

Deepak and Poonam

A "typical" Indian wedding to unite strangers

by Donna Behrend

Ninety-nine percent of us would never dream of marrying a stranger. But that is exactly what tribal employee Deepak Sehgal is doing this Sunday. Dee's fiancée, Poonam Loomba, is from Punja, India, and just arrived in Madras early last week with her parents.

Dee has been working for the Tribe as water master since last year. Because Dee's office is located in the Spilyay Tymoo building, I have had the opportunity to talk frequently with him about his impending marriage to the girl he had never met.

Dee appeared to be a bit uneasy about the life-long commitment arranged by his father and the father of his fiancée. I asked Dee if I might do an article about his fiancée, their upcoming wedding, and the culture that requires pre-arranged weddings.

When I arrived at the restaurant for the interview, Poonam and Dee sat across from one another like they had known each other for years, smiling and laughing at private jokes they had already begun to share. From Dee's apparently apprehensive attitude, it was a sight I had not expected.

Poonam and Dee's families are distantly related through in-laws and have been friends for years. However, Dee and Poonam had never met. On one visit, Dee's father expressed to Poonam's father that he was "looking for a girl" for Dee. Arrangements were made, with no financial strings attached, and a short time later the two were engaged via long-distance.

This sounded unusual to my western ears and it was very hard for me to understand such an arrangement. Poonam, who speaks fluent English,



Deepak Sehgal (right) and fiancée Poonam Loomba

explained that it is not an "unusual" occurrence in India, but rather a fact of life. "It may sound cold to you," she explained, "but we're raised with the custom. It's expected."

Traditionally, in India, children have absolutely no input into such marriage arrangements and no choice of mates. Dee and Poonam explained that their marriage is one of mutual consent and that if either had objected, their parents wouldn't have forced them to marry. They also told me that if they were in India, they would never have even seen each other prior to the marriage, unless perhaps once with a chaperone.

They exchanged only two letters prior to Poonam's arrival in the states. The letters were accompanied by

photos....they knew what each other looked like, but very little else. To their surprise and delight they have discovered that they "think alike," says Dee. "It may have something to do with our education."

Dee was raised and educated in Ireland and received a degree in Chemical Engineering from University of Manchester in England. Poonam attended a convent school run by English nuns in northern India for 11 years, many miles away from her family. When she returned home she attended the University of Punjab and received an MA in English and a profession degree in teaching (comparative to a BA in the states).

So that their marriage will be recognized in the United States, Dee and Poonam were

married at the Jefferson County Court House on Wednesday, June 11. It seemed unfortunate to me that they had to be married twice just to keep everyone happy. "It's just something we had to do. It's no big deal," Dee said nonchalantly.

The official Indian wedding will be held Sunday at Satish Puri's home. Satish is a first cousin to Dee, and it was he who brought Dee's family to the Madras area. The wedding, which in India usually takes anywhere from two to five hours, will be shortened to a brief hour or so.

Poonam says the wedding will be "typical" Indian style. Her idea of typical amused me, for a priest is traveling from Vancouver B.C. to marry them

and the ceremony will be recited in Sanskrit, which is the classical language of India.

The ceremony will begin with the garlanding. Dee and his entire family will go to Satish's home where Poonam and her parents have been staying. Poonam will then place a garland of flowers around Dee's neck and he in turn will do the same to her. Traditionally, marriages take place in the evening and the girl's family serves a huge lunch following the garlanding ceremony before the wedding. But for practical purposes, the lunch will be omitted and will be combined with the reception following the ceremony.

The "lavvas," or wedding is next. The actual ceremony involves the priest and Dee and Poonam walking four times around the holy fire. In the first three circles around the fire, the priest will explain Dee's responsibilities to him. In the last circle, the priest will tell Poonam that Dee will assume his responsibilities. The four trips around the fire will make Poonam and Dee husband and wife.

Following the ceremony, the two will go to Dee's house, where Poonam will receive clothing from Dee's family. This "doli" is a symbolic of Dee's family's acceptance of Poonam and her acceptance of them.

India's social structure is a caste system, now illegal, but still in existence. Dee and Poonam happen to be in the same social level, but they assured me that even if they had been on different levels, it wouldn't have mattered. "It just didn't apply to us," they said.

Dee and Poonam will be living in an apartment in Madras. Poonam says that this area is very similar to India. "It's the kind of place I've always wanted to stay."

**Watch for the
Confederated Tribes'
float (#14) on TV
Starting Saturday, 9:30 am**

Spilyay Tymoo
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Getting into their hair

The Hair Bear has recently opened its doors under new management. Both men and women are making appointments with Billy Jo McConville to have their hair cut, styled, colored or oiled. She also does manicures. Senior citizens are offered a reduced rate and given extra special care.

Billy Jo has waited a long time to have her own shop. She graduated from beauty school many years back. For seven years she worked in and around Lebanon and Sweet Home, Oregon. Unfortunately the chemicals at that time were very harsh and she found it impossible to work with them. Now, she says, "the products are milder" and she can work with them.

Because Billy Jo was out of the hairstyling business for many years she had to take her state examination over. She has been re-licensed. An appointment can be made by calling 553-1476.

A beauty shop at Kah-Nee-

Ta is her hope for the future. Until then she is content working in the mobile unit beside Macy's store. She

says, "I've waited a long time to do what I wanted, getting into people's hair and being paid for it."



Finishing Touches-Stylist, Billy Jo McConville helps Edna Sanders get ready for the weekend.