

Interview, Mitu Aggarwal, 17 May 2001

Mitu does not claim any Indian state as home as she moved around a lot as a child and her parents are from completely different regions. If asked to pick an area, however, Rajasthan would be the state she most associates with. Nearly 10 years ago, in August 1991, Mitu immigrated to Oregon after her marriage to her husband. Her husband was living and working in Washington County, having immigrated here himself one year earlier. Mitu described how she came to be married and how, as was custom, her family placed an advertisement in the Sunday Times. Their families met several times and from first contact to the actual wedding (20 days), Mitu and her husband were only alone for about 45 minutes.

After the wedding, and a brief trip to Oregon, Mitu spent time in India with her in-laws, getting to know them. She also spent many weeks saying good-bye to her own family and friends. She only took two suitcases with her to America. When reflecting on the difficulty in leaving all that was known, Mitu acknowledged that Indian girls grow up expecting to leave the home and are well prepared for it when the time comes.

Prior to her marriage, Mitu spent most of her time in university--she has a BS and MS in electronics. After coming to Oregon, she found that her MS (which was only a 5th year program) was not recognized here in the US, so she went back to school to the Oregon Graduate Institute, where she received another MS in Computer Engineering. In the mean time, she was also settling into her new

home, which, she admits was difficult as first. This was mainly due to the physical distance between her and her twin sister, the first time the pair had been so far away from each other. Luckily, her sister immigrated with her family just a year later.

One detail Mitu remembers vividly about her first few months in Oregon was the extreme difference between marriage customs in India versus Indian Marriage customs in Oregon. In India, it is customary for the bride to spend the first year of marriage to dress in her finest clothes and jewelry whenever she leaves the home as a sign of her new status as a wife, to show off her trousseau. Here in Oregon, however her husband discouraged her from being too extravagant and from wearing her "bindi" dot altogether. [a bindi dot, loosely interpreted, is a red, or sometimes orange or burgundy, dot about the circumference of a pencil placed on the forehead between the eyebrows that denotes a married woman] She would, he said, invite too many questions and possibly derisiveness' from non-Indians.