

"UTTARAM YAT... een gesprek met... AADRAISHCHAIVA DAKSHINAM VAR...
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DEPUTY MAYOR MR. **RABIN BALDEW SINGH** IS THE HAGUE'S ALDERMAN FOR SOCIAL AFFAIRS, EMPLOYMENT, NEIGHBOURHOOD APPROACH, INTEGRATION POLICY AND SPORTS. HE TALKS TO **CHAITALI SENGUPTA** ON THE ISSUE OF THE RISE AND SUCCESS OF THE HINDUSTANI COMMUNITY IN THE NETHERLANDS.



The Hindustani

Community is one of the most

successful migrants

Q You arrived in the Netherlands at an impressionable age of 13 in the year 1975. Tell us a little about those first years of struggle as a 'migrant'? Could you easily integrate in the Dutch society?

I left Suriname on the 2nd of October 1975, at the age of thirteen and arrived in Holland during the festivities of the liberation of Leiden on the third of October. This made a big impression on me and I decided to stay there and finish my secondary education. I later studied literature for a couple of years at the University of Leiden. Of course it was quite difficult to be so far away from home, but at the same time it was a very liberating and enlightening experience. I was made to feel very welcome in this country, and now consider the Netherlands (and especially The Hague) as my home.

Q The 'multiculturele samenleving' has greatly changed since then. What has changed in your opinion, in terms of the growth of the multicultural society in the NL? What challenges does the Hindustani community face in the present times?

Since those years The Netherlands has experienced many changes. We have had times of prosperity and times of economic decline. The world situation has changed drastically with the political situation in the Middle East. Europe united itself in the European Union with a single currency and opened up their borders to each other. Thus many more migrants came to Holland sometimes to seek employment and sometimes to seek refuge. In some of the larger cities like The Hague the population of migrant descent is now the largest

segment. Political discourse has hardened on the subject of integration and although there is a growing community of successful representatives of migrant descent, tension amongst some of the communities has grown. The Hindustani community is one of the most successful migrant communities and I feel that it has an obligation to help the less fortunate within and outside of the Hindustani community to find their way in Dutch society. I am a firm believer in the multicultural society and the strength of individuals to fend for themselves, but I also believe that we all have to help each other.

Q You are active in the local politics since the last 20 years and you have been instrumental in the socio-cultural activities of the Surinamese Hindustani community. How have they contributed to the Dutch society and what do you see as their achievements?

I have been active for more than 30 years with this activities to stimulate the emancipation process of the different migrant groups. That surely was not an easy task because Holland had to adjust to their presence. Through their successful integration the Surinamese Hindustani community has contributed to the Economic growth in Holland. Also they have, like other groups, enriched the Dutch society with their culture. Especially the Indian cuisine is a very visible example. But also the open and tolerant way the Surinamese Hindustani community addresses religion I think is an inspiring example of the civic society. And of course there are many individuals who in their own way and in their own setting make a solid contribution to our great Dutch community as I try to do myself.

Q In January 2014 the Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Award (PBSA) was conferred on you by the Indian government. What is your message to the Indian community here? How in your opinion can the Indian and the Hindustani community integrate, given the fact that they share the same roots?

My message to the Indian community would be to actively participate in Dutch society. It is not necessary to change your identity. Be proud of your origin and never forget who you are. But it is required to participate in this society that you have chosen as the place where you live and build your future. Learn the language if you have not done so yet. It is extremely important to be able to work and have access to Dutch society.

I do not think that the Hindustani and Indian society should completely integrate. They share the same roots indeed, but there are also differences originating from the different paths that they have followed. To both communities I say: Fully enjoy the common roots together and share the warmth of being united through culture. Learn from each other from the differences that have evolved in the two communities during more than a century.



Share viewpoints on developments that have consequences on our Dutch society and our role in building the multicultural society.

Q You are also a noted poet and a writer. What influences and inspires you to compose?

My love of the expression of the human emotion and my quest to share wisdom and stimulate spirituality inspire me to write and compose. I am greatly influenced by the Indian spiritual masters. I feel that their views can have a great contribution to Western civilization.