

The Netherlands



1. Country Brief with reference to its people

The Kingdom of the Netherlands was formed in 1815. In 1830 Belgium seceded and formed a separate kingdom. The Netherlands remained neutral in World War I, but suffered invasion and occupation by Germany in World War II. A modern, industrialized nation, the Netherlands is also a large exporter of agricultural products. The country was a founding member of NATO and the EEC (now the EU), and participated in the introduction of the euro in 1999. The Netherlands has a population of 16,407,491 (July 2005 estimates). The Netherlands has 83% of Dutch population and the rest consist of Turks, Moroccans, Antilleans, Surinamese, and Indonesians. It is also estimated (2005) that 3 out of every 1,000 population are migrants in the Netherlands. The Indian Diaspora in the Netherlands mostly came from Suriname.

2. Nature and Demographic Profile of Indian Diaspora

The emigration of Indians to the Netherlands is a post-World War II phenomenon.

The Netherlands has the second largest population of people of Indian origin in Europe [ii]. There are two very distinct groups among the Indian community in the Netherlands. People of Indian origin (PIO) – mainly from UP and Bihar who, 130 years ago, migrated to the then Dutch colony of Suriname under the indenture system. Just before as well as after the independence of Suriname in 1975, a majority of them migrated to the Netherlands. In more recent years Indians from India joined them.

The Netherlands has a total population of about 17 million, out of which the PIOs (Surinamese Indians - Sarnami Hindustanis as they call themselves) are about 160,000 in number and the Indians are about 15,000. To this one can add between 3,000 and 5,000 illegal immigrants mainly from the Punjab. Highly qualified professionals or entrepreneurs largely constitute the recent wave of Indians who came to seek their fortunes in the Netherlands.

In 1972 during the dictatorship of infamous Idi Amin, a few hundred Indians migrated from Uganda to the Netherlands. In the recent past a few PIO's from Afghanistan arrived in the Netherlands. Besides the above, the Dutch have been adopting Indian children more or less on a regular basis. The Surinamese Indians are mostly concentrated in and around the four big cities – Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Utrecht and The Hague. The Hague alone has about 40,000 Surinamese Indians.

The identity of the Indians in Diaspora is based on a combination of culture and language, and in a lesser but growing extent influenced by literature and the influence of audiovisual medium (films). Each of these constituent factors plays a role in keeping the identity alive. And their influence determines the identity of future generations. In other words, they decide whether one will remain attached to the roots of one's parents and forefathers or will get immersed/assimilated in the culture of the country of residence and acquire a new identity.

Indians from India: NRIs

The NRIs who have chosen the Netherlands as their “home” are professionally trained and well-settled and have not only retained Indian identity but also have

showed interest in the advancement of their kith and kin back home in India. Many of them have retained Indian citizenship. They have gained considerable expertise in important spheres of economic and professional life. Diasporic peoples often experience the need to maintain their cultural and national identity through contact with family and friends and through consuming mass media products from their home countries and communities of origin.

The question for the NRIs in the Netherlands, even with a Dutch passport is: which is preferable - complete acceptance of the new home by integration and assimilation, or rather remain aloof and keep a cautious distance? For most of them English is still the means of communication. Should one enthusiastically thrust oneself into the Dutch society? Or should one remain a “gastarbeider” - a guest worker, who is temporarily resident in the Netherlands, a rich country, but who has every intention of returning to India? This is a question, which the individual person has to answer.

The Surinamese Indians don't have this problem. They know that their forefathers left India and they belong to their present country of residence. As India is the centre of their religion, for the Surinamese Hindus, India has a special meaning. It gives them a special identity. This special identity may be one of the reasons why there are so many Surinamese Indian travel agents looking after the constant flow of travellers from the Netherlands to the religious sites in India. The Surinamese Indians have also built-up a network with PIOs of countries like Mauritius.

Neither language nor religion binds the Indian community in the Netherlands together. It is known that India, being more of a continent in size and diversity, an Urdu-speaking Muslim from Delhi and a Malayalam - speaking Brahmin from Kerala would have even less in common than an Egyptian or some one from Nigeria. One speaks Bengali, Hindi, Tamil, or any of the Indian languages or one follows one's own faith, but still they preserve their “Indianness” – their “Diasporic Identity”.

It is found that in 2003, 6 percentage of the total population consists of Muslims and one percent Hindus. Around half of the population is Christian. Most

of the Diaspora ends up becoming a minority and the old diaspora has to be looked from the angle of ethnic-religious composition of the total population.

