

# Concept Note

## **Sarnami-Hindustani Legacy & Beyond: Preserving Identity in a Changing World**

The Indian diaspora, shaped by migration histories, colonial legacies, and cultural resilience, has played a pivotal role in shaping multicultural societies across the globe. Among these communities, the **Sarnami-Hindustani diaspora** holds a unique place, tracing its roots to the indentured labourers from India who were brought to Suriname under Dutch rule in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Over generations, this community has preserved its heritage while also adapting to new cultural landscapes, particularly in the Netherlands, where a significant Sarnami-Hindustani population resides today.

In an era of globalization, preserving this rich history and identity has become more crucial than ever. The younger generations, navigating between their ancestral heritage and modern realities, are redefining their cultural expressions through **music, literature, performing arts, and digital platforms**. The challenge lies in ensuring that the voices of the Sarnami-Hindustani community continue to be heard, valued, and passed on to future generations.

### **Webinar Objectives**

This international webinar, hosted by the Pravasi Setu Foundation, seeks to:

- **Explore the Historical Journey:** Reflect on the migration, struggles, and cultural evolution of the Sarnami-Hindustani diaspora.
- **Showcase Cultural and Artistic Contributions:** Highlight efforts in music, literature, and performing arts that have helped sustain and promote the identity of the diaspora.
- **Examine Diaspora Identity in a Modern Context:** Discuss how younger generations balance heritage and contemporary global influences.
- **Strengthen Cultural Bridges:** Facilitate dialogue on transnational collaborations that promote the rich heritage of the Indian diaspora.

### **Chief Guest: Mrs. Mahesvari Autar**

We are honoured to welcome **Mrs. Mahesvari Autar** as the Chief Guest for this event. A **dynamic cultural leader, media personality, and the founder of DesiYUP**, Mahesvari has been at the forefront of **promoting Indian classical and fusion music in the Netherlands**. Her work focuses on fostering deeper cultural connections between India and the diaspora, with a special emphasis on the **Sarnami-Hindustani experience**.

Her passion for preserving the stories and voices of the Indian diaspora, particularly those with roots in Suriname, has been evident through her extensive work in curating artistic and cultural events, including the **Endless India Festival 2023**, which commemorated **150 years of Hindustani immigration to Suriname**. She has also developed **theatrical concepts blending Indian performing arts with contemporary social themes**, ensuring that these narratives reach wider audiences.

Beyond her work in music and theatre, Mahesvari Autar is also a **published author**, with her children's book *Radha's First Concert* serving as an early introduction to Indian classical music for young readers. Her initiatives actively promote **diasporic identity, gender representation, and cultural inclusion**, making her an influential voice in the preservation and reinvention of the Indo-Surinamese heritage.

### Event Chair

The session will be chaired by **Prof. Bandana Jha, Chairperson of the Centre of Indian Languages, Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU)**. With her expertise in **Indian languages and diaspora studies**, she will guide the discussions, ensuring an enriching exchange of ideas on cultural preservation and identity.

### Special Remarks

**Dr. Rashmi Rani Anand, Assistant Professor at the Centre for African Studies, JNU**, will deliver the **special remarks**, bringing her expertise in diaspora and transnational identity studies to the discussion.

### Key Discussion Points

1. **Cultural Evolution and Identity:** Understanding how **Sarnami-Hindustani identity** has been shaped over generations and how younger generations are redefining their cultural heritage.
2. **The Role of Art, Music & Literature in Diaspora Identity:** How cultural initiatives, **theatre, books, and music**, like those championed by Mahesvari Autar, serve as powerful tools for preserving and transmitting diasporic heritage.
3. **Global Collaborations and Representation:** The role of **diaspora-led platforms and organisations** in ensuring that Indo-Surinamese heritage is recognized in international spaces.
4. **Preserving Heritage for Future Generations:** Strategies to **engage youth in cultural preservation**, including digital storytelling, education, and artistic expression.

### Event Formalities

- **Introduction of the Webinar and Guests:** Mr. Nilotpall Kant, PhD Candidate, Centre for Latin American Studies, JNU
- **Formal Vote of Thanks:** Ms. Pratibha Poonia, PhD Candidate, Centre for African Studies, JNU

## Conclusion

This webinar will provide a platform to celebrate the **resilience, creativity, and cultural dynamism** of the Sarnami-Hindustani community. As the diaspora continues to evolve, it is essential to honour and document its contributions, ensuring that its legacy is preserved **beyond borders and generations**.

## Event Details



**Date:** 28th March 2025




**Time:** 3:00 PM IST | 10:30 AM CET




**Organized by:** Pravasi Setu Foundation

Join us for an insightful discussion on the **Sarnami-Hindustani legacy, identity, and future**.

## Tentative Schedule for the Webinar

 **Date:** 28th March 2025


 **Duration:** 1 hour 30 minutes (90 minutes)

 **Platform:** Online

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 **3:00 PM – 3:05 PM IST | 10:30 AM – 10:35 AM CET**

 **Opening & Welcome Remarks**

 **Speaker:** Mr. Nilotpal Kant, PhD Candidate, Centre for Latin American Studies, JNU

- Welcoming participants and introducing the Pravasi Setu Foundation.
  - Brief overview of the event's significance.
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 **3:05 PM – 3:10 PM IST | 10:35 AM – 10:40 AM CET**

 **Introduction of the Event & Theme**

 **Speaker:** Prof. Bandana Jha, Chairperson, Centre of Indian Languages, JNU

- Contextualizing the webinar theme: *Sarnami-Hindustani Legacy & Beyond: Preserving Identity in a Changing World*.
  - Highlighting the importance of preserving diaspora identities and cultural contributions.
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 **3:10 PM – 3:30 PM IST | 10:40 AM – 11:00 AM CET**

 **Keynote Address by Chief Guest**

 **Speaker:** Mrs. Mahesvari Autar, Founder – DesiYUP


- **Topic:** The Role of Arts, Music, and Theatre in Diaspora Identity Preservation.
  - Insights on Indo-Surinamese heritage and cultural preservation efforts.
  - How diasporic storytelling strengthens global cultural connections.
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 **3:30 PM – 3:40 PM IST | 11:00 AM – 11:10 AM CET**

 **Special Remarks**

 **Speaker:** Dr. Rashmi Rani Anand, Assistant Professor, Centre for African Studies, JNU

- Broader reflections on **transnational identity, heritage, and representation** of Indian diasporas.
  - Comparative insights from African and Latin American diasporic experiences.
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 **3:40 PM – 4:05 PM IST | 11:10 AM – 11:35 AM CET**

 **Panel Discussion & Reflections**

 **Panelists:** Mrs. Mahesvari Autar & Prof. Bandana Jha

 Moderated by Prof. Bandana Jha

- Exploring **challenges and strategies** for cultural preservation.
  - Discussing **community-driven initiatives** for identity reinforcement.
  - The role of **education and artistic collaborations** in preserving diasporic legacies.
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 **4:05 PM – 4:30 PM IST | 11:35 AM – 12:00 PM CET**

 **Q&A Session (Open Floor)**

 Moderated by Prof. Bandana Jha

- **Interactive session** with the audience.
  - Questions from scholars, students, and cultural enthusiasts on the topic.
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 **4:30 PM – 4:35 PM IST | 12:00 PM – 12:05 PM CET**

 **Formal Vote of Thanks**

 **Speaker:** Ms. Pratibha Poonia, PhD Candidate, Centre for African Studies, JNU

- Expressing gratitude to speakers, organizers, and attendees.
  - Concluding remarks on the significance of continued discussions on diaspora identity.
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