

Sewa's Posters Make Their Mark at the 2018 World Hindu Congress

The Second World Hindu Congress was held in Chicago to mark the 125th anniversary of Swami Vivekananda's historic speech at the Parliament of World's Religions in 1893 . More than 2,500 delegates and 250 speakers from over 60 countries participated in the three-day event.



Sewa Team at World Hindu Congress 2018, Chicago.

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Executive's Corner

Dear Sewa Supporter,

As you all know, one among Sewa's top three missions is promoting volunteerism. It is also part of our family values and traditions in India where people have a long history of helping individuals, communities, and neighbors who need help. This sense of responsibility for the well-being of fellow citizens, and society in general, will ensure the quality of life in our society, and it needs to be continually nurtured. This not only gives increased recognition to an individual but it also creates public awareness of the crucial role played by volunteers in the organization's mission-oriented goals and value system.

One of the objectives of Sewa is to support the local community in the context of our own identity in this country, as well as in being good neighbors and citizens. By promoting volunteerism we not only bond with fellow citizens and the larger society but we also contribute to the individual's growth in attaining higher levels of satisfaction in life. Scientific studies affirm this. The benefits of volunteering are intangible and are therefore difficult to measure but they add a great deal of value. This not only instills pride in the volunteers but fosters close relationships among families and peers and in the communities we serve.

Last year, after "Hurricane Harvey," the tireless efforts of our volunteers, and the generous contributions of our donors really helped in the rebuilding of society, however small our presence in the larger society. You may recall

the squirrel's contribution to the building of the bridge to Lanka and what Lord Rama told the squirrel.

But we are growing, and we are now collaborating with groups and organizations on the ground that makes our work much more tangible. With hundreds of volunteers on the ground in Kerala and Karnataka, during the recent monsoon floods, we could make a real difference. Our volunteers' efforts contributed to the rescue of hundreds of people with the help of local government officials and the Indian Army and paramilitary forces. Our volunteers were able to reach and help people in remote rural areas, and some of that brave work was accomplished with the help of social media and technology.

Rescue efforts constitute the first phase in responding to disasters. The second phase involves providing relief, and the third, help in the rehabilitation of communities. This last phase requires us to devote at least three-five years in reconstruction work in those affected communities. I therefore ask you -- each Sewa supporter, volunteer, members, and partner organizations -- to come forward and take up some volunteering effort, and share the news and reports we generate on your personal social media pages - Facebook, Twitter, etc -- helping us spread the message of sewa and encourage people to volunteer.



Rakesh Pathak
Director IT



I introduce myself as an Indian, an engineer by profession but with roots in a farmer family. I am based in Phoenix, AZ, and work with American Express as a Software Engineer. In my free time, I love to work for humanity, and spend time with my family: I have two beautiful children (Chitrani 6, and Mitakshi 2), and a lovely wife, Vinita, and they motivate me to be a better father, a better husband, a better friend, and a better human being.



I have been through tough times during childhood. My father inculcated in me high moral values, and he helped me to understand humanity. I have therefore always felt the need, the necessity, and the desire to do something better for humanity before I leave this world. This desire and this goal are inspired by my father.

Following Narendra Modi's career, and excited by the vision of what we could achieve in Bharat, I joined politics. I served my country as the Uttar Pradesh State Social Media Convener during 2013-14. I resigned from IBM, where I was working, and planned to become a full-time political activist - working to better and serve humanity.

Unfortunately, my father met with a severe accident and we ran into financial issues. I had secured a US visa in 2012, and therefore decided to come and start working here. I was, at that point in time, somewhat of a "broken man" as I had worked very hard in India, and had to leave everything behind.

But after a dark night the Sun always comes up: I heard about Sewa International and the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh, and I got a chance to connect with Achalesh Amar and Swadesh Katoch of Sewa. This ignited the spark in me again, and I realized that being away from my country would not stop me from what I dreamed about in terms of serving humanity. I joined the Sewa International disaster relief team, and we worked together on many projects together: for example, Tamil Nadu flood relief, Hurricane Harvey storm relief, and just recently, the Kerala and Karnataka flood relief.

We have formed a good team together and we have worked day and night to streamline the process of establishing and managing effective communication links, coordinating relief work, collaborating with partner agencies in India and local organizations here, and fund raising. During the Tamil Nadu flood relief effort, we worked with the Indian Air Force team to help a pregnant woman who was stuck at home. She was taken to the hospital and she delivered twins.

During Hurricane Harvey we streamlined the communication process through the use of social media, and we were able to come to the help of many individuals whose homes were inundated or who faced imminent danger.

In terms of fund-raising, I created a fundraising page on Facebook and we have raised more than \$78,000 for Sewa International, which will be used for Kerala flood relief. Our target is \$100,000 and I hope those of you reading this story of mine will pitch in, and get your friends and family to donate generously. Of course, like all such efforts, success would not come without team work: I sincerely thank Achalesh Amar, Vikramaditya Tikoo, Sachin Chitlangia, Manik Tyagi, and Swadesh Katoch for helping me with this fundraiser.

Beyond the demands of responding to natural calamities we have helped a number of people who faced tragedy or hardship in life. In one instance, a family of four had suffered serious burn injuries, and Sewa helped them get the required treatment and support them during recovery. We helped a poor father financially to get his daughter married. We are supporting the education of three girls whose father and mother passed away.

Working for Sewa International has been a wonderful and satisfying experience as I get to be part of a "family" of committed volunteers dedicated to serving humanity. I have no doubt that one day we will be known as one of the best and most reliable organizations to serve humanity, and I hope I will have more strength to do good work and serve society better.

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Over 20 chapter from Sewa International participated as delegates/speakers/poster presenters at the September 7-9 events at the Westin Chicago. The WHC motto *Sumantrite Suvikrante* (Think Collectively, Achieve Valiantly) inspiring the attendees, Sewa International's own motto '*Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*' (the world is one family) and '*Nara Seva, Narayana Seva*' (serving humanity is serving divinity) served to buttress the WHC goals for global welfare as well as Hindu solidarity. It was exhilarating to see like-minded people from around the world come together and present their views and their concerns on the WHC platform. As the single largest Hindu faith-based organization in the US, Sewa's representatives got another opportunity to meet with people from different projects across the globe with whom we can potentially learn from and partner with to execute programs for the greater good of the world's diverse communities. It was also a privilege to meet many potential donors who showed keen interest in supporting Sewa.

Among numerous high profile speakers and attendees at the event were India's Vice President Venkaiah Naidu; Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh Sarsanghachalak (Director) Dr. Mohan Bhagwat; U.S. Congressman Raja Krishnamoorthi (D-Illinois); Ohio Republican State Rep. Niraj Antani; former Iowa State Senator Swati Dandekar; Connecticut State Rep. Dr. Prasad Srinivasan; and, Bollywood actor Anupam Kher.

The event showcased inspiring speeches by leaders from Hindu communities across the world. The three-day event was organized along seven tracks: economics, organization, media, youth, women, politics, and education. Each area/track offered attendees interesting and useful perspectives on how we can do more community work and reach a global audience of Hindus and other communities around the world.

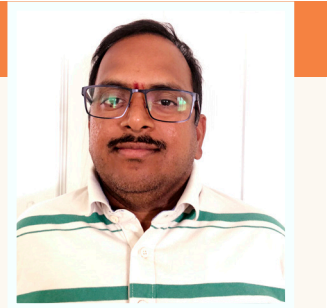
Of the 55 posters presented at the Congress, six were by Sewa International:

- Bhutanese Empowerment Project – presented by Yashwant Belsare
- Disaster Relief – Harvey and Beyond – presented by Swadesh Katoch
- Educating to Eliminate Generational Poverty – presented by Kavita Tewary
- I do Yoga – presented by Dr. Hetal Nayak
- Toilet and Hygiene Project for the Girl Child – presented by Prakash Saunshi, and
- Youth - Experience the Joy of Giving – presented by Sandeep Khadkekar

These posters may be viewed on <http://whc2018.worldhinducongress.org/poster-presentation-track/>



Toilet and Hygiene Project for the Girl Child **won an award** for poster presentation based on the poster's clarity, communication and impact.



Venkata Naga Prasad Kalavakolanu was introduced to Sewa International in December 2015, and is now the Coordinator of the Los Angeles Chapter. He has conducted several programs related to family services like the Stop Diabetes Movement (SDM), college entrance information sessions, and blood drives in Los Angeles with the help of a good team who are passionate about Sewa and service.

Prior to joining Sewa International, Venkata was involved in serving the community through several organizations like the Dharma Civilization Foundation, International Center for Cultural Studies, Telugu Manabadi, and the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh. He found inspiration working with the active, thoughtful, committed members and founders of these organizations. Venkata, as a child, grew up watching his grandparents helping others and doing community service, and this example set by his grandparents continues to inspire him to help others.

Venkata lives in Simi Valley with his wife Sridevi, and two children -- daughter Sravya, who is a high school senior, and son Aniketh Sai, who is a 7th grade student. Venkata has many interests – including astrology, reading the Hindu *puranas* and *itihisas*, Vedic chanting, and observing/studying Hindu temple structures. Venkata is a member of his family trust which enables and promotes Vedic traditions, and which was involved in constructing a temple in his native village.

Venkata is also keenly interested in sports like badminton, carom, cricket, and tennis. Sewa International is proud to have Venkata leading the Los Angeles Chapter.

Karnataka Floods - Kannada Regional Associations Partner with Sewa International to Raise Funds

Kannada Regional Associations Partner with Sewa International to Raise Funds On the occasion of the annual Kannadotsava event, Kannada Koota of Northern California (KKNC.ORG), the largest Kannada platform outside of India, invited Sewa International and presented a check for \$20,000. With support from Tri Valley Kannada Sangha, Kannada Sangha of Arizona, Shiva Vishnu Temple of Livermore, Portland Kannada Koota, and other donors and supporters, Sewa International raised over \$42,000 to alleviate the plight of those affected by the floods.



Sewa Bay Area co-ordinator Guruprasad (in white dress), collected \$20K check at Kannadotsava event.

Upcoming Events

- Oct 6 to Dec 15 2018 : Stop Diabetes Movement | IAACM, 14240 Sully Field Circle, STE # U, Chantilly, VA
- Oct 10 2018 : Sewa Atlanta | Tackling immigration crisis and trauma | Online event - Register at <https://bit.ly/2Ncnbsr>
- Oct 13 2018 : Sewa Bay Area | Dandiya | 37720 Fremont Blvd, Fremont, CA
- Oct 15 to Nov 15, 2018 : Sewa Chicago | Diwali Food Drive | Multiple locations

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