

# Indian festivals source of softpower in Guyana

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Guyana lived in the hearts and minds of Indian Government and its people since long from the days when Indian indentured labourers arrived in the British Guyana in 1938. This emotional connect between India and Guyana continues even today, with India partnering in Guyana's celebration of the 180th anniversary of the arrival of East Indian Immigrants to Guyana as 'Arrival Day' on 5 May 2019.

The Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) donated a Sculpture (six bronze statues depicting a Hindu man, a Muslim man, a Drum boy, a woman with bundle, a woman with tawa and cahary and a man with cutlass and rice plant) for the Indian Arrival Monument in Palmyra in Guyana to mark the arrival of Indians.

India has been a long time partner in prosperity and growth and is still closely connected with Guyana in many ways and still contributes in various areas of development. Indo-Guyanese are the largest ethnic group in Guyana as identified by the official census, about 40% of the country's population of about 750,000 in 2012. Guyanese continue to observe Indian festivals such as Phagwah (Holi), Diwali, Navratri. This soft power of India in this country is the most remarkable Indian contribution in Guyana. The cultural linkage, religious practices and economic trend brought with them during the time of indentureship helped Guyana to take the country forward in a different way than the other countries in the Caribbean region.

The Commission of India was established in Georgetown in May 1965. The Commission was made into a full-fledged High Commission of India in 1968. The relationship between India and Guyana ever since the independence of Guyana in May 1966 has been close and cordial with a high degree of understanding. India and Guyana all along viewed each other as strategic partners and cooperate in the international arena where there exists a clear convergence of views on issues of mutual interest. Guyana, however, closed down its Mission in India in 1990 due to economic reasons, but reopened it in 2004.

The warmth in the relation was carried forward through exchange visits from both sides, Smt. Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India visited Guyana in 1968, Dr Shankar Dayal Sharma, the then Vice President of India visited Guyana in 1988, Shri Bhairon Singh Shekhawat, the then Vice President of India came on a state visit to Guyana in 2006, President Mr Bharrat Jagdeo made a state visit to India in 2003 and in 2004; President Jagdeo was the Chief Guest at the 2nd Pravasi Bharatiya Divas celebrations and received the Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Award, Prime Minister Mr Samuel Hinds visited India October 2012, President Donald Ramotar visited India in January-February 2013 and again in January 2015 to be the Chief Guest of Pravasi Bharatiya Divas held at Gujarat, President David Granger visited India in March 2018.

Indo Guyanese have made significant contribution to the development of Guyana. After the emancipation of slaves throughout British Caribbean territories in 1838, some 239,149 Indians arrived in what was then British Guiana to service the sugar plantations as indentured labourers. Most of them came from agricultural backgrounds in the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh, Bengal and Madras. By 1911, the Indians were the largest ethnic group in Guyana, followed by Afro-Guyanese, Portuguese, Amerindians, Europeans and Chinese. Between 1838 and 1917 over 500 ship voyages with 238,909 indentured Indian immigrants came to Guyana, while just 75,898 of them or their children returned.

The vast majority came from the Hindustani (or Hindi) speaking areas of North India. The most popular dialect spoken was Bhojpuri (spoken in east Uttar Pradesh and west Bihar), followed by Awadhi (spoken in central Uttar Pradesh). Nearly 62% of the immigrants came from districts that are now part of the State of Uttar Pradesh; 21% from districts that are now part of Bihar state; 6% were from pre-partitioned Bengal; 3% from what are today Orissa and Jharkhand states; 3% from what is today Tamil Nadu state; 3% from Central India, 1% from pre-partitioned Punjab and the remaining 1% from the rest of India. (96.8% of all the Indian Immigrants to Guyana left the port of Calcutta in North India, and 3.2% from the port of Madras in South India). The religious breakdown was 85% Hindu, 15% Muslims. Indenture documents showed as Hindu by caste consisted of 11% Brahmin, Bhumihar, Chatri, Rajput and Thakur castes; 1% merchant or writer castes; 30% medium agricultural castes; 9% artisan castes; 2% petty trading castes; 2% fishermen and boatmen castes; 25% menial or dalit castes; 3% Hindus who were Madrasis; 2% Hill Coolies or Tribals.

In order to augment their meagre earnings, they engaged in farming and later their offspring did not only continue but expanded into large scale agriculture. Today, they play essential roles in the economic, political and cultural life of the country. The Indian presence has immeasurably enriched the Guyanese nation. Descendants of indentured labourers continue to contribute to the cultural, economic and political life of the country. The contributions of Indian indentured immigrants and their descendants to the building of Guyana is always lauded, as the country is now richer, culturally, socially and politically because of these contributions. Indian indentured immigrants played an important role in the transformation of the economy. They turned their indentureship into citizenship. From an economic point of view, Indians helped to transform the country that they adopted, what was then British Guiana.

