he believed tilted heavily in favour of women, particularly in marital disputes.

The incident has once again reignited the contentious debate surrounding the misuse of cruelty laws, with questions arising about the delicate balance between protection and exploitation within the legal framework.

The Case



The tragic suicide has shone the spotlight on an issue that has often been discussed only in small circles - the marital rights of men in India. For years, these rights have been overshadowed by those of women, influenced by the country's patriarchal past.

"India's patriarchal history has created a legal system that often favours women. Laws like Section 498A of the IPC and the Domestic Violence Act were introduced with good intentions but are sometimes misused against husbands," says Anjali Prabhakaran, Assistant Professor at IFIM School of Law.

The Supreme Court has repeatedly highlighted the misuse of these laws, pointing to the lack of protections for men. Delays in legal processes, exaggerated allegations, high litigation costs, and the emotional strain of fighting false claims add to the challenges faced by men in such cases.

The Laws

Marital laws like Section 498A of the Indian Penal Code, introduced in 1983, were designed to protect married women from abusive partners or in-laws. Similarly, the Dowry Prohibition Act, enacted in 1961, seeks to curb the practice of dowry and prevent associated harassment.



Virat Vilas Pawar

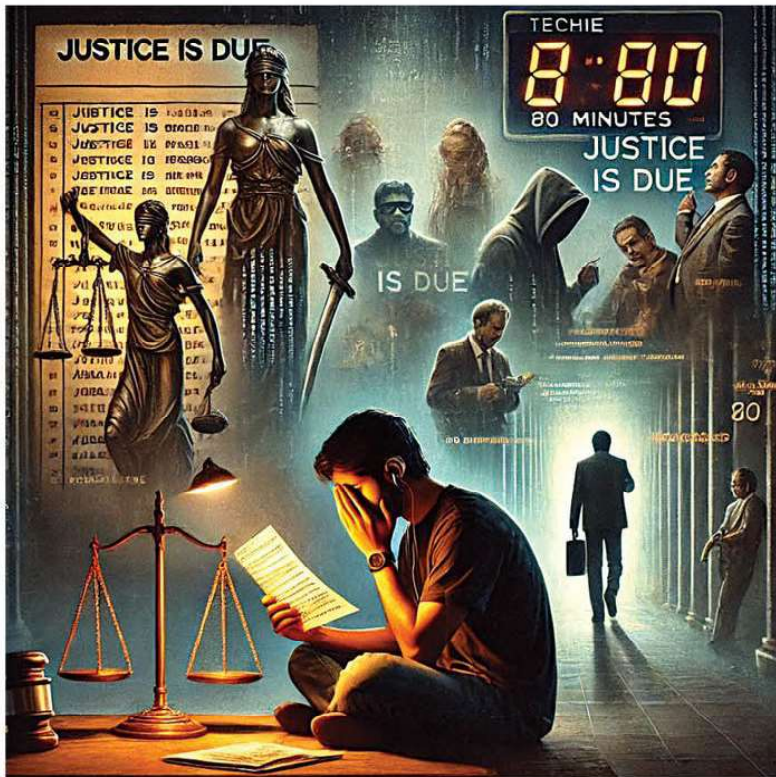
Since their inception, these laws have provided crucial relief to countless women. However, over time, it has become evident that these protective laws are occasionally misused by vindictive individuals. "Many perceive these laws as biased,



Atul Subhash

The death of 34-year-old Atul uncovers systemic flaws in marital laws, urging society to reflect on their application and potential misuse

MARITAL MAYHEM



often resulting in unintended consequences for the other parties involved," explains Virat Vilas Pawar, Advocate at the Bombay High Court.

He adds that often the legal system is quick to act in such cases. For example, a 498A case of domestic violence often leads to an immediate arrest. "Similarly, dowry-related crimes under Section 3 of the Dowry Prohibition Act frequently place the burden of proof on the husband and his family to prove their innocence," he adds.

Beyond the legal complexities, such cases also carry a heavy social stigma, with frequent court appearances and societal judgment leading to long-lasting repercussions.

The Misuse

In today's world, where quick-fix solutions are often sought, laws meant to protect abused women are increasingly being misused by some women to harass their spouses and pressure them into agreeing to unreasonable divorce terms.



Shaili Muzoomdar

"Moreover, access to children and finances are also being weaponised by both women and men as pressure tactics to frustrate the other spouse and force them into submission. It is crucial to remember that matrimonial laws should serve to alleviate suffering, not be misused to inflict harm on another," explains Shaili Muzoomdar, an advocate specialising in Matrimonial Laws.

While the Internet provides easy access to legal information, it's essential that legal literacy extends beyond knowledge of the law itself. It must also foster emotional maturity, helping individuals understand that laws are meant to protect, not to be used as tools for threats or emotional and financial extortion. "Along with information about the laws, there should be greater awareness of the consequences of their misuse," adds Muzoomdar.

Divorce dilemma

In a society where divorce is still often seen as taboo, choosing the right partner becomes crucial for both men and women. Understanding each other's values, personalities, and compatibility from the outset is essential to ensure mutual safety—both emotional and legal. This approach can help prevent domestic violence for women and reduce the risk of false allegations for men.

"That said, humans are inherently unpredictable, and relationships evolve over time. It's

The Supreme Court has repeatedly highlighted the misuse of these laws, pointing to the lack of protections for men. The need of the hour is balance, with an emphasis on the constitutional provision of equality of laws

vital for partners to adapt to these changes. While I'm not advocating for excessive compromise, a certain degree of adjustment is often necessary for a relationship to thrive, just as we adapt in other areas of life. However, this adjustment should have its limits and must never come at the cost of one's dignity or well-being," explains Pawar.

He continues, "Divorce, in my view, should be seen as a way to exit an unhealthy marriage—not as a tool for revenge. Both parties must approach it with fairness and respect for the legal system to ensure justice is served properly." The need of the hour is balance, with an emphasis on the constitutional provision of equality of laws. When and how that balance will be achieved remains to be seen, he adds.

Breaking the silence

Mental health is another critical area that demands attention. If feelings of anxiety, stress, or

depression arise, men are encouraged to seek professional guidance. Therapy, far from being a sign of weakness, reflects self-awareness and a proactive approach to well-being.

Dr. Naazneen Ladak, Psychiatrist and Relationship Expert, advises, "Men should prioritise open and transparent communication in their relationships. Expressing thoughts and emotions clearly, while actively listening to their partner, fosters trust and mutual understanding. Suppressing emotions or avoiding difficult conversations often leads to misunderstandings and emotional distance. Equally important is establishing and respecting healthy boundaries, ensuring that both individuals feel valued and secure within the relationship."

Men must stay vigilant for warning signs, such as manipulative, controlling, or overly possessive behaviour. Addressing these issues early can prevent long-term harm. If a relationship becomes toxic or irreparable, seeking professional mediation or, if necessary, deciding to end it, is a vital step toward personal well-being. "Managing expectations is also crucial; relationships cannot be the sole source of emotional fulfilment. Men should focus on personal growth, pursue individual interests, and maintain friendships outside the relationship to ensure a balanced and healthy life," adds Ladak.



Dr. Naazneen Ladak