

# GERMAN

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# NEWS

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# India in Germany

**India is present in today's Germany, – much more and deeper than through the recent popularity of Bollywood movies. A growing and successful Indian community has become a vital part of Germany. Other Indians have lived in Germany for some time and started their careers through studies in Germany where over 250,000 foreign students are enrolled, and research is thriving. More and more Indian tourists are visiting incredible Germany.**



## The growing Indian Community in Germany makes a Difference

The model on the brochure looks like a South Indian temple: the vibrant colours, the deities, the architecture. And indeed, it is a South Indian temple dedicated to Lord Ganesha that will soon become reality in one of the biggest parks of Berlin. A huge Raja Gopuram built as per the guidelines of the traditional shastras, the canonical treatises on architecture, will tower above the Hasenheide in the heart of the German capital.

Dr Lugani, chairman of the Sri Ganesha Hindu Temple Committee, is on a fund-raising spree in New Delhi, hoping to find sponsors for the estimated costs of almost €1 million. Construction for what will become the second biggest Hindu temple in Europe started on 28 October 2007 but “still we need every Euro,” says Lugani. For the son of a Sanskrit scholar, who strongly believes in predestination, building this temple means performing a task of his life. A place of worship for Berlin’s estimated 6,000 Hindus, the Sri Ganesha Temple can also be seen as a symbol for the growing Indian

community in Germany and its recognition by the society. “I want this temple to be a place for intercultural exchange and open to everybody,” says Lugani.

The community of Indians and persons of Indian origin in Germany is probably the country’s most successful group of immigrants. Highly qualified engineers and IT specialists have flocked in great numbers in recent years. Today, Indians account for the highest incomes among immigrants and most of them are professionals in fields such as medicine, science and business.

“When I came to Germany 35 years ago to finish my studies,” remembers Bengali journalist Pankaj Chattopadhyay, “there were hardly any jobs and when a friend asked me ‘why don’t you join me in Germany,’ I took the opportunity to leave.” First, he did not intend to stay for long, “but whenever I thought about going back to India, Germany became more and more interesting,” he says. The last such occasion was



the fall of the Berlin wall. As a journalist writing for Bengali newspapers, he felt blessed to experience this historical event. With the recent economic boom in India and more German companies investing there, he has explored a new profession. Chattopadhyay works as an intercultural trainer now, which became his main occupation. "I am very happy with this development, because I can pass on my lifelong experiences with two cultures to others," he says. It was also in Germany, that he met his wife Madhuri, a classical Indian musician, who was on a concert tour in Europe. As an artist, she sees many benefits in living in Berlin. "I really like to experiment and I believe, I would not have gotten to that extent into Jazz, Fusion and Oriental music if I had stayed back in India," she says. The violinist often plays with Indian tabla players touring through Germany, and she teaches Indian music as well. "I like Germany, I have my freedom here and it is getting more cosmopolitan," says Madhuri who braves the German climate by mostly wearing saris.

Nowadays IT specialists come to live in Germany. One of them is Sanjay Tambe, who initially went to the US after completing his first degree as an IT engineer in Bangalore. But he did not like it there. "I started a trainee programme with IBM in New Jersey and half of my college friends were there," the 41-year-old consultant remembers. "The strange thing is, in the US minorities tend to stick to each other and not mingle with the rest of the society," he recalls. "To me it made no sense to live exactly like in India – just on a different continent."

Given the opportunity to go to Munich with IBM, he grabbed it – and immediately fell in love with it. "It's not only the beer," he jokes. "The European mentality is closer to the Indian. I always found American culture somewhat superficial, whereas I had no trouble integrating myself in Munich." The young professional, who has started his own consulting company by now, dived into the cultural scene of Germany by becoming a DJ for many popular clubs from Munich to Frankfurt. Together with friends, he founded *Munich Masala*, a non-profit forum that organizes cultural events with a South Asian flavour all over Germany.

Amongst others, they have created what can be called the recent Bollywood hype in Germany. *Munich Masala's*

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*Photos: (page 40/41 from top left) A Hindu priest in Germany; Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Chancellor Angela Merkel at the Hanover Fair, Germany 2006; Bharati, a musical with Indian music and dance traditions, on tour in Germany in 2008; Ravindra Gujjula, born in Hyderabad, has been mayor of Altlandsberg in east Germany for the past 15 years; the Indian dance group Triveni in Germany; (left page) a Hindu temple in Germany – Sri Kamadchi Ampal Temple in Hamm; (right) Ranga Yogeshwar experiencing weightlessness.*



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monthly Bollywood party in the Bavarian capital is always packed with people and they could easily offer it once a week, “but none of us has enough time. At the end of the day, we have other jobs also,” says Sanjay Tambe who originates from Pune. 50 percent of the guests are Germans and the others are a mixture of Indians, Turks and other ethnic groups. “Keeping the concept open to everybody,” is *Munich Masala*’s philosophy – and it works.

