



HINDU SWAYAMSEVAK SANGH USA

# ANNUAL REPORT

October 2022 - September 2023



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

 **36 States**

 **171 Cities**

 **234 Centers (Shakhas)**



# President's Message

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Namaste,

My warmest greetings to you on the auspicious occasion of Vijayadashami! I proudly present the accomplishments of HSS for 2022-23 through this annual report.

Our shakhas (weekly gatherings) continued to expand with growing participation in the in-person setting. We experienced a strengthening of our organizational work in line with our thrust on "back to basics" after a couple of years of disruption due to the pandemic. Many karyakartas underwent leadership and skills training organized locally and in regional settings.

Throughout the year, HSS was active in many social and charitable causes. We continued to partner with SewaDiwali, through which over 600,000 lbs of food was collected and donated to pantries, soup kitchens, and those in need. The HSS-designed Darshana exhibition to create awareness and appreciation of Hindu culture was hosted in the Ohio, Illinois, and Georgia State Capitols and numerous other places, including the recently concluded Parliament of World Religions. HSS chapters in New Jersey,

North Carolina, Illinois, Texas, California, and Oregon celebrated Black History Month events to promote understanding and build bridges with the African-American community. HSS volunteers also participated enthusiastically in the 4th of July parades around the country.

HSS' social work was widely appreciated. Youth volunteers of HSS in the Chicago area received the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Community Service Award. University chapters of Hindu YUVA won awards for their cultural and service activities and for promoting diversity on campus. Local chapters of HSS also received awards for Human and Spiritual Values and exemplary volunteering.

Let us draw inspiration from these accolades to continue our noble work while guided by our vision to promote Dharma and foster peace in our communities!

**- Dr. Vinod Ambastha**

President

Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh USA

# Vijaya Dashami



Vijaya Dashami is a major Hindu festival that celebrates the victory of the good and positive. HSS USA, founded on this auspicious day in 1989, celebrates it with enthusiasm annually. HSS volunteers put up a synchronized display of activities practiced by children, young adults, youths, and family members in their respective centers throughout the year. These activities include yoga postures, human formations, singing and choruses, marching band tunes called “Ghosh”, and engaging games. With over 9,000 participants at 48 locations involving all

regional HSS centers, the Vijaya Dashami celebrations of this year were a grand spectacle. Distinguished community leaders from various organizations, including interfaith community groups, were invited as chief guests to these events. HSS volunteers of all ages and genders skillfully exhibited their training, making these celebrations a testament to their unity, dedication, and harmony. Many gatherings also featured delightful performances by young children, adding a layer of joy and festivity.

# Health for Humanity Yogathon

(Surya Namaskar Yajna)

Participants across the country : **13,392**

Participating Schools : **41**

Total participants (students + staff) : **4,476**

Surya Namaskars collectively performed : **328,744**



HSS held its two-week-long 16th annual Health for Humanity Yogathon, also known as Surya Namaskar Yajna (SNY), between January 14th and January 29th.

Over 13,300 enthusiasts actively performed daily Surya Namaskar sets during this project. Over 4,400 students and teachers from various schools participated this year. A total of 328,744

Surya Namaskars were collectively performed. Many participants acknowledged its benefits in attaining physical and emotional balance and committed to continuing this activity regularly. The HSS Women's division organized an online event, creating a wave of Surya Namaskars from the East Coast to the West Coast.

# Guru Vandana (Teachers Appreciation)



*Guru Vandana 2023 at Connecticut*



*Guru Vandana 2023 at Nevada*

In May and June 2023, HSS organized Guru Vandana events nationwide to recognize and honor teachers' significant contributions to society. These events saw an overwhelming participation of academicians, including teachers, principals, and superintendents from more than 60 school districts, with over 6,000 students, parents, and other invitees in attendance.

The events featured cultural programs with children showcasing their talents in classical dances, songs, and musical instruments. Additionally, the popular exhibition on Hindu Civilization, called Darshana, was held at various locations, with young HSS student members leading presentations and explaining aspects of Hindu Dharma, Philosophy, Yoga, and other facets of the

civilization. Some children performed innovative skits highlighting notable personalities from India and the U.S., while others demonstrated their skills in Indian martial arts, Yoga, and team activities. Some event locations included game stalls and information booths covering cultural and philosophical topics. These events were organized by local HSS centers and were planned and coordinated by teenagers and their families. In some instances, HSS collaborated with local townships to engage school districts.

Participating teachers expressed deep gratitude and appreciation for the unique honor of Guru Vandana and for the awareness about Hinduism coming directly from Hindu students and their parents.



## Raksha Bandhan

## HSS Women Division

(Sevika Vibhag)

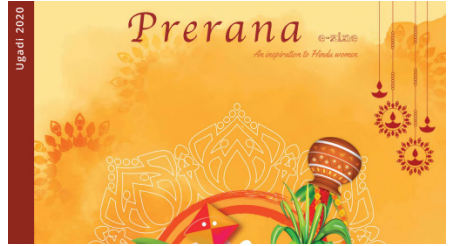


*Rakshabandhan 2023 at Morrisville NC*



*RakshaBandhan2023-Arizona*

HSS observes the Hindu festival of Raksha Bandhan, which symbolizes the bonds 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 in the Gregorian calendar. 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.



HSS’ women volunteers, known as Sevikas, actively engage in regular shakha activities. They attend shakhas enthusiastically and take on leadership roles in organizing weekly sessions, special events, Sewa (service), and more.

During the Surya Namaskar Yajna (SNY) events, Sevikas orchestrated a unique national wave (leher) that spanned the entire country. This wave commenced on the East Coast and gradually moved westward. A total of 700 Sevikas wholeheartedly participated, collectively completing an impressive 19,000 Surya Namaskars (Sun Salutations) during the yoga sessions. Additionally, Sevikas took the initiative to invite women leaders in celebration of International Women’s Month.

Prerana, a flagship publication by Sevikas, publishes a quarterly online magazine. The name “Prerana” translates to “inspiration,” and true to its name, it has proven to be a source of inspiration for Sevika Vibhag and its readers. This magazine has showcased the talents of Sevika writers, designers, and those with specialized expertise and featured interviews with external women experts.

## Children's Activities

In Hindu Dharma, value education starts at an early age. HSS centers make special efforts to impart these Hindu samskaras to children (Balas) through fun activities. They include games, storytelling, and reciting of Samskrit subhashitams, prayers, and singing songs.

Special activities for this year include Bala Darshana (Contest for Children on Glimpse into the Hindu Civilization), Kaun Banega Ramayan Expert (who

will be the expert in Ramayan), Hindu Heritage Camps, Dashavatar storytelling series, Bala Mitra (e-magazine featuring articles by the children on Hindu history, trips to India, camps, birthday celebrations, coloring, artwork).

Programs, such as Guru Vandana, provided the children a platform to appreciate and honor their teachers by showcasing traditional felicitations and talent presentations.

## Youth Activities



their energy and curiosity. The youth themselves took the lead in organizing such activities. Four Kishor leadership camps were held around the country to sharpen the skills needed to build community, encourage character development, and explore Hindu identity.

The youth were also highly engaged throughout the year in collaborative community events with other organizations, such as Sewa Diwali and MLK Day, and in presenting the Darshana exhibition to the broader American community. These activities provided platforms for volunteering in their communities and developing social relationships, harmonizing the teachings of Hindu Dharma with American civic values.

For teenagers (Kishor), local chapters developed more rigorous exercises, games, and discussion topics to nurture

# Hindu YUVA



*Guru Vandana by Hindu YUVA 2023*



*Hindu YUVA 2023*

Hindu YUVA (Hindu Youth for Unity, Virtues, and Action) demonstrated its active engagement by hosting various impactful events that exemplified Hindu culture, unity, and community service.

The organization's growth was evident on several fronts. These included an expanding presence on university campuses, with Hindu YUVA now officially registered in 63 universities and establishing 5 Vivekananda Houses. These houses serve as a home away from home and dedicated prayer spaces for Hindu students on campus. Additionally, six regional summits were held throughout the year, similar to the national summit conducted the previous year.

The year began enthusiastically, celebrating Hindu Awareness Week in October 2022 at numerous universities, coinciding with Hindu Heritage Month. These events aimed to increase awareness about Hindu traditions and

values, promoting understanding and cross-cultural discussions.

During the spring of 2023, many chapters introduced the Guru Vandana event, a ceremony honoring professors and faculty members for their contributions to the growth of Hindu YUVA members. This event, rooted in traditional Hindu practices, underscored the profound respect for knowledge upheld in Hindu philosophy.

In April, the Hindu YUVA Sports Tournament showcased physical prowess and camaraderie, involving 12 chapters from across California and over 110 students, embodying the principles of healthy competition and unity.

Throughout the year, Hindu YUVA effectively integrated a diverse range of activities that reflected the organization's core values—knowledge, unity, and service—resulting in a positive and meaningful impact.



# HSS SEWA ACTIVITIES



*Sewa Project at Arlington Heights*

HSS initiated a series of social service activities known as Sewa activities, starting on Earth Day. Over 120 volunteers from various HSS USA branches nationwide participated in programs focusing on environmental conservation. The Earth Day Sewa activities highlighted road and highway cleanups in several cities, such as Naperville, IL, Portland, OR, and Seal Beach, CA. Volunteers also participated in park cleanups, annual spring trash-off events, and local Earth Day celebrations in states like New Jersey and South Jersey.

In addition to environmental efforts, some HSS chapters organized other Sewa activities. These included blood donation camps in San Ramon, CA, and Renton, WA with significant contributions and a farming area cleanup and planting in San Ramon, CA. The Peoria, IL chapter hosted a book fair, offering a wide selection of books. Sewa activities are integral to HSS volunteerism, allowing members to contribute to American society through selfless service.



*Sewa Diwali 2022*

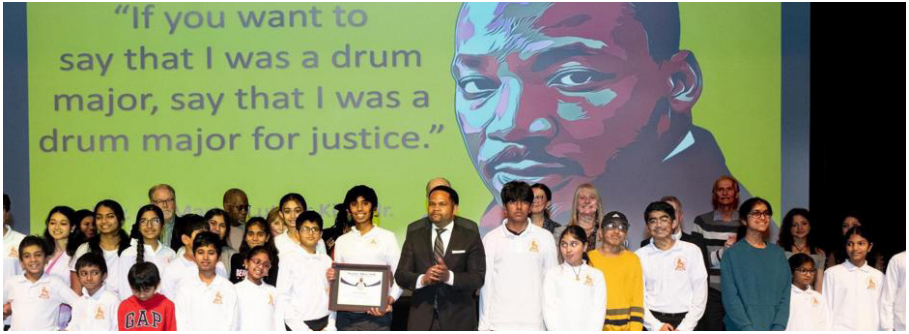
## Sewa Diwali 2022

Over 630,000 pounds of food were donated to charities nationwide, benefiting over 200 food pantries from 32 states through a unique project called SewaDiwali. The food drive was organized by 192 Dharmic communities across the country and was coordinated by Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh USA (HSS). It coincides with the Hindu festival of Diwali.

This year's Sewa Diwali saw active and spirited participation from Sikh Gurudwaras, Hindu, Jain, and Buddhist temples, Yogic organizations, Interfaith organizations, Indian American cultural and linguistic associations, and thousands of families and individuals all over the land. Several dharmic organizations such as BAPS, Chinmaya Mission, Arya Samaj, and Sewa International collected food among their supporters.

# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

## Martin Luther King Jr. Day



*HSS Youths received MLK Day Award at Aurora, IL*



*MLK Day 2023 with Indianapolis Mayor Joe Hogset*

In 2023, the HSS Youth in Aurora, Illinois, received the “2023 Service Above Self MLK Youth Leadership Award” from Mayor Richard Irvin for their community service and efforts in promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion. The HSS Youth received this award for their food drives, highway cleanup, cultural education, and honoring of school teachers and first responders.

The HSS has been working in the United States since 1989 and has conducted numerous service activities, including food drives, cleanup projects, health awareness events, tutoring, and helping people during the COVID-19 pandemic.

On MLK Day 2023, the HSS volunteers

at Roseville and Rocklin, California, celebrated the holiday with the local community and community leaders. They also helped with the setup and cleanup of the event. The youth chanted Hindu prayers for peace and unity, which were appreciated by the participants.

In Lewisville, Texas, the HSS partnered with the MLK committee to co-sponsor and co-host the 30th annual Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day event. Elected officials and the school district superintendent attended the event. The HSS volunteers conducted sessions on Yoga and SNY, explaining the simple breathing techniques, their benefits, and how they are practiced.

The HSS Dallas team also partnered with the African American museum in a Realizing the Dream – Healthy Expo. They conducted sessions on Yoga and SNY, and many people attended and gave positive feedback.

# Black History Month



*HSS Celebrated Black History Month 2023*

The Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS) celebrated Black History Month in several chapters across the United States, including New Jersey, North Carolina, Illinois, Texas, California, and Oregon. The HSS hosted prominent members of the African-American community as guest speakers to learn more about Black history and to draw inspiration for its activities and social causes.

In Aurora-Naperville, Illinois, Clayton Mohammad, Aurora City's Chief Communications and Equity Officer, delivered a presentation on the impact of Black inventions and ingenuity on Aurora, America, and across the globe. In McKinney, Texas, HSS and Sewa International of Dallas jointly hosted a discussion with four senior African-American leaders. In Concord, North Carolina, Willie Fleming, the Founder and President of the International Minority Coalition, called the gesture

to celebrate Black History Month and recognize the struggles of the African-American community as a "great step forward."

In Oregon, HSS Community Relations Manager Hiral Pandya joined Governor Tina Kotek in signing the proclamation recognizing Black History Month. In South Jersey, HSS' Pranavananda Shakha hosted Tangie Cobb and North Brunswick Township Council President Rajesh Mehta. In Roseville, California, over 90 members of HSS' Roseville chapter hosted Twiana Armstrong, a businesswoman, community influencer, and founder of the non-profit seeMYchild. The Edison, NJ, chapter of HSS celebrated Black History Month by inviting the Community Oriented Policing Unit of Edison. The Folsom CA chapter of HSS invited Citrus Heights Councilwoman Porsche Middleton to their Black History Month celebration.

# Darshana Events



*Darshana at Sacramento, CA*



*Darshana at Georgia State House*



*Barron Arts Center, NJ*

The Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS) developed a traveling exhibition called Darshana to promote awareness of Hinduism in American society. The exhibition succeeded in 2022 when it was held in 165 cities, the US Capitol, and several other public and private venues. In response to requests from the public, HSS continued to organize Darshana in 2023, including at the Georgia State House, Illinois State House, Ohio State Senate, the Barron

Arts Center in Woodbridge, NJ, the Parliament of World Religions, schools, churches, Guru Vandana events, and public events such as Independence Day celebrations. HSS also organized Hindu Dharma Awareness workshops to dive deeper into the concepts presented through the exhibition posters. In the Great Lakes region, six youth volunteers conducted these educational sessions for their school staff, the FBI Academy, and at churches.

# Interfaith Activities



*The Interfaith Alliance of Irving meeting, a total of 13 members representing different faiths like Zoroastrian, Bahai, Bohra, Christian, Sikh, Church of Scientology & Hindu met.*

HSS practices equity and respecting all as its core values. In the same spirit, HSS volunteers take part in interfaith activities locally.

HSS Naperville-Aurora participated in the Naperville Interfaith Leaders Association's (NILA) 19th Annual World Peace Day Interfaith Prayer Service. HSS co-sponsored this event along with 27 faith organizations in the western suburbs of Chicagoland. HSS presented Hinduism through a poster and book display. Several faiths and civic leaders visited the HSS display to learn about Hinduism.

The Indiana Christian Leadership Conference invited HSS to represent the Hindu community for the 54th MLK Day celebration service at St. John's Missionary Baptist Church in

Indianapolis, Indiana. On this occasion, they offered a Hindu prayer of peace and unity.

HSS and its members from Irving TX are part of the interfaith Alliance of Irving. The Irving City awarded and acknowledged their services and contributions in a ceremony and with a plaque.

At Indiana HSS volunteer engaged in a Religious Liberty Forum hosted by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, where a panel comprising representatives from Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, and Christianity convened. Approximately 200 individuals were in attendance, and the discussions primarily revolved around topics related to religious liberty, freedom and governmental supervision.

## 4th July Celebration



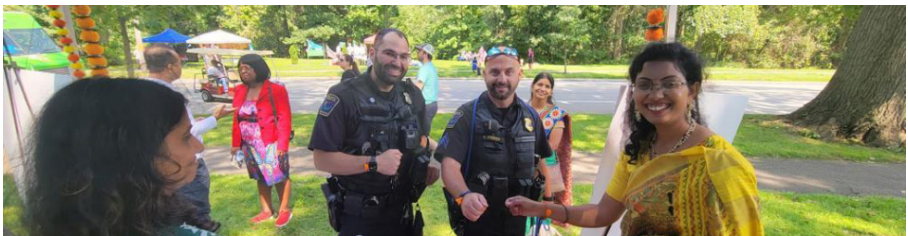
*4th July Celebration at North Carolina*

The Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS) celebrated the Fourth of July in several ways. In North Carolina, over 100 HSS volunteers walked in the Independence Day parade, some playing traditional Hindu and American patriotic tunes. They were cheered by the crowd and welcomed by the organizers. At a city-organized Independence Day festival, HSS was recognized as “Friends of the Event” in Texas. HSS volunteers helped with the event’s setup, crowd management, and cleanup.

In California, HSS volunteer families participated in the “Red and White Parade.” Young children in ethnic outfits walked enthusiastically, holding the American flag and posters on Yoga and Spirituality.

HSS also organized youth and leadership development camps nationwide to train its volunteers. Attendees of these camps celebrated July 4th by hoisting the flag and singing the national anthem.

## One World at Cleveland, OH



*One World at Cleveland, OH*

One World Day is an annual festival, organized by the City of Cleveland, that celebrates Cleveland’s diversity and international communities. HSS local

volunteers participated in this festivities and celebrated rakshabandhan with attendees including with Solon OH’s Mayor, Police and Fire Department Staff.

# The Parliament of World Religions



The HSS also exhibited posters from its nationally renowned exhibition, “Darshana: A Glimpse into Hindu Civilization.” The Darshana exhibition at the PoWR emerged as a dynamic hub of interaction and collaboration among representatives of diverse faiths, including Paganism, Sikhism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Jainism, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, and Baha’i. The exhibition sparked meaningful conversations about Hindu culture, philosophy, and civilization, creating an atmosphere of mutual respect and appreciation.

The Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS) volunteers from Illinois participated in the Parliament of World Religions (PoWR) from August 14-18, 2023. The HSS actively participated in the event to promote interfaith dialogue, cultural exchange, and the promotion of universal values.

One of the critical highlights of HSS’s participation was introducing the Raksha Bandhan celebration as “Universal Oneness Day.” This innovative concept resonated deeply with attendees, who enthusiastically engaged with HSS volunteers as they tied rakhis - a traditional wristband symbolizing protection and unity, to their hands. Delegates expressed their excitement and support for recognizing and celebrating universal interconnectedness.

As a prelude to the conference, on Sunday, August 13, 2023, the HSS also participated in the ‘Parade of Faiths’ to showcase its vibrant spirit and promote unity. The HSS successfully initiated conversations, built bridges, and promoted greater understanding in line with the Hindu values of acceptance despite variances.

In addition to the above, the delegates highly appreciated HSS’s work in civic engagement, Teacher Appreciation Day(Guru Vandana), food security/donation(Sewa Diwali), Health for Humanity, and Yogathon in hundreds of cities across the USA.

## Comments

“This was a great community event, and I appreciated being a part of it. The presenters provided valuable information for the families, and I loved the focus on children being physically and mentally healthy.”

- *Sully School District in Virginia, Fairfax County Supervisor Kathy Smith, on Health for Humanity Yogathon experience.*

“I feel humbled by the love and respect shown by the Hindu community towards us. It’s heartwarming to see such appreciation and recognition for our work. I got to learn so much about Hindu Culture today,”

- *A school teacher from Wilton, CT, during Guru Vandana.*

“It is important for the students to connect the modern subjects with the knowledge from their own culture. It leads to personalized learning for the students. I have taken pictures to reference back to them later.”

- *A social sciences teacher from the 6th grade from a Boston, MA, area school, during Guru Vandana.*

“Woodbridge Township is proud of the vibrant Hindu community and their contributions to science, education, medicine, law, business, and culture.”

- *Mayor John E. McCormac, Woodbridge, NJ during Darshana Exhibition at Barron Arts Center, Woodbridge, NJ.*

“This morning I was joined by members from the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh USA to Celebrate Universal Oneness Day. #UniversalOnenessDay serves as a reminder to reaffirm social and civic responsibilities in hopes to support and protect the community that we are part of. It was great speaking on the importance of #oneness. I also got to try Sesame Barfi, which was delicious! Thank you HSS for stopping by and celebrating!”

- *Illinois Senator Adriane Johnson, 30th District.*

Happy Raskhā Bhandhan - Bond of Care, Love, & Protection. Thank you Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh for always sharing this special tradition. I will wear my rakhi proudly.

- *Liz Johnson – Morrisville, North Carolina, Mayor Pro Tem.*