Indian skills in paddy and vegetable-farming, coconut-cultivation and cattle-rearing; and their skills as boatmen, charcoal-burners, goldsmiths, fishermen, hucksters, milk and sweetmeat vendors, shopkeepers and tailors enriched the Guyanese society and its entire economy. These are skills they brought from their homelands. Guyana is richer now with Indian immigration. The Indians also helped to transform their own lives and the lives of other immigrants who came to British Guiana, through their resistance to abuse, brutality, confinement and domination of plantation life.

Indians, while a docile people, stood up for their rights and by standing up for their rights, they helped to preserve the rights for future generations. The political footprint of Indian Guyanese was made more prominent through the present day politicians, judges, educators, Solicitors, lawyers, Ambassadors, etc.

Among the Indos who excelled were Dr Cheddi Jagan who became the most popular leader in Guyana and can also be singled out for his role in politics, Sir Shridath Ramphal who was Commonwealth Secretary General for 15 years, in the field of business, trade and commerce, Dr Yesu Persaud who celebrated his 90th birthday recently, was honoured by at least three universities, and in the field of sports, Rohan Kanhai, Shivnarine Chanderpaul and Narsh Sarwan stands out as outstanding cricketers. President David Granger also penned about Indians in his book titled “Indian presence”.

Game of cricket and Indian cuisine are the other great contributions of Indians to Guyana which also binds the two countries intimately. With the launching of Indian Premier League, a number of Guyanese players are contracted to play in India.



India believes in a shared future, indivisible future of this world. Sharing of capacities leads to formation of professional and economic inter-linkages which in turn generate the ecosystem for co-creation of mutually beneficial policies and technologies. An economically and technologically connected world helps building bridges of friendship and camaraderie for lasting peace and prosperity. Guyana is an important partner for India in the area of development partnership cooperation and our cooperation with Guyana is purely driven by Guyana’s requirements and its priorities.

An Education Exchange Programme was signed in August 2003 between the Governments of India and Guyana. This provides for grant of scholarships, establishment of Chairs of Studies, Academic Exchanges and other arrangements in the field of education. The cooperation between the two countries in sharing developmental experience is mainly routed through the Indian Technical & Economic Cooperation (ITEC) under which 50 scholarships are granted to Guyana every year in various courses. Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation programme popularly known as ITEC was launched in 1964 as a bilateral programme of assistance of the Government of India.

Scholarships are offered for short term courses of 3 weeks to 6 weeks, in 1250 courses for skill development, in the fields of Hydrology, Engineering, Cyber Technology, Management, Education, Agriculture, Horticulture, Banking and Financial Services, Environment Protection, Public Management, and many more. More than 500 Guyanese have been trained under ITEC scheme in various institutions of

repute in India. Besides, some experts are also deputed to Guyana from time to time on request in specified areas of activity such as Meteorology, Transmission and Broadcasting, Legal Experts, Disaster Management, Coconut, Spices, Institutional Development.

The Government of India offers various scholarships and schemes for Guyanese nationals to study or get trained in India or to visit India for pilgrimage. Several other scholarships are also available to Guyanese to pursue long-term courses, to get acquainted with India and to learn Indian music, dance, etc. in India. India continues to empower Guyanese and provide services in the area of Information Technology, Engineering, Agriculture (Rice and Sugar), Research and Development, Medicine, among others. In Guyana today, there are many Indo-Guyanese youths who returned from India with Master and Doctorate Degrees and are serving the country in various fields.

Scholarships under the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) are also offered for study in India for Undergraduate, Post-Graduate and higher courses. ICCR also offers courses for study of music, dance, painting, sculpture and other forms of fine arts in India. Guyanese nationals have been availing of these scholarships every year on a regular basis. The other schemes offered by the Government of India is the Know India Programme known as KIP for the young people to visit and feel India, and the pilgrimage tour of India called Pravasi Teerth Darshan Yojana (PTDY) for elderly people.

With the objective of strengthening and broadening their relations in the cultural field, India and Guyana concluded a Cultural Agreement in 1974 which came into force on 31 March 1977. Pursuant to this agreement, the first Cultural Exchange Programme (CEP) for 1994, 1995 and 1996 between the two countries was signed in 1993 in New Delhi during the visit of the then Guyanese President Cheddi Jagan. The current CEP for 2007, 2008 and 2009 facilitates visit of cultural troupes from India to Guyana; exchange of Archivists and records of mutual interest, training of Guyanese officials in Archives Management by the National Archives of India, exchange of exhibitions between National Art Galleries of the two countries.

An MoU on Cultural Exchange Programme 2018-2021 was signed on 31 January 2018 during the visit to India by Second Vice President and Minister of Foreign Affairs Carl B. Greenidge. Cultural troupes from India under the CEP, and outside the CEP, have been visiting and performing in different parts of Guyana from time to time. Indian Cultural Centre (now known as Swami Vivekanand Cultural Centre - SVCC) in Georgetown was established in 1972 with the objective of strengthening cultural relations and mutual understanding between India and Guyana and their peoples. The Centre runs regular classes in Yoga, music and Kathak dance. The teachers and students of SVCC participate in events by the local community on culture, mythology and works of eminent scholars and authors.

