



Holi Comes to Atlanta in Rainbow Colors, Attracting Thousands



Tiny clouds of color hung over a large crowd gathered at the Atlanta Cricket Fields, in Forsyth County, north of the city center, to celebrate Holi, and welcome spring. Sprinkling colored powder on each other and dancing beneath a clear, blue sky, many of them remembered their childhood and celebrations in India, their home far away.

Participants Celebrating Beginning of Spring in Atlanta Holi Event – Photo: Venkat Kuttua Studios

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Executive's Corner

Dear Sewa Family,

On behalf of Sewa International, I wish you and your families a Happy and Prosperous *Ugadi!* May this new year provide you a lot of opportunities to serve your communities. Service can be in several forms, like in improving community services, and enhancing the quality of life. Like life, service is a continuous process! A big thanks to our volunteers, donors, and Sewa supporters for being part of this process of sustaining and enhancing life.

I travelled to Bharat thinking that I will be there for a short while in December 2018, but due to several family situations I ended up postponing my return three times. I am still in Bharat! But this long stay in Bharat has given me a different experience, exposure, more human interactions, and understanding of both human suffering as well as the goodness and kindness of people. In all this, the one common thread is *sewa* (service)! Either *sewa* is received or performed. There is a lot of need for *sewa* in Bharat, and it may not be always in the form of money, but is in helping people improve their emotional wellbeing. Maybe, it is same case in other parts of the world too. This experience gives me an answer to a question I have muller over for a long time: "One day, will there be an end to the need of Sewa/ *sewa*? Will there be a time when the whole world is wealthy and healthy, like we imagine "Ram Rajya" to have been. The answer is a simple and firm, "no". *Sewa* is a continuous need and an opportunity, and as mentioned in the Bhagawad Gita it is our *Paramo Dharma* (a universal duty)!

In last month's newsletter we learned about the great service rendered by our own "Bhama Shahs". Sewa International is happy to provide opportunities to donors like Ram Gehani and Sachin Kulkarni, selfless donors who are helping Sewa International serve its purpose! Another example is Gitesh Desai, who rightly got conferred with the *Pravasi Bharatiya Samman* award by the Hon. Ram Nath Kovind, President of India. Gitesh Desai was serving others when he himself was in need of help! "*Sewa bhaav*" (the spirit of service) is contagious and inspiring. We believe Sewa International will be instrumental in providing service opportunities to all those who join us in making this world a happier place.

As all of us know that Sewa international has taken on several projects and offers programs and services that will further the cause of serving society in all four dimensions: "*tan, man, dhan and samay*" (physical effort, intelligence, money, and time).

Once again, I wish you all a Happy Ugadi, Gudi Padwa, Cheti Chand, Sajibu Nongma Panba, Nyepi, and a service-rich year ahead!

Sincerely,


Anil Deshpande
 Vice President, Technology Services



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The annual Holi event, organized by Sewa International's Atlanta chapter on Saturday, March 23 was a runaway success. An estimated 10,000 people from all over the state of Georgia joined in the festivities. Music, positive energy, and aroma of delicious Indian food filled the air. Holi is celebrated on the full moon day (Purnima) between the end of February and the middle of March, in the month of Phalguna, according to the Hindu lunar calendar. This year, Holi began on March 21, but given that it was a weekday, Atlantans gathered two days later to welcome spring, and remember the tale of the burning of demoness Holika whose fire-retardant covering was blown away by Lord Vishnu who answered the prayers of his devotee, Prahlada, the nephew of Holika.

Many families who had enjoyed the Holi event the previous years, brought their friends and coworkers with them to the gathering. Musicians from Blue Spirit Wheel of Atlanta, and the School of Rock in Gainesville, VA played while children and adults alike showered friends and strangers with color, danced to the music, and munched on delicious *pakor*as and *samos*as.

Cultural Showcase

Swadesh Katoch, Sewa's Director of Disaster Relief, and a resident of Atlanta, reflected on how Sewa started this event fourteen years ago: "Year after year, the participation is increasing. Last year we had about 6,000 people, but this year's turnout was great. This is a great way to showcase our rich Indian culture to the local community".

Local media reports said that many Americans who participated in the Holi event for the first time, felt "blown away" by the cultural display and spirit of inclusion and celebration. Many of them said they felt moved by the sense of community and friendship, and that they looked forward to participating in the next year's festival.

Event to Remember

For many participants from the Indian community, Atlanta's Holi festival brought back joy and togetherness that were tucked away in their memories. They felt happy that they were able to attend an event like this in the United States. "It felt great to celebrate Holi with the broader community, not just Indians," was a common refrain heard at the venue.

For Sewa volunteers in Atlanta, this year's Holi event is remembered for many reasons: the big crowds, corporate and business sponsors lining up to support the event, cheerful and energetic volunteers, diversity of participants, and the valuable learning experience gained by organizing a large event. Way to go, Atlanta!

"Practice Yoga and Meditate" -- New Prescription to Defeat Heart Disease



Swami Chidananda Saraswati inaugurating the conference on "Role of Meditation for Prevention and Treatment of Cardiovascular Diseases" in Rishikesh, India. Dr. Bhanu Duggal, AIIMS Rishikesh, Subodh Tiwari, CEO Kaivalyadham, Dr. H R Nagendra, Vice Chancellor SVYASA, Prof. Ravi Kant, AIIMS Rishikesh, and Prof. Indranill Basu Ray, Prof. of Cardiology and Head of Integrative Medicine, AIIMS were also present.

"Practice Yoga and Meditate" was the message heard on the banks of the river Ganga in Rishikesh, India recently. Internationally recognized cardiologists, scientists, and researchers assembled in this holy city to highlight ancient Hindu spiritual practices that can help people achieve better health and harmony.

This first ever international conference on "Role of Meditation for Prevention and Treatment of Cardiovascular Diseases" was organized by the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), Rishikesh on March 9-10, with more than 1000 physicians from all over the world attending the conference. Sewa International, USA supported this initiative to encourage research on yoga and meditation.

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“Practice Yoga and Meditate” -- New Prescription to Defeat Heart Disease

Speaking on the occasion, AIIMS's Visiting Professor and Cardiologist, Dr. Indranill Basu Ray pointed out that “research in the last 10-12 years shows that modifying our lifestyle to include meditation and yoga and proper diet can reduce chronic diseases like hypertension, coronary artery disease and stroke.”

Emphasising the preventive and curative role of meditation and yoga in dealing with diabetes and other diseases, Prof. Ray said that, “only depending on medicines can reduce the chance of heart attacks but cannot entirely nullify the disease which is the result due to increase in stress levels.”

Vice Chancellor of SYVYASA and Chairman of the Conference, Dr. H.R. Nagendra presented a paper on Yogic Anatomy and explained how yoga and meditation can affect the human body. Dr. Greg Fricchione, Professor of Psychiatry, Harvard Medical School, detailed in his plenary lecture the latest scientific developments connecting heart and the brain.

Swami Chidananda Saraswati, President and Spiritual Head of the Parmarth Niketan Ashram, Dr. Subhas Chandra Manchanda, the former Head of Cardiology at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, Delhi and a pioneer in cardiovascular research on yoga, Prof. Yashwant Pathak, Associate Dean, School of Pharmacy, University of South Florida, Dr. Robert Schneider, Dean of the Maharishi University of Management, Iowa, Dr. Ravi Kant, Director of AIIMS, and Subodh Tiwari, Vice President of the Indian Yoga Association participated in the conference.

Acharya Balkrishna, CEO of Patanjali Yogpeeth, delivered the valedictory address and distributed prizes to the winners of the poster competition on meditation and yoga.

Naach Di Cleveland – Students Dance to Support Sewa



In the Sewa International supported, nationwide, “*Naach Di Cleveland*”, Bhangra and Bollywood-fusion Dance Competition, Boston University Bhangra and Detroit Kohinoor teams won the top honors. Held at the Cleveland Public Auditorium on Saturday, April 23, the competition is in its fourth year. The competition, which draws large audiences, was organized by Ohio’s *Naach Di Cleveland*, a non-profit organization dedicated to furthering South Asian culture through dance.

To support Sewa International’s humanitarian mission, *Naach Di Cleveland* donated all the proceeds from this year’s competition towards Sewa USA Cleveland Chapter’s ASPIRE tutorial program. Through ASPIRE, Sewa volunteers provide educational mentoring to students from under-privileged students in their communities.

Boston University Bhangra Team celebrating their win in the “*Naach Di Cleveland*” dance competition on April 23, 2019 in Cleveland, Ohio. Photo by Sai Conjeevaram (chicityhero.com)

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Viswanath Koppaka, in his professional avatar, a strategic thinker and executor, has been involved with Sewa International since 2010 in Atlanta. He developed a passion towards community service at a very young age, and has made it his life's calling.

Viswanath was involved in developing the *Run for Sewa* program, which has been a great success the past eight years. He was Atlanta chapter coordinator between 2013 and 2016, and played a significant role in increasing the active chapter volunteer numbers, and mentoring the active volunteers with challenging responsibilities. Currently, Atlanta Chapter has 100+ active volunteers and 15+ volunteers with responsibility. He has also understood the importance of public outreach using social media, and is currently helping the national team in marketing efforts.

"We have to find a way to partner and provide a greater impact to the community by connecting one another," Viswanath says, and seeks to help Sewa by connecting the right people to the right cause, and the right community to the right organization.

Viswanath was born in Vishakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh, and grew up in Bhagyanagar (Hyderabad), Telangana. He has lived in Atlanta, GA since 2005. He is married to Mrinalini, who currently helps Sewa with human resources related work nationally. They have an eight-year-old daughter, Anika.

Viswanath is a healthcare consultant and an entrepreneur, and has led a few healthcare organizations in his career.

Nach Di Cleveland

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Positive Impact

Speaking on the occasion, Sewa USA's President and Case Western Reserve University Professor of Engineering, Dr. Sree N. Sreenath explained how Sewa's extensive work in education, health, and other areas was positively impacting people's lives in many countries worldwide.

In the Bhangra dance category, Michigan Bhangra won second place, and the Carnegie Mellon University troupe won third place. In the Bollywood-fusion category, University of California, Santa Cruz's Kahani team won second spot, and the Texas Mohini team came in third. The event saw 16 teams vying for top spots in these dance categories. A total of 334 students participated in the competition and they represented all regions of the country – from California to Michigan, and from Texas to Massachusetts.

"*Nach Di Cleveland*" was started in 2015 by three Case Western Reserve University students, and the organization is currently headed by Amogh Iyer, Thanvi Vatti, and Sanjana Madishetty -- all Case Western Reserve University students. The theme for the dance competition this year was, "*For Dancers, By Dancers*".

The top three teams from the Bhangra category will be competing in the Bhangra Championship to be held in North Carolina on April 13, 2019.

Upcoming Events

Jan **19** to Dec **21**, 2019: Sewa Atlanta | *Food for Hungry* | Otwell Middle School Cafeteria, 605 Tribble Gap Road, Cumming, GA

Feb **1** to Sept **1**, 2019 : Sewa North Jersey | *Lead Program for High Schoolers* | Edison/Monroe/ChesterField Central New Jersey, NJ

Feb **28** to Apr **28**, 2019 : Sewa San Antonio | *Sewa Annual Gala 2019* | Mahalakshmi Hall, Hindu Temple San Antonio, TX

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