



# National

## Tying the knot, then cutting the ties

### A jilted spouse is among those pushing for a crackdown on marriages of convenience

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OTTAWA — In the fall of 2005, the love story of Toronto's Ramesh Maharaj was splashed on the front page of this newspaper.

"The bureaucracy is destroying my family," he fumed at the time, expressing his outrage at Canada's immigration system for refusing to allow his new wife, Sudha Arora, to immigrate to Toronto.

The target of his fury was a Canadian official in New Delhi, who had concluded the marriage was motivated primarily by immigration purposes rather than love: a marriage of convenience.

Mr. Maharaj appealed the decision, spending \$30,000 to win his bid to bring his bride to Canada.

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Now, at 57, he is again rallying against the federal government as vice-president of a new group called Canadians Against Immigration Fraud. The bureaucrat, it turns out, had been right.

Mr. Maharaj's wife arrived with her mother and daughter in June of 2006. After a few tense months in which the three women kept to themselves in a separate bedroom, they were gone by October.

Mr. Maharaj said he supports new federal efforts to root out the latest fraudulent-marriage trends by using Canadian personnel overseas, such as anti-fraud squads that keep tabs on phony wedding ceremonies.

But he said Ottawa does next to nothing when faced with clear-cut cases of fraudsters who make it to Canada. He wants Canada to adopt U.S. and Australian laws that require immigrant spouses to live with their husbands or wives for two years before receiving full permanent residency.

"Those models work very well," Mr. Maharaj said, expressing his view that members of Parliament are reluctant to address the issue for fear of upsetting ethnic groups. "Politicians don't want to seem to be doing anything that may affect minority communities negatively. They feel it goes down bad."

Lainie Towell, an Ottawa-based African dancer, said she, too, has had a hard time getting any federal agency to pay attention to her tips on marriage fraud. Her husband left her last year, just four weeks after she sponsored his immigration from Guinea. Only after she recently went public with the local Ottawa news media did authorities offer to discuss her allegations.

Ms. Towell said her husband has threatened to go on social assistance, in which case she would be forced to pay Ottawa and Ontario thousands of dollars in compensation.

"I don't think they should be giving these permanent resident cards the minute you arrive in the country," she said. "In minutes, you could disappear and you've got all the rights of any other Canadian. It's really absolutely maddening and insane if you think about it."

Critics say the U.S. model puts the immigrant in a highly vulnerable position should the Canadian spouse turn out to be abusive, but Mr. Maharaj and Ms. Towell think a balance could be reached.

Immigration Minister Diane Finley said yesterday that the government is working with the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, as well as with the Canada Border Services Agency, to deal with fraudulent marriages overseas and in Canada.

"We take marriages of convenience and fraud marriages very seriously," she told reporters yesterday in Whitehorse, where she was announcing new measures to encourage immigration to Yukon. "In fact, in my last trip abroad [to India], I was investigating these personally and some of the methods that are used because, quite frankly, Canadians want an immigration system that helps legitimate immigrants and we want to make sure that all immigrants to Canada are legitimate."

With a report from Dan Jones in Whitehorse