In the year 2004, it is found that as high as 19 percent of the total population are born abroad or with one or both parents born abroad. Netherlands is a home for people from many countries, which includes every continent. The Indonesians and Germans consist of 2.4 percent each out of the total population born abroad. The Turks and Moroccans also have a good representation. There is a good number of people came from Suriname, who were mostly Indians. They consist of 2 percent of the population born abroad or with one or both parents born abroad.

3. Diaspora Relations

The Surinamese Indians in the Netherlands and the NRIs have a common cultural base. Yet there is an unseen barrier among the communities. In spite of their common origin and cultural heritage, the two groups of Indians in the Netherlands have different characteristics and cultural differences. They also differ in the level of their integration with the Dutch society. Due to their colonial past and knowledge of the Dutch language the Surinamese Indians are more integrated in the Dutch society than the Indians. They are also politically involved. No doubt that their proficiency in Dutch language has given them chance to participate actively in politics – both on local as well as national level. Being born and brought up in Suriname they are loyal to their motherland.

On the other hand, the Indians who came directly from India or migrated from other countries to the Netherlands also adapted themselves to the Dutch way of life. But, socio-cultural interaction between the two communities hardly takes place. One of the reasons may be the language barrier. Among the NRIs, English is the usual medium of communication and the Surinamese Indians communicate either in Dutch or in Sarnami Hindustani or Sarnami Hindi as spoken in Suriname. Sarnami Hindustani is a blend of Bhojpuri and Avadhi. It has also some influence of Dutch and other languages.

But both communities do share the age-old customs and traditions and observe them in festivities and bereavements. Even the Indian “arranged marriage” system has not completely lost its popularity within the communities. But the European custom of dating has also made in-road. Special Internet sites cater for the needs, both for the young as well as for the old. Keeping track with the modern trends, the Internet is used by a few for spreading news from back “home”, activities in the society, new trends in fashion, lifestyle etc.

4. Concerns and problems of Indian Diaspora

(To be requested to the Indian Embassy at Hague)

5. Major Diaspora Associations

The Netherlands-India Association, a friendship society established in 1951, also works to project India in this country. In the trade sector, the NRI community has organized two business groups, the Netherlands India Chamber of Commerce and Trade (NICCT) and the Indian Business Chamber. Another organization, an NRI think tank called the Foundation for Critical Choices for India, has its headquarters in the Netherlands, and periodically brings out papers with suggestions on issues relevant to India and the NRIs. They organized the first ever, successful international NRI conference in India in 1985.

There was active participation from the Netherlands in the first, second, and third Pravasi Bharatiya Divas celebrations in India in January 2003, January 2004, and January 2005 and January 2006 respectively. The Indian origin community in the Netherlands warmly welcomed the GOI decision to permit dual nationality for Persons of Indian Origin from a number of countries, including the Netherlands.

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<p>OHM TV (Indian TV Channel) Koningeweg 8, 1217 KX Hilversum Chairman: R. Ramnath; Director: R. Chander Tel: 31-35-6248784; Fax: 6280843 Website: www.ohmnet.nl E-mail: info@ohmnet.nl</p>	

6. Bilateral Relation/Agreements

Recorded bilateral contacts between India and the Netherlands go back to several centuries, and include the first voyage to the Indian Ocean by Cornelius Houtman in 1595-96 as well as by two other Dutch ships reaching India in 1597. The first recorded agreement between the two countries, of 11th November 1604, was between the Dutch East India Company and the Zamorin of Calicut, to form an alliance against the Portuguese military presence in India. In subsequent years, although the Dutch had trading outposts, with administrative control, on both the western and eastern coasts of India, the largest one being at Cochin, they did not try to extend their territorial control, and Dutch historians today assume that the Dutch in the 17th and 18th centuries did not want an empire in India. Moreover, their attention had begun to shift to the campaign to set up a colonial empire in Indonesia.

Important Bilateral Treaties and Agreements

Various agreements, which together constitute a comprehensive framework for economic co-operation, are operational between India and the Netherlands.

These include

- Air Services Agreement (May 1951)
- 1898 Treaty for the Mutual Surrender of Fugitive Criminals (effected in 1971)
- An Agreement on Economic and Technical Cooperation (February 1983)
- An MoU on Cooperation in Agriculture and Animal Husbandry (September 1990)
- A Cultural Agreement (May 1985)
- An MoU and an Agreement on Scientific Cooperation (July and November 1985 respectively)
- A Convention for the Avoidance of Double Taxation and Prevention of Fiscal Evasion (July 1988)

- An Agreement for the promotion and protection of investments (November 1995)
- A MoU on Investment Promotion (February 2004).