

Indian Cultural Calendar on the Indiawijzer (www.indiawijzer.nl)

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This is a special year for Indian culture in the Netherlands, as a Festival of India will be held in Amsterdam this November. The festival will be the culmination of a long association with the richness and diversity of Indian culture in Dutch society. Indeed, it was only in 2002 - 2003 that the celebration of Indian culture marked the commemoration of the 400th anniversary of early Indo-Dutch relations. The Festival organized by the Concertgebouw, the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR), Government of India and many other art organisations, will be the largest India Festival ever held in this country and will showcase the best of Indian culture in the Netherlands.

Dutch appreciation for Indian music, dance and theatre is heavily indebted to Mr. Felix van Lamsweerde, who helped organise Pandit Ravi Shankar's first performance in Amsterdam at the Concertgebouw's Kleine Zaal on May 27, 1957. From 1958, van Lamsweerde started the tradition of inviting well-known Indian artists to perform at the Royal Tropical Institute (KIT) in Amsterdam. In August 1973, the highlight was a three-day "India Festival" in cooperation with the Netherlands Broadcasting Foundation (NOS). These performances exposed the Dutch public to classical Indian music and dance. In 1972 Ms. Darsan Kumari, a sitar player came to Amsterdam and taught sitar at KIT. She was the driving force behind the promotion of Indian music at this time and establish *Tritantri Vidya Peeth* in 1974, the only music school of its kind in The Netherlands. She also performed for the Royal Family. Darsan Kumari supported the late John Eijlers in establishing the India Music Foundation. Around 1973 the Foundation started to organise Indian concerts at Amsterdam's Moses & Aaron church, which was absorbed into KIT's programme in 1985.

Mohini Devi, a Dutch national, who studied Indian dance in the early 1950s and gave dance lessons to the Dutch, was one of the pioneers of Indian dance in the Netherlands. Since then, many dance schools offering Indian classical dance, folk dance and modern Indian (Bollywood) dance have sprung up around the country. Almost all of India's most famous artists have performed in the Netherlands and visit the country regularly. From the 1970s, Indian dancers started settling in the Netherlands. A large number of Surinamese Indians also perform, teach and treasure this art form. Many have done *Arangetrams* (professional initiation). Dutch dance students regularly visit India to refine their techniques and skills. The Kalakshetra in Chennai – a key institution where many Dutch student dancers pursue their higher studies – is a great source of inspiration. On February 13, 2008, the Association of Platform Indian Dance (PID) was established to stimulate cooperation and the exchange of expertise between different Indian dance styles and dance schools, to support and encourage artistic developments and to present dancers and teachers of Indian dance through a common platform.

The Netherlands has also been one of the favourite venues for Indian music performances ever since mid-1960s. What attracted artists most to this country was the appreciative and knowledgeable Dutch audience. In 1980s, the world-famous Rotterdam conservatory launched an Indian music programme, whose current Art Director is Pandit Hariprasad

Chaurasia, the renowned flautist. Indian music lessons are also offered at different Dutch World Music schools, where both vocal and instrumental styles of music are taught. In the field of cross-over music and dance, a new trend is also slowly developing. Young local musicians have started experimenting with playing Indian music together with jazz and/or Arabic music. Classical dancers have also choreographed Bharatanatyam with Western and African music. Nevertheless, Baithak Gana, Nagara, Ahirwa ka Naach, Natua Naach are still cherished and treasured by the diaspora community.

Although Satyajit Ray's films had been shown to the Dutch public around 1966, commercial Indian cinema did not come to this country until the early 1970s. In the early 1970s, Indian films were screened once a week at the Seinpost cinema in Scheveningen. KIT only started screening Indian films in 1990. In March 1993, the Institute, together with Amsterdam Filmmuseum, organised "Cinema India – 80 years of Films for the Millions". From March 10 to April 23, 2005 KIT-Tropentheater held the 8th Indian Film Festival dedicated to the South Indian films. Today, Indian films are screened regularly in Dutch cinemas. Cities like Amsterdam feature Indian films in their local film festivals. The annual Hindustani Film Festival is held in The Hague. Indian films have come to occupy a distinct niche in the annual International Film Festival Rotterdam (IFFR). The 37th edition of the IFFR (January 23- February 3), 2008 created a special section, Hinglish, to accommodate Bollywood from India. Several Dutch companies are active in producing documentaries and feature films relating to the Indian culture and heritage. On May 23, 2008, Beifilms released *Saiyan Chitchor*, the first ever Indian film produced by a Dutch company with Surinamese Hindustani actors. The Bollywood film industry recently discovered the Netherlands with its colourful tulip fields as an ideal locale for shooting certain scenes. Bollywood artists perform in the Netherlands regularly, and Bollywood is now a big craze. In the summer of 2005, Amsterdam was invaded by the Indian film industry for a few days.

The Tropentheater, where diaspora artistes also perform occasionally, puts on Indian plays for Dutch audiences. Ms. Kamala Sukul, who is a producer and director of theatre productions based on social issues and current topics, has written, directed and produced 29 plays – all staged in different theatres in the Netherlands. She has also written scenarios for two films, both of which she directed herself. In Rotterdam, Ramlila is staged in the open air.

Both classical and modern Indian literature, has a wide appeal in the Netherlands and is translated regularly into Dutch. Ancient sacred texts have been translated from Sanskrit by Dutch scholars and Indologists. Frederik van Eeden, a physician practising medicine and psychiatry, introduced Tagore to the Netherlands. In 1913, he translated the Nobel Prize-winning *Gitanjali*. Contemporary Indian literature, whether in English and the vernacular, is also popular and translated into Dutch.

Painters from the Netherlands were not only inspired but influenced by Indian art. Some paintings by Rembrandt, the great Dutch master, were allegedly also influenced by Indian works. Rembrandt specialists believe that about 20-25 sketches of Rembrandt, dating to the period from 1654 to 1656, are copies of Moghul miniature paintings. Many galleries support the works of Indian artists and sculptors. Prestigious department stores also display Indian artists' works. For their part, Dutch artists regularly visit India for inspiration and work.

Indian philosophy and religion, as well as yoga and spirituality, are inseparable. People are attracted to yoga for various reasons. The wide spread of yoga in the Netherlands is thanks to the pioneering work of people like Dr Rama Polderman, André van Lysebeth, the late Saswitha and the late Wolter Keers. Yoga teachers and yoga schools can be found all over the Netherlands. There are special teacher-training yoga schools to train yoga teachers. More than 300 yoga centres cater for the growing need for yoga classes. Almost every town and city in the Netherlands has a yoga school.

Ayurveda, another facet of Indian culture, is increasingly being introduced and practiced in the Netherlands. Even Dutch biomedical doctors have followed courses in Ayurveda. Besides Ayurvedic doctors, there are several Ayurvedic massage practitioners. These specialists are trained at several specialist colleges. In cooperation with the World Ayurvedic Health Organisation (WAHO) and Ayurvedic institutions in India, the International Cooperated Ayurvedic University (ICAU) at The Hague provides courses for Ayurvedic practitioners and is run by an Indian Ayurvedic doctor.

Food is an integral part of the Indo-Dutch cultural encounter. The growing popularity of Indian cuisine is evident in the mushrooming of Indian restaurants all across the country, with more than 40 Indian restaurants in Amsterdam alone. The number of Dutch tourists to India and businessmen and women visiting India is increasing. They are all exposed to the wide variety of Indian cuisine. As for Indians, the number of Indian tourists visiting the Netherlands is also on the increase. Many Indian companies have established their base in the Netherlands. Neither should the corner roti shops frequented by the Dutch forgotten. Indian cooking classes are offered at several places in the Netherlands. Indian shops selling fresh Indian vegetables, spices, lentils, basmati rice and flour can be found in almost any major city and town of the Netherlands.

The Indian diaspora in the Netherlands has its own TV and radio stations. Concertzender and VPRO, two major Dutch radio stations regularly air Indian classical music. There are several commercial Hindustani radio stations serving the community. They are also a source of information for the community especially for family affairs like birth, marriage and death..

The Indo-Dutch cultural and friendship/fraternity societies play a key role in expanding and facilitating social get-togethers between the Indian diaspora and the Dutch. Various organisations like the Tropentheater, Foundation Tagore, Sarnami Huis, The Netherlands-India Association and Swarasawati Arts promote cultural encounters between India and the Netherlands. Another meeting place for both communities is the *melas* and *milans* organised in various places by different organisations. Milan Festival of The Hague is said to be the biggest open-air Indian festival in mainland Europe. The three-day festival attracts more than 80,000 visitors.

The Dutch have always had a fascination for Indian thought and philosophy. Tagore visited the Netherlands in 1920. Modern thinkers & philosophers such as Vivekananda, Aurobindo, and Krishnamurti were also admired in the Netherlands. Krishnamurti visited the Netherlands several times. Dutch interest in Indian spirituality is much deeper than something purely academic. India is a land of spiritual wisdom and ancient texts, imbued

with philosophical insight and written in one of the oldest languages of civilisation, which blossomed even before Europe contemplated using paper. Mahatma Gandhi, Nehru, and Rabindranath Tagore enjoy the admiration of the Dutch, and Dutch municipalities have named more than 50 streets after these great men. Gandhi is honoured with three statues in three different Dutch cities and has pride of place in The Peace Palace, which is the seat of the International Court of Justice in The Hague.

The Cultural agenda of the unique digital database Indiawijzer - Guide to India (www.indiawijzer.nl) covers the multifaceted cultural relation between India and the Netherlands, providing a comprehensive overview of the Indian culture in the Netherlands.

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