



Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh USA

Annual Report 2019-2020

A Message from the HSS USA President

Namaste,

I hope you and your family are healthy and doing well.

I am delighted to share HSS USA's annual report for 2019-2020, which covers our work from Vijaya Dashami of 2019 to Raksha Bandhan of 2020. However, this year, it feels like a story from the distant past when our 200+ centers, called shakhas, were actively meeting every week, when we celebrated Vijaya Dashami Utsavs, our volunteers energized the surrounding community during Surya Namaskar Yajna, and we organized several study groups and visits by senior office holders.

Like the rest of the world, our Sangh work too faced a challenge with the COVID-crisis. Our shakhas took a pause and converted into e-shakhas, all with three simple words, "until further notice." It was a testing time not only for us as individuals but also as Sangh Karyakartas. It was a time to show what we learn from Hindu philosophy and what we practice in our regular shakha.

Here I recall one of the many ways, knowingly or unknowingly but for sure, collectively we practiced the famous advice by Bhagwan ShriKrishna to Arjuna in Bhagavad-Gita

तस्मादसक्तः सततं कार्यं कर्म समाचर ।
असक्तो ह्याचरन्कर्म परमाप्नोति पूरुषः ॥ ३-१९॥

Or, to put it in English, it means, "Perform actions as a matter of duty with no emotional attachment, working with no expectations and help only to achieve greater goods."

On behalf of HSS, I humbly mention that thousands of our volunteers from 222 shakhas not only continue their shakha work online, but have developed several initiatives and social services aka Sewa projects that are actively helping the needy in society, offering support to first responders and conducting a variety of online programs to help anyone to attain peace and tranquility.

This year's annual report is nothing but a reflection of above summarized activities and our efforts. I conclude my thoughts with a prayer we always chant, but especially this year, it means a lot...

ॐ सर्वे भवन्तु सुखिनः। सर्वे सन्तु निरामयाः।
सर्वे भद्राणि पश्यन्तु। मा कश्चित् दुःख भाग्भवेत्॥
ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः ॥

May all be prosperous and happy. May all be free from illness.
May all see what is spiritually uplifting. May no one suffer.
Om, peace, peace, peace

Dr. Vinod Ambastha
Sanghchalak HSS USA, (President, HSS USA)

222

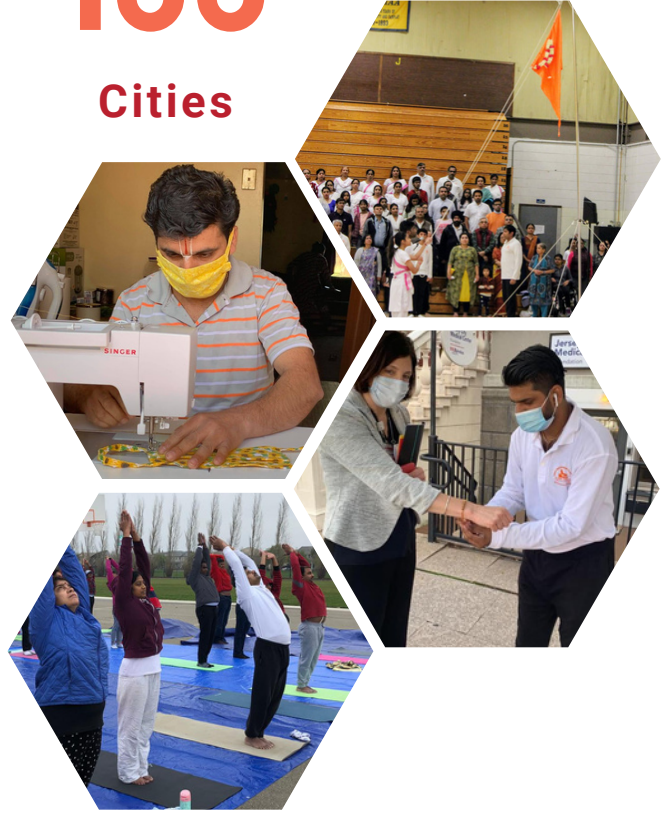
e-Shakhas
(Branches)

32

States

166

Cities



[Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh USA](https://www.youtube.com/HinduSwayamsevakSanghUSA)



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[Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh USA](https://www.facebook.com/HinduSwayamsevakSanghUSA)

www.hssus.org

Health for Humanity Yogathon (Surya Namaskar Yajna)

The thirteenth year of Surya Namaskar Yajna (SNY) was concluded on February 2, 2020. 82 public elected officials including mayors, governors, congressmen, and senators offered proclamations in their respective constituencies to promote this healthy activity among their constituents. This year, over 8,500 Yogathon enthusiasts from 36 states took part in this annual activity. HSS volunteers also engaged with the local schools and offered Surya Namaskar training to students, teachers, and administrative staff. This year 107 schools and 19,232 students took part in this activity and performed 115,032 Surya Namaskar. At many places, volunteers' enthusiasms led to 24 SNY Marathon where a group of participants performed sets of Surya Namaskar in a relay manner for 24 hours.



Mayor of Morrisville, NC performing Surya Namaskar

Guru Vandana

Guru Vandana or teachers' appreciation day is a flagship program that gives our youngsters an opportunity to invite their teachers and appreciate them according to Hindu culture. It takes place during the month of May, coinciding with National Teachers Week. This year it was a challenging year because of the stay-home advisory. However, it did not stop our members and children from organizing events innovatively. Many HSS branches developed video greetings by children and sent them collectively to schools for their teachers. Some places also made handmade greeting cards and email messages to send to their children. Some branches developed an e-Guru Vandana event on YouTube or Zoom and engaged teachers and educators with a unique live event. A total of 42 Guru Vandana programs were conducted covering 79 shakhas. 23 Shakhas held 12 e-Guru Vandana events. Children appreciated 1639 educators from various schools and school districts across the country.



Guru Vandana celebrated by Sadhana Shakha in Indiana

Work grows despite COVID 19

Since the middle of March 2020, acknowledging the health and safety of its members and following the local public health advisories, HSS stopped congregating in person for weekly shakha. HSS, however, neither stopped the work nor did HSS members stay idle or disheartened. They immediately adopted the available Internet technologies to develop online programs for various community-focused activities. One of the first and foremost activities was weekly e-shakha using video conferencing from homes. Other activities included Yoga activities for individual wellbeing, intellectual discourses, children's activities workshops, virtual singers' groups, and last but not the least various training events. This helped members to deal with sudden stay-home mandate maintaining positive energy and further helped to engage them for much needed social work for COVID 19 relief.



Vijaya Dashami

Vijaya Dashami is the foundation day of HSS USA. It is one of the six Utsavs (festivals) that HSS celebrates every year. In October 2019, HSS celebrated Vijaya Dashami Utsav at 43 locations nationwide. "Sharirika Pratyakshik," or a physical activities demonstration, yogasana, games traditional to India such as kho-kho and kabaddi, or synchronized calisthenics followed by Ghosh sanchalan, or marching band, were part of their celebration. 9,368 youths, adults, and children from 207 branches and several distinguished guests took part in these celebrations, including Congressman Raja Krishnamoorthi at Chicago Chapter celebration.



Congressman Raja Krishnamoorthi at Chicago Vijayadashami Utsav

Dharma Internship Program

The Dharma Internship Program (DIP) is an initiative of HSS for the Hindu American teenagers. It was rolled out for the first time this summer and got a very good reception. The eight week-long program was specially designed to connect Hindu-American teenagers to their Hindu roots while building skills such as writing, research, and presentation in them and exposing them to inspiring people and ideas through which they may imbibe the values of sewa and positive contribution to the world. Nearly a thousand teenagers registered for the internship and over 920 teenagers were assigned projects as interns.

The program had learning modules and opportunities to contribute through volunteer projects. The learning modules were designed as part of the 'Hindu Dharma for Teens' course and included topics on Hindu history, spirituality, culture, and topics of contemporary relevance such as Hindu Human rights, etc. The mode of learning was through reading assignments, videos, group discussions, webinars, and projects. The course was conducted in over 50 centers across the United States.

The projects involved half the time of their internships and included writing articles, interviewing people, writing stories on inspiring historical figures, preparing sketches, creating presentations, creating music, etc.

Over 120 adult mentors including many University students joined in and volunteered to help the interns in the projects and in the learning modules.



A kishore from Dharma Internship Program presenting story of Mahabharat

Civic Engagement Drive during Raksha Bandhan

HSS celebrates Raksha Bandhan as a Universal Oneness Day when volunteers tie a thread (Rakhee/Raksha) to each other and to the community leaders, to the first responders, etc. and express their commitment to protecting the society. At the time of printing of this report, Raksha Bandhan events were being conducted at several places. In some places our volunteers met Police, and the elected officials in person while maintaining social distance. However, many places HSS volunteers organized an online meeting with the elected officials from the local to the federal levels.



Swayamsevaks providing masks to a hospital in Seattle



Swayamsevaks in Dallas, Texas thanking essential workers



Food drive in California

COVID 19 Relief Sewa

Since the middle of March, the entire world including the United States faced an unprecedented challenge of COVID-19. When the surrounding community was facing a dire challenge, our members used their organizational skills and discipline and offered services to the needy, to the first responders, and to the healthcare professionals. Our volunteers in various communities worked in groups to feed needy and homeless people, support senior citizens, supply groceries to the needy, make PPEs, provide meals and PPE to first responders, and did fundraising for food pantries and local relief organizations, etc. They also collaborated with and brought together various other organizations to multiply the efforts and help. Various authorities appreciated HSS volunteers for their selfless service. New Jersey General Assembly proclaimed and praised HSS work at the time of need.



Rakshabandhan Celebrations with first responders in Connecticut

Sevika Vibhag (Division)

Women members of HSS form the Sevika Division take inspiration from Rashtra Sevika Samiti ("Samiti") while focusing locally on the US-based society's needs. This year in July, HSS Sevika volunteers celebrated the birth anniversary of Samiti's founder honorary Mausiji Kelkar by holding nationwide 21 unique events. 759 Sevikas took part in these events. Ram Navami is the day when Shri Ram was born and the day that Hindus celebrate wherever they are in the world. On this occasion, this year, 30 Sevikas recited Ramayana stories in 7 languages and hundreds of Sevikas attended this event over the phone during Ram Navami and the period known as "Ram Navaratri."

This year Sevikas started a quarterly e-zine named "Prerana" or "Inspiration". It contains stories, experiences, articles, narrated by HSS Sevikas. It has been highly appreciated by HSS members and was also well received by HSS well-wishers.



Alka ji, sah-Karyavahika, Rashtra Sevika Samiti, addressing sevikas from Bay Area, California

Dharma Bee



Dharma bee lessons being conducted in Irvine, California

Dharma Bee, a unique nation-wide quiz contest, was conducted throughout the US this year with a participation of 4,654 children.

This year's theme was 'Discover Your Hindu Heritage' where the syllabus was designed to cover various aspects of Hindu Dharma and give a glimpse of the vast heritage in this 8 weeks program. Topics included, origin of Hindu Dharma, Puja, Festivals, Symbols, Scriptures, Yoga, Gods and Goddesses, Hindu Values and Concepts such as Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam and Karma, amongst others. Children and parents were equally excited.

Dharma Bee launched in February and despite the COVID situation, the sessions continued online in a remote format. Shakhas came up with very creative ways to conduct the online sessions and engage them through various quizzes and projects. Online contests at local level were also held successfully.

Hindu YUVA

Hindu Youth for Unity, Virtues, and Action, or Hindu YUVA, (www.hinduyuva.org) is a youth program of HSS that is conducting its routine activities year-round in 36 chapters. Youth volunteers ramped up their service efforts during the COVID-19 crisis. When the challenges of COVID-19 became apparent, members of Hindu YUVA promptly developed a Student Support Network along with Sewa International, Vivekananda House, and Bharatiyam, comprising over 80 youth volunteers who worked on a helpline 15 hours a day 7 days a week. It helped over 400 students in getting groceries, temporary accommodation, medical/legal resources, and for international students linking with the embassies and connecting them with their home countries. The Network continues to support students around career guidance and mental health.

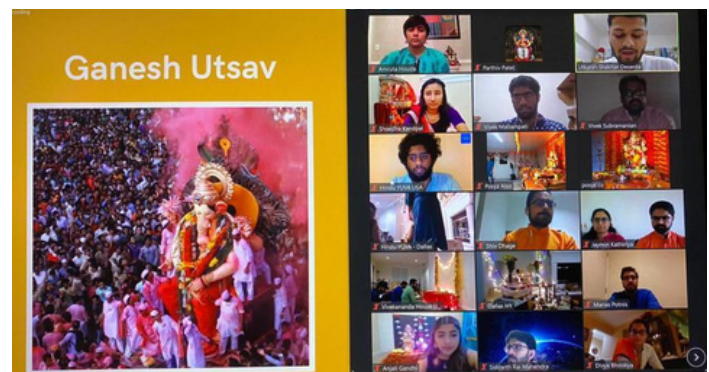
Hindu YUVA also organized a virtual graduation ceremony for high school and university graduates nationwide and made sure that they did not miss the special event of their life. US Tennis player and Olympic Silver medalist Rajeev Ram was the chief guest for the event who addressed students and attendees, bringing energy and cheers in the online crowd.

The Hindu auspicious symbol of Swastika has often been misquoted as a symbol of hate because of a similar-looking Nazi German symbol that Nazis used to call Hakenkreuz. Hindu YUVA at Ohio State University addressed this historically and socially significant topic this year by organizing an open dialogue and space for learning between Hindu YUVA and the Campus Jewish student organization, Hillel.

As with many other auspicious occasions, this year Hindus celebrated the Ganesh festival at home with minimum or no guests to maintain social distancing. Hindu YUVA organized a virtual Samuhik (collective) Ganesh festival. Over 450 youths attended the event. Entrepreneur and Grammy award winner Chandrika Tandon was the chief guest and delivered an inspiring speech.



Grocery kits provided to students by Hindu YUVA at SDSU



Samuhik Ganesh Utsav by 36 chapters of Hindu YUVA