

WAHID SALEH



A symbol of indomitable Assamese spirit, Wahid Saleh's journey to distinction began when his college in Ernakulam selected him for higher training in Germany. But when he eventually got to his workplace, BMW, in Munich, he discovered he had been taken on not for training but as an unskilled labourer. But there was no going back, so he forged on, determined. He started working for Lufthansa in Hamburg and then fell in love with a new phenomenon that was the computer, for it was the dawn of the computer age.

Originating from a very humble background, he managed to carve out a niche for himself through sheer hard work, determination and adaptation to his working environment. Wahid is an iconic persona among the NRIs in Netherlands. A "true son of Assam", he has been involved in a number of activities to pay back his debt and love to the land of his birth. In recognition of his outstanding achievements in the field of community service, valuable contribution in promoting the honour and prestige of India and for fostering the interest of overseas Indians, Wahid was awarded the Pravasi Bharatiya Samman by the Hon' ble President of India Shrimati Pratibha Devi Singh Patil at Vigyan Bhawan on 9th January, 2011. He was also given the rare honour of making the acceptance speech on behalf of all the Pravasi Bharatiya Samman recipients. Wahid is recognized for his significant contributions to the Indian community in The Netherlands and for his philanthropic activities in Assam.

Born in Assam, Wahid Saleh studied engineering in Kerala, Germany, and The Netherlands. He has served as a board member of the Netherlands-India Association, and guided the creation of the Dutch Indian Youth Association. The Indian community honoured him in 1998 with "The Golden Jubilee Community Service Award". He has also served in many civic, community and cultural organizations in various executive positions. In April 2002, he was awarded the coveted Dutch honour, Ridder in de Orde van Oranje-Nassau or the Knighthood of the Order of Orange-Nassau.

Wahid Saleh also authored the book, "Indiawijzer — India in Nederland," a reference guide on Indian culture in The Netherlands. For his services to the PIO/NRI community, Saleh was presented with THE Foundation for Critical Choices for India Silver Jubilee Award. In 2006, the Global People of Indian Origin (GOPIO), USA recognized Wahid's dedicated and committed community service and presented him the Copio Pravasai Bharatiya Community Service Award for the year 2007.

For a man who grew up in a house without electricity and 'news' meant a man in a rickshaw who announced events over a loudspeaker, he has come a long way. He misses his native land, but when he visits 'home' and faces the lack of infrastructure, the bureaucracy and the corruption, he wants to take the next available flight back to The Netherlands.

Wahid married a Dutch national who was his pen-friend in The Netherlands and was studying medicine. He decided to join her there, and eventually joined a Dutch company in Rotterdam as a computer programmer. He excelled at it and, by 1983, was able to implement one of the biggest PC networks in Europe. The couple has two children. Tasnim has an MA in law and another in pedagogy. Qauthar did his masters in financial economics and works with the Amsterdam city council. ■