



# Unsung Heroes:

