

Man's sponsored wife runs away one week after arriving from India

COQUITLAM: She's been found but says she won't return to husband, who's financially responsible for her

BY JENNIFER SALTMAN
STAFF REPORTER

When Burinder Manget married his wife in India a year ago, he pictured an idyllic life in Canada.

He never thought that a week after her arrival, his wife would disappear.

"I was just shocked, confused," Manget said quietly. "I thought maybe she was playing a joke."

Now Manget is obligated to his absent wife for the next three years should she demand financial support or need income assistance from the government.

The 31-year-old married Harpreet Dhami on April 12, 2006, 10 days after their marriage was arranged by a relative.

Manget thought 21-year-old Harpreet was shy, nice and respectful, and the couple clicked during their initial conversations.

After the wedding, Manget stayed in India for three weeks before returning to Canada to start the process of sponsoring his bride to become a Canadian resident.

During their time apart, Manget called Harpreet regularly and sent money monthly.

"She was really happy and I was happy," Manget said.

"When she used to call, she goes, 'I'm dying to come there, whenever I get my visa I'm going to come running.'"

Harpreet's visa was approved in May and she arrived in Vancouver June 14.

Sitting on the couch in his mother's Coquitlam home, Manget describes the excitement of finally seeing his wife again after a year of separation.

The house was decorated and Manget's mother was planning a welcome party.

The couple spent a week attending gatherings and greeting family and friends dropping by to see the new bride.

Manget's twin brother Gurinder said everything seemed normal.

"That's why we're so shocked. Usually you'll show signs of being mad or sad or something," he said.

But a week after her arrival, on June 21, Harpreet disappeared.

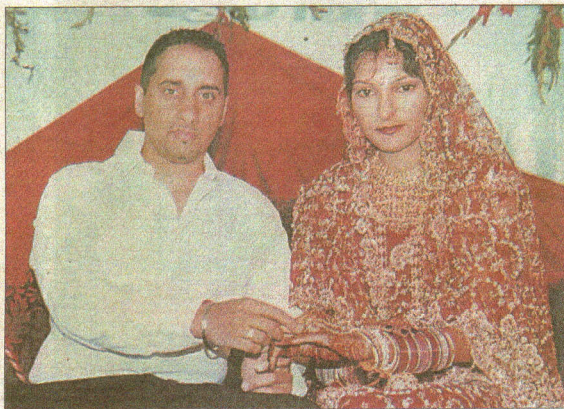
Her passport, gold jewelry and a few hundred dollars were missing. No one saw her leave.

Manget and his mother called Harpreet's mother in India and family in Toronto, but no one knew where she was.

Manget called Coquitlam RCMP, who investigated and released a



Burinder 'Bob' Manget, 31, sits in his mother's Coquitlam home Monday. Harpreet Manget, 21, disappeared one week following her arrival in Canada from India after waiting a year for her immigration papers after marrying Bob. JASON PAYNE — THE PROVINCE



Harpreet Manget (right) and Burinder 'Bob' Manget in happier times. — FAMILY PHOTO

missing-person notice to media the same day.

That night, Harpreet called and spoke to Manget's mother.

She allegedly told her that she was fine and was not coming home before hanging up.

On June 22, after seeing herself on

the news, Harpreet called Delta police to let them know she was OK.

Const. Brenda Gresiu, spokeswoman for the Coquitlam RCMP, said investigators spoke with Harpreet and were satisfied that there was no threat to her safety.

"We've concluded our investiga-

tion," Gresiu said. "This is not a suspicious circumstance."

An uncle in Toronto, who refused to give his name, said he hasn't heard from Harpreet and has no idea where she is staying.

The uncle said he has spoken to Harpreet's mother, Balbir Kaur Dhami, and the whole family is worried.

He said as far as he knew there was no problem with the marriage, and nobody knows why she left.

"I don't know. I have no clue until I speak to her," he said. "Is there anything wrong? What is the problem? We also would like to find out."

Manget and his family, however, wonder if "it was maybe pre-planned," Manget said, questioning whether "she came here just to come here and use me."

"It's not just me that's used, it's our whole family, her family."

Said Manget's sister-in-law Ruby Toor, "it's not like we kicked her out — she walked out on her own."

Toor said the family has contacted Citizenship and Immigration Canada and was told there is nothing they can do.

"Sponsorship is a legally binding commitment and it can't be can-

celled, regardless of whether a relationship breaks down or not," said Shakila Bezeau of Citizenship and Immigration. "An individual who sponsors someone is pretty well obligated for three years' support for that person."

Manget said that since his wife left, he's heard many similar stories.

"It has to stop," he said.

A *Province* investigation in 2005 revealed there are thousands of abandoned brides in India.

Palwinder Gill of the Canadian Fraud Marriage Victims Society said there are just as many abandoned grooms.

"This is not a one-sided thing," Gill said. "It has always happened."

Gill said men feel ashamed when their wives leave them, and will not speak out. "They don't talk about it because they think shame," he said.

"It's a cultural thing."

Gill said those who flout the law should be punished. People proven to have married under false pretenses "should be charged as criminals because they enter Canada by fraud. Fraud is a crime."

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