Sanjay Tambe is convinced, that the success of *Munich Masala* also reflects the different attitude of second generation immigrants in Germany. “For the first generation it is still very important from which part of India they are, to which community they belong,” he says. “The second generation tends to see themselves simply as Germans of Indian origin.”

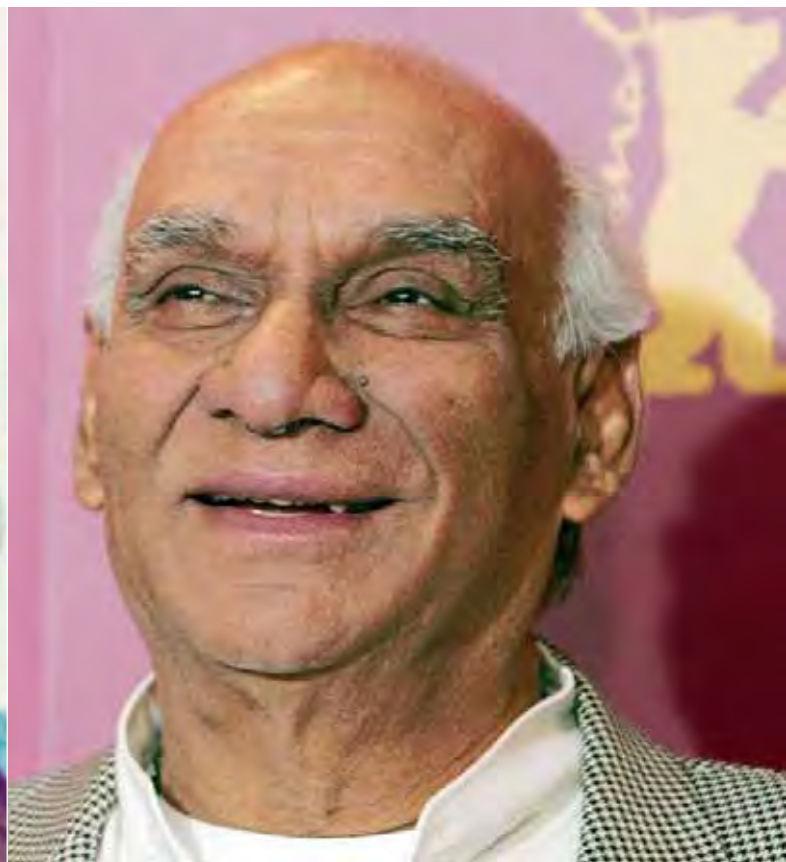
33-year-old Josef Winkler would subscribe to this. He is one of two members of the German parliament who have Indian roots. However, born and raised in the South Western city of Koblenz, he feels thoroughly German. “Of course, it makes a difference to know that half of your family lives in India. As a member of parliament, you become some sort of focal point for Indians in Germany,” he says. Despite his South Indian looks, the tall man with the German name never faced any prejudices. “Maybe I was lucky, but I neither had problems at school nor in politics.” Sometimes people are surprised to see a dark-skinned German MP. But he attributes this rather to the contrast between his outer

appearance and his utterly German name. “People don’t expect it,” he says.

The research of Urmila Goel, herself a German born social scientist of Indian origin, comes to similar results. Goel is a Visiting Scholar at the University of Bergen in Norway and works on a project about “ethnic identity” of second generation Indians in Germany. “They live like their parents in a mainly German environment and differ like them by skin colour, names and some family traditions. However, they are also different from their parents as Germany is their first home. This double otherness brings about a specific Indo-German culture and identity. Today Germans of Indian origin establish their own spaces,” observes Goel.

Mona Sharma is a well-known television star in Germany. Born in 1973 in Delhi to a German mother and an Indian father, she moved to Germany at the age of three. While studying in Cologne she was spotted by a talent scout and quickly became a star in the upcoming German stand-up comedy scene. Starring with famous comedians her TV show “Switch” made her a popular public person in Germany. “Emotionally I feel very much Indian,” she says, while she is married to a German with one daughter. But there are ambiguities that could not be overcome easily. “Throughout my childhood, I visited my father in Defence Colony in Delhi in the summer holidays, but I could never behave like a real Indian girl,” she remembers, “I do not even speak Hindi!” Questions about identity are central topics of her life and a source for creativity. “Carrying

Photos: (left to right) theindian.net/Boris Loehrer; Reuters; H. Schulze



two nationalities is an enormous wealth,” she says. It might even contribute to success.

Another well-known Indian in Germany is Ranga Yogeshwar, a physicist and host of some of the most popular science shows on German television. Bright and handsome, the 48-year-old father of four incorporates the new image of India in Germany in many ways. “The view of India has changed totally in the last few years,” he says. “When I was a child, people only associated Mother Teresa and the Tiger of Eshnapur with India,” he recalls. “Today it is the booming economy and the IT industry. But both images are wrong. India has so much more to offer.” Born in Bangalore, Ranga moved with his family to his mother’s homeland Luxembourg when he was eleven years old. “My mother tongue is a mixture of Hindi, English, Kannada and Luxembourgian,” he laughs. He still has a Luxembourgian passport and first moved to Germany to study physics.

Sabrina Setlur is a star in Germany. Already in 1988 the rapper and daughter of Indian immigrants in Frankfurt, was elected “the most erotic women” by readers of the biggest German tabloid *Bild*. She rose to stardom among a wider public a few years later when she became the girl-friend of German world tennis star Boris Becker. Sabrina Setlur, however, strongly disapproves of being defined through this relationship. “We were together just for a very short time and there is no reason to hook my whole life history to Boris Becker,” she says. She rather prefers to be perceived as an artist in her own right.

Business is another area where Indians prosper in Germany. Dr Seshu Bhagavatula is a division manager with car maker Daimler in Stuttgart. He chose to study electrical engineering in Stuttgart because he was attracted by the international aerospace projects that Stuttgart University carried out at that time together with NASA. Daimler became a somewhat natural employer after finishing his dissertation. He has been in Germany since 22 years and is married to a German. “What I really like about Germany is that it combines history with modernity, tradition with innovation,” he says. He loves the romantic, historical old centres of German cities and always almost misses them when traveling abroad. Bhagavatula, who headed Daimler’s Research Centre in Bangalore for several years, has no intention of returning to India. “My family is half German and we feel at home in both worlds,” he says.

The same applies to Mohan Murti, head of Trevira in Germany, the popular German brand that was recently taken over by Indian Reliance Industries. Out of 18 years in Europe, Murti has spent 12 in Germany and leaves no doubt about which country his heart beats for. “I was in Paris and Zurich before, but Germany was the most beautiful and fulfilling experience for me,” he says. He has bought a house near Frankfurt and while his wife is from Kerala, he says: “My

*Photos: (from left) Mona Sharma, an Indian brought up in Germany, is a successful comedian on German TV; Indian film maker Yash Chopra was a member of the Jury of the Berlinale 2006; “Bollywood: The Show” which premiered in Berlin on 5 October 2007.*



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children are totally German.” Trained as a lawyer he worked as representative of the Indian Industry at the Federation of German Industry (BDI) and as a consultant for Deutsche Bank, before Mukesh Ambani asked him to join Reliance.

Although Murti would love to stay in Germany, he says that time will come when he and his wife might go back to India. “Our parents are getting old and somebody has to take care of them,” says the 50-year-old manager. But his children will stay on in Germany. “Germany has done much good to us,” says Murti. “The country is tolerant and friendly towards foreigners. And Germans are extremely reliable. Once you have made friends, they stay forever.”



Ravindra Gujjula lives in eastern Germany where some infamous attacks on foreigners by right wing hooligans took place. “However, nobody has to be afraid to come to eastern Germany,” says Ravindra Gujjula. He is the only mayor of Indian origin in Germany, elected in the small town of Altlandsberg in the state of Brandenburg near Berlin and re-elected several times. A member of the governing Social Democratic Party (SPD), Gujjula is convinced that dedicated work for the people in his constituency won him the confidence of the electorate. He considers it as one of his special tasks to help immigrants. “Whenever a foreigner moves to Altlandsberg, I contact him and do my best to help him integrate into the community,” says the father of two who came to the former GDR as a student 33 years ago.

Gujjula believes in integration and sometimes feels that not everybody in Germany takes it seriously enough. “Germany has to acknowledge that it has become a country of immigration. One out of eight people living here are either immigrants or have a background of migration,” says Gujjula, who took on German citizenship in 1993 and is married to a German. Politics is running in his family. His father was a member of parliament in Hyderabad and his mother head of one of the biggest women’s organisations in India. Gujjula’s own political career still hasn’t reached its peak, as it seems. Last month, the 53-year-old doctor became a member of parliament in the federal state of Brandenburg.

The Indian doctor always felt welcome in Germany. In fact Gujjula’s entrance into politics was blocked in GDR by functionaries, who told him that he cannot represent his district as a foreigner. After filing a complaint with the Communist party, he lost his job at a hospital. But luckily one year later, the Berlin wall came down and a new chapter of his life was opened. “I know the best of both Germanys. I am very much at home here,” says Ravindra Gujjula.

Aparna Das feels the same. Germany is her country and home – something she had never even thought of when she came to Germany in 1957 just to visit her husband who was finishing his PhD at Braunschweig University. However, what seemed to be only a limited stay developed into a career and a life in Germany. Arabindo Das became a leading scientist at the German Aerospace Center and a professor at university. Aparna followed her own career and became an interpreter. Their children were born and grew up in Germany. Aparna and Arabindo Das are retired now – in Germany. ■

*Photos: (from bottom) Indian movie star Shah Rukh Khan is greeted by young German fans in Hamburg; Indian Maestro Zubin Mehta was Bavarian Music Director from 1998 to 2006. In 2005 Zubin Mehta and the Bavarian Philharmonic Orchestra performed in Chennai and New Delhi. More than 14,000 people attended the concerts.*