



The Indian Journal for Research in Law and Management

Open Access Law Journal – Copyright © 2025

Editor-in-Chief – Dr. Muktai Deb Chavan; Publisher – Alden Vas; ISSN: 2583-9896

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The Dark Side of Empowerment: Uncovering the Unintended Consequences of Women's Rights

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Introduction

The women empowerment in India is crucial as still the orthodox mentality is isolating the women to enjoy their rights and freedom. Many laws are formulated to ensure women safety and to safeguard the women rights such as the laws related to crime against women i.e., Bhartiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023 The Dowry Prohibition Act, Domestic Violence Act, etc. The laws for women are crucial but sometimes they lead to unpredictable challenges and misapplications for the other sections of society, which harms them and such misapplications makes the other sections such as men and their parents etc, to prove their innocence and escape the legal system.

Legal empowerment vs legal misuse

There are several legislations which were enacted by the Indian parliament to safeguard the women from exploitation, harassment, abuse and inequality but the loopholes in these laws and specific gender centric approach, these laws are prone to misapplications and misuses.

a) **Section 498 IPC 1860:** Now covered in Section 85 of BNS, which states cruelty against women such as dowry, harassment etc in context of marriage by the husband, in laws and other relatives involved. This section aims to provide justice on the ground of cruelty and punishes husband, in - laws and other relatives imposes up to 3 years of imprisonment and fine.

According to NCRB (National Crime Records Bureau) report of 2021 over 1.25 lakh cases were filed on 498A IPC in which the convictions made were less than 15% and 80% of the accused were acquitted, which highlighted the false complaints and lack of evidences, 1 in every 10 cases reported in 498A are declared false by the concerned courts.

The Law Commission and Parliamentary committee on Home Affairs noted that “ The section 498A is being used as a tool for revenge rather than protection specifically in urban regions”

- b) Section 375 IPC 1860:** Now covered in section 63 of BNS, which states if a man commits rape or done any of the following acts with women against her will, consent, or consent through fraud, coercion etc, intoxication. Punishment Minimum 10 years imprisonment Maximum life imprisonment and fine.

According to NCRB (National Crime Records Bureau) report of 2021 over 31,000 cases were registered under section 375 IPC in which conviction rate was around 27%. In 2020 in Delhi nearly 1429 cases were filed out of which 500 were declared false and mala fide after investigation.

- c) Section 304B IPC, 1860:** Now covered in section 80 BNS which states dowry death where a woman dies under unnatural circumstances within 7 years of marriage and was subjected to harassment and cruelty due to dowry demands. Punishment Minimum 7 years imprisonment Maximum life imprisonment.

According to NCRB (National Crime Records Bureau) report of 2021 cases registered were 6589, conviction rate 35% and acquittal rate are 60% due to unsubstantial and lack of evidence. According to NCRB data, in 2012 almost 2 lakh people were arrested on unproven dowry allegations with only 15% of the accused were convicted and rest cases were still pending from years due to lack of evidences.

Recent incidents highlighted the misuse of women centric laws

- a) The Atul Subhash Case (2024 – Bengaluru):** A 34-yr-antique techie, Atul Subhash, died with the aid of suicide, leaving at the back of a detailed word and video accusing his wife of submitting more than one fake cases below dowry and domestic violence laws. He alleged extortion for ₹three crore and bribery need for infant visitation. His death induced countrywide outrage and a PIL within the ideally suited courtroom looking for reforms in matrimonial laws.

Effect: Sparked debate on criminal weaponization, want for gender-impartial reforms, and judicial caution in own family cases.

b) Zomato transport Boy false Case (Bengaluru, 2021–2022): A shipping government was accused by a client of bodily attack. however, CCTV footage and investigation proved his innocence, and the lady was later charged with submitting a false criticism.

Effect: Raised worries about how immediately public outrage and media trials can smash lives before statistics emerge.

c) Rohtak Sisters Viral Video Case (Haryana, 2014 – Verdict 2022): sisters went viral after beating guys on a bus, accusing them of harassment. Investigations later discovered the men have been falsely implicated, and the accused were acquitted after eight years.

Effect: showed how mob justice and media glorification can damage innocent lives primarily based on unverified claims.

Landmark judgements

a) Arnesh Kumar v State of Bihar (2014) 8 SCC 273: The Supreme Court held that misuse of phase 498A of Indian Penal Code and stated in instances of dowry-associated harassment. The case laid down strict tips to decrease arbitrary arrests and guard person liberty and laid down important guidelines such as must preliminary enquiry by police.

b) Dara Lakshmi Narayana v. State of Telangana, 2024 SCC 3682: The Supreme Court quashed the FIR which was filed in 2022 against husband and in-laws on the ground of 498A and Dowry Prohibition Act and stated the mere stating the names of the family members without specific allegation indicates vague FIR and it is the abuse of legal process.

c) Rajesh Chaddha vs State of Uttar Pradesh 2025 INSC 671: The Supreme Court in this case acquitted the husband in the 26 years old dowry case which was found vague and unsubstantial allegations calling such cases as “cruel misuse”.

Conclusion

The women protections laws are crucial to protect and safeguards the rights of the women ensuring their safety from harassment and inequality but the loopholes in such women centric laws must be curbed making the laws gender neutral. The approach must be balanced and inclusive empowerment rather than biased and arbitrary, such balancing will curb the abuse, misuse and misapplication of such laws for mala fide intentions.