Apart from running regular classes in Yoga, music and Kathak dance, the Centre in recent past introduced teaching of Indian Folk Dances which have become very popular with young girls. In furtherance of expansion of its activities, the Centre has been imparting training in Vocal and Harmonium. Due to strong presence of Indian diaspora and PIO among Guyanese, Indian films and songs, especially Bollywood films, are very popular here. In fulfilment of their aspirations and wishes, the Centre also on monthly basis organizes screening of Indian films in its auditorium which gets admiration from one and all. The multifarious activities of the SVCC helped the Guyanese to maintain their deep cultural ties with mother India.

Apart from our traditional forms of development assistance like Lines of Credit, Grant assistance, High Impact Community Development, technical consultancy and capacity building, humanitarian assistance, disaster relief etc. the Government of India have consciously tried to venture into new sectors, improve delivery, innovate on existing services, bring into the fold new ways of doing things and also leverage other forms of partnership.

Throughout history, India has always partaken with others our knowledge in science, mathematics, astronomy, philosophy, music, the arts - indeed every aspect of human activity. We also shared the experience and unique tools of our freedom struggle which inspired many countries to throw away the yoke of colonialism.

India's commitment to shared prosperity has guided our development assistance endeavours. India recognizes the mutually reinforcing and inter-dependent development paths that countries take/taken not just as a normative imperative but as an enlightened choice. Just as India's development is good for the world as a factor for peace, prosperity and stability, we believe that the development of other countries, including our neighbours, is also good for us. This is clearly visible in our choices and actions as we pursue cooperation with our partners.

Our multifaceted bonds with Africa have been reinforced by the Ten Guiding Principles set out by Prime Minister Modi in 2018. These guiding principles may well also be a template guiding India's development engagement with the rest of the developing world. Prime Minister's vision is for our development partnership to be guided by partner's priorities; on terms that will be reasonable and comfortable for the partners; build local capacity, create local opportunities and unleash the potential of the Youth and their aspirations; liberate the potential of the country; open our markets and make trade and investment easier; harness India's digital revolution to enhance education, health, public services, financial inclusion etc; improve agriculture; address climate change; combat terrorism and extremism; keep oceans open and free and strive together for a representative and democratic global order.

It is therefore self evident that any initiative that constrains the development space for a partner country cannot be part of "development diplomacy". Any initiative that contributes to further indebtedness cannot be part of "development diplomacy". And any initiative that seeks to impose conditionalities cannot come under the rubric of "development diplomacy". Our assistance to a friendly country is with no strings attached. Our support is based on the traditional belief of an elder brother helping a younger brother to make him strong and self-sufficient, self-reliant. It is not exploitation or debt trapping as practiced by some other countries in the world in the garb of developmental assistance. Sustainability is the touch stone for development cooperation and now we have the SDGs, which give us a useful reference framework to build on.

Apart from the capacity building training, India is deeply involved in partnership cooperation with Guyana by providing developmental assistance under the Indian Development and Economic Assistance Scheme (IDEAS) for use in mutually accepted designated fields for various projects. These projects include East Bank Demerara East Coast Demerara Link Road project under a Line of Credit of US\$ 50 million; Supply of Ocean Going Ferry with a Grant of US\$ 8 million and an LoC of US\$ 10 million for using in the North Western region as well as South Western region of Guyana; Upgrading of 3 Regional Hospitals at West Demerara, Suddie and Bartica with an LoC of US\$ 17.5 million; Supply of Fixed and Mobile Pumps with US\$ 4 million LoC; and Supply of Pilot Scale Rice Husk Gasifier valued at around US\$ 160,000 to be supplied by the Ministry of New & Renewable Energy. Some of these projects have already been executed and some are on-going projects at various stages of implementation. We have also established a Centre of Excellence in Information Technology in Georgetown. This Centre of Excellence with 1 Master Trainer and 2 Trainers from India can provide IT training upto 500 people in a year. The total value of the on-going projects is US\$ 81.5 million (Line of Credit) and US\$ 9 million (grant). Government of India had also financed and constructed a Cricket stadium in Providence, Georgetown in 2006 with a Grant of US\$ 6 million and a concessional Line of Credit (LoC) of US\$ 19 million. Installing Traffic Signaling System at 50 junctions in Georgetown at a cost of US\$ 2.1 million was executed under Line of Credit funding extended by the Government of India in July 2007. Government of India extended a Line of Credit of US\$ 4 million in May 2011 for the design, manufacture and supply of fixed and mobile drainage pumps, which would help to improve and manage the effects of climate change on Guyana's coast.

All these projects will not only help develop the country's economy and improve people's livelihood, but also become a major driving force for the friendly cooperation between the two countries. India is considered by Guyana as a strategic cooperative partner with sincere mutual assistance and ever-lasting friendship built upon a long tradition of friendly exchanges. Recent years has seen fruitful cooperation under different projects and programmes, particularly IDEAS. India expects to carry forward the traditional friendship, strengthen political mutual trust, dovetail development strategies and bring bilateral relations to new heights.



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