



HINDU SWAYAMSEVAK SANGH USA



Annual Report

OCTOBER 2023 - SEPTEMBER 2024



32
States



169
Cities



233
Centers
(Shakhas)

The Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS) is a non-profit organization that promotes the universal values of Hindu Dharma, such as humanity, equality, inclusivity, and serving the needy.

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President's Message

Namaste,

Happy Vijayadashami to all of you! On this auspicious occasion, I am pleased to present the accomplishments of Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh USA (HSS) for 2023-24.

I want to begin by honoring our Mananeeya Sanghachalak (Hon. President) of America Zone, Professor Ved Prakash Nanda, who passed away on January 1st, 2024. His remarkable contributions to the Hindu American cause and the Sangh till his last breath, will continue to inspire us karyakartas (volunteers) to work with dedication and conviction.

Following the outcomes of our 2023 strategic planning meeting, many karyakartas from the national team traveled across the country to conduct follow up meetings. These efforts have sparked new ideas and opportunities for the growth of our shakhas. We are already witnessing increased activities in areas without regular shakhas. Leadership skills through workshops have enhanced our organizational and outreach capabilities.

The Shri Ram Praan Pratishtha event in Ayodhya was celebrated across the U.S. with active participation from swayamsevaks and sevikas. Our social and charitable efforts, including the Sewa Diwali food drive and the new "Vidyadaan" back-to-school charity initiative, resulted in donating over half a million pounds of food and supporting nearly 2,400 students in public schools.

We continued expanding interfaith and community outreach by celebrating Hindu, Sikh, Black American, and Women's history and heritage, as well as events like Guru Vandana with teachers and Raksha Bandhan with first responders. Our participation in Martin Luther King Jr. Day celebrations and 4th of July parades also grew, and we hosted the Darshana exhibition to educate the public on Hindu Dharma.

Through our activities inside and outside shakha, we are building a strong, value-based generation of Americans, committed to creating a peaceful world.

Dr. Vinod Ambastha

President, Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh USA

Vijaya Dashami

HSS USA, established in 1989 on the auspicious day of Vijaya Dashami, commemorates this significant Hindu festival with enthusiasm. During this festival, HSS volunteers proudly showcase diverse activities undertaken by children, teenagers, young adults, youth, and families in their respective centers throughout the year. These activities encompass yoga postures, Indian traditional martial art (“Niyuddh”), the melodious band (“Ghosh”), singing, harmonious choruses, and engaging games. With over 9,000 participants at 49 locations spanning all regional HSS centers, the Vijaya Dashami celebrations are a grand spectacle. Esteemed community leaders from various organizations, including interfaith community groups, are invited as chief guests to these events.



Surya Namaskar Yajna

HSS organized its 17th annual “Surya Namaskar Yajna” also known as “Health for Humanity Yogathon” in January, 2024. This 16-day event, aimed at raising public health awareness and focused on the practice of Surya Namaskar (Sun Salutation), a yoga routine known for its physical and mental benefits. Over 15,585 participants from 36 states completed 925,051 repetitions of the Sun Salutation, with significant participation of schools, temples, and community centers. The initiative also received endorsements from elected officials, emphasizing its community impact.

15,585+

Participants across the country

36

Number of States

35

Number of Schools

4,640

Total participants (students + staff)

925,051

Surya Namaskars collectively performed



Teachers' Appreciation Week

Guru Vandana

72	22	82	8,656	2,000
Events	States	Chapters	Participants	Educators

HSS held “Guru Vandana” events in more than 82 chapters across the nation during Teachers’ Appreciation Week and National Teachers’ Day in May, honoring over 2,000 educators. These events, organized by Hindu students and their families, express respect and gratitude toward teachers, aligning with Hindu traditions where a guru is revered as a spiritual guide.

The students, showcased musical and dance performances, cultural presentations, and symbolic gestures of appreciation like flowers and gifts. Major celebrations took place in states like California, Texas, Illinois, New Jersey, and Ohio, featuring prominent guests such as local mayors, school superintendents, and administrators. Community leaders praised the Guru Vandana events for fostering respect for teachers and enhancing cultural diversity, awareness, and inclusivity in schools.

This initiative aims to foster a culture of gratitude and collaboration among students, teachers, and communities.



Raksha Bandhan

HSS observes the Hindu festival of Raksha Bandhan, which symbolizes the bond of friendship and shared responsibilities of safeguarding one another by exchanging a thread known as “Rakhi.” HSS commemorates this festival as Universal Oneness Day, typically occurring in August or early September. During this time, volunteers from HSS across various states and cities visit local first responders, civic authorities, and elected officials. These officials appreciate the recognition of their public service in this distinctive manner. Furthermore, special Raksha Bandhan events are organized at local community gatherings. This year, HSS volunteers also celebrated Raksha Bandhan with faith leaders at the Parliament of World Religions held in Chicago.



Selfless Service

Sewa



HSS is dedicated to sewa, or selfless service, to those in need. Volunteers of all ages across the US participate in various Sewa activities, including Adopt-a-Highway, school backpack donations, food drives, and more.

In Peoria, IL, HSS volunteers organized a successful book fair for the third year in a row. This fair provided needy children with easy access to books.

HSS also coordinated Sewa Diwali, a major collaborative project involving numerous Hindu faith organizations collecting non-perishable food items. This food was distributed to food pantries, homeless shelters, worship houses, and schools. The Arizona division of HSS received Congressional recognition from Debbie Lasko Honorary Congresswoman from Arizona, District 8 for the Sewa Diwali food drive organized for benefitting the Navajo tribes at Flagstaff.

These initiatives highlight HSS' commitment to making a positive impact on the community through Sewa.



Balagokulam

The Balagokulam yearly syllabus, implemented for six years, has provided a unified approach for all regions, offering shikshaks value-based content for after-shakha activities. It engages children ages 5-12, offering a traditional reading experience while serving as a resource for outreach to new families. The project will continue with two more issues, culminating in an eight-year series, to be completed by 2025 in celebration of 100 years of Sangh work.

The "Know My Hindu Values" program for HSS engaged children in Balagokulam sessions through various interactive activities, such as chanting, researching, and creative projects. It helped all regions strengthen their shakhas by providing timely training for shikshaks and outreach to local communities. The program featured consistent sessions nationwide, with children receiving a Ramayana board game as participation prize.



Kishore

High school students, known as “Kishores,” are the most active members of HSS, participating in Shakha activities, planning weekly events, and contributing to regional programs, both virtually and in-person. Notably, they were invited by Temple City, CA, to join the 80th parade post-COVID, organized a Hindu Sports Fest in Texas, and led national initiatives like Surya Namaskar during the Health for Humanity Yogathon. They also conducted an online national Hanuman Chalisa chant, launched a Dharma Internship Program, and held five Kishore training sessions. This summer, 23 teen Vistaraks dedicated 2-4 weeks for service across states.



Hindu YUVA



Hindu YUVA is expanding its presence on university and high school campuses, focusing on promoting Hindu Dharma through character development, leadership, and community service. The organization celebrates Hindu festivals like Holi, Diwali, and Ganesh Chaturthi, fostering social awareness and discussions on university campuses. Notable events this year included Speaker on Campus series by J. Sai Deepak at UC Berkeley and Ami Ganatra at Georgia Tech. Hindu YUVA also organized a successful cultural exhibition at the Iowa State Capitol in 2024. Additionally, the Ohio State University chapter received two prestigious awards for wellness and social engagement in the Student Leadership Awards.

Hindu YUVA leaders from 95 universities gathered for the 'Sankalp: The Hindu YUVA National Summit' hosted at serene BAPS Los Angeles Mandir in September 2024, where 400 attendees committed to strengthening Hindu student life on campus. The summit's success has reinforced Hindu YUVA's leadership in fostering collaboration and growth among Hindu youth across North American universities.

80

University
Chapters

26

High School
Chapters

28

States

600

Yuvas in leadership
positions

32,000

Students attended
various events

Sevika

HSS' women volunteers, known as Sevikas, actively participate in shakha activities, taking leadership roles in organizing weekly sessions, special events, and Sewa (service). During the Surya Namaskar Yajna (SNY), Sevikas led and participated in a national Yoga wave that started on the East Coast and spread westward, involving hundreds of women, including many first-time participants.

In a few cities, Sevikas celebrated International Women's Month by connecting with local women leaders and organizing Hindu women's conferences and panel discussions. They also hosted friendly gatherings ("Sakhi Milans") in five cities.

Prerana, the quarterly online magazine by women, includes an array of articles contributed by Sevika writers, designers, and experts, featuring interviews with external women leaders. In April, hundreds of women, along with family and friends, took part in a 10-day read-aloud project of the Ramayanam ("Pathadarshini"), which gained popularity among youth and teens.



Jyeshtha Shakha

A gathering platform for seniors in our community, Jyeshtha Shakha provides opportunities to senior volunteers to remain active and participate in various social initiatives. Apart from some local meet ups, volunteers also meet online. Activities in Jyeshtha Shakha include exercise, discourses, discussions, practicing pranayam, and meditation. Intellectual sessions include life stories of Padma and Bharat Ratna awardees. The group also participates in Sewa Diwali and local events, fostering a strong sense of community and support.



Martin Luther King Jr. Day

HSS volunteers participated in local Martin Luther King Jr. Day activities in many cities. One of the key highlights was HSS' representation of the Hindu faith as part of the Center for Interfaith Cooperation and Indiana Christian Leadership Council's 55th Martin Luther King Jr. Birthday celebration. HSS volunteers reflected on Dr. King's harmonious blend of Christian faith and non-violence rooted in Hindu philosophy.



July 4th Parades

HSS volunteers actively participated in local Independence Day celebrations, marching in parades and joining community festivities. The HSS band was a standout performer at the Harrisburg, NC parade. Their dedication to community involvement and the betterment of the United States earned praise from local officials and residents alike. Even HSS training camps held during the Fourth of July week joined in the patriotic spirit.



Shri Ram Praan Pratishtha Celebrations

HSS volunteers actively participated and volunteered in the community celebrations of the Shri Ram temple's inauguration in Ayodhya, India. The celebrations across the United States included car rallies, Deepotsav (Festival of Lights) in homes and Hindu cultural centers, and singing and chanting in over thousand temples across USA, creating an atmosphere of spirituality and community bonding.



International Day of Yoga

June 21st marks the global celebration of International Day of Yoga (IDY), aimed at raising awareness and appreciation for this ancient Hindu practice that promotes holistic well-being. In recognition of the 10th anniversary of IDY, HSS volunteers across the country led and organized numerous public Yoga events. These activities ranged from online sessions to in-person gatherings, with media coverage. Additionally, HSS volunteers from various locations joined in the IDY celebrations at the United Nations in New York..



Hindu Sangathan Divas

Hindu Sangathan Divas (Hindu Unity Day) is an annual event commemorated by the HSS in June or July to honor Chhatrapati Shivaji's coronation. The event every year brings together diverse Hindu organizations to network, collaborate on community projects, and address shared challenges. Among many events nationwide, HSS Central Pacific region hosted a unique event in the Bay Area, focusing on a "Vedic approach" to leadership and conscious business. The keynote speaker was his Holiness Swami Govind Dev Giri Maharaj ji, a spiritual leader and trustee of the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Trust. The event was attended by a diverse group of professionals, including venture capitalists, entrepreneurs, tech executives, doctors, and attorneys.



Interfaith Activities

Chicago’s “United for Peace” invited HSS officials to share its cultural and philanthropic activities with its members. Presentations were made by HSS officials at this event.

HSS represented the Hindu community at a forum on “Confronting Acts of Hate in Our Community” in Wilton, CT and proposed the analogy of a salad bowl for characterizing the United States, instead of a “melting pot”, wherein the individual parts maintain their unique flavors and identities.

The Universal Peace Federation (UPF), Texas hosted an interfaith prayer event where HSS representative, along with Christian and Jewish leaders, shared their respective religious perspectives on peace, harmony, and forgiveness. The Hindu prayer offered by HSS volunteer highlighted the importance of unity and compassion in addressing global challenges.

In Portland, Oregon, the Jewish Federation of Greater Portland and Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh co-sponsored a celebration of Purim and Holi at Congregation Neveh Shalom.



Black History Month



HSS chapters celebrated Black History Month by organizing events across various U.S. cities, including Buffalo Grove, IL; Chandler, AZ; Charlotte, NC; and Cincinnati, OH. The celebrations featured prominent African American leaders such as Calisa Horton, Marvin Francis, author Ant Blair, DEI officer Clayton Mohammad, and State Senator Adriane Johnson. These events spotlighted significant historical milestones, the Civil Rights Movement, and the influence of the Indian freedom struggle. Emphasizing cultural understanding, leadership, and community solidarity, the speakers encouraged younger generations to embrace leadership and service. The events also fostered dialogue and collaboration between the Hindu and African American communities, promoting inclusivity and education.

Sikh Heritage Month



Swami Vivekananda Shakha in San Antonio TX celebrated Sikh Heritage Month in April inviting speakers from the local Sikh community. Children from the Gatka Group (Bhujang Fauj) from Sikh Center of San Antonio did a demonstration of “gatka” – a traditional martial art using sticks.

HSS Naperville Aurora, IL families visited Gurudwara in Wheaton, IL to learn about Sikh Heritage.

Comments

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“IN HONOR OF: Celebrating The 2023 Diwali Mela Festival of Lights Parade. The Third Congressional District OF California commends SEWA DIWALI for their dedication to promoting Indian culture, heritage and harmony in our community”

– *Congressman Kevin Kiley, Member of Congress, CA-03*

“This morning I got to do the sun salutations with some experts here at PV and I have to say it was very invigorating. I feel both rested and ready to start my day and if I can do it I think anybody can do it. Thank you so much the instructors.”

– *Remarks by a School Administrator*

“We were honored to welcome members of the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh, Inc., USA, who visited our department today to celebrate the festival of Raksha Bandhan. As part of this Hindu tradition, they tied bracelets, or “rakhis,” symbolizing a bond of protection, trust and care. Moments like these deepen our connection with our community and highlight the diverse cultures that make Santa Clara so special.”

– *Santa Clara Police Department, CA*

“Today we celebrated Raksha Bandhan with the amazing volunteers of HSS! Lieutenant Scott Krug, Officer Christian Martinez, Officer Monica Ricci, and Officer Nick Marino proudly wore their Rakhis, embracing the meaningful symbol of the “bond of protection.” We were honored to meet the members of the HSS community.”

– *Town of Acton, Mass. Police*

“Thank you to HSS for your efforts in building a stronger, more connected community.”

– *Montgomery Township Police Department, PA*

(Guru Vandana event is) “perfect culmination of diversity and inclusivity in the district.”

– *Mayor Peter Cantu, Plainsboro, NJ.*

“Officers from the Shrewsbury Police Department were happy to assist the The Greater Boston chapter of Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS) and several organizations representing our local Hindu community on Saturday January 24th, 2024.”

– *Shrewsbury, MA Police Department.*

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“Parents, schools, and temples are the three places that can exert a great influence on children...We have a wonderful heritage. We are the trustees. We are the ones responsible for creating an impact of Hindu culture, Hindu thought, and Hindu values in this country.”

– **Dr. Ved Prakash Nanda** (1934 - 2024).

Mananeeya Sanghachalak of HSS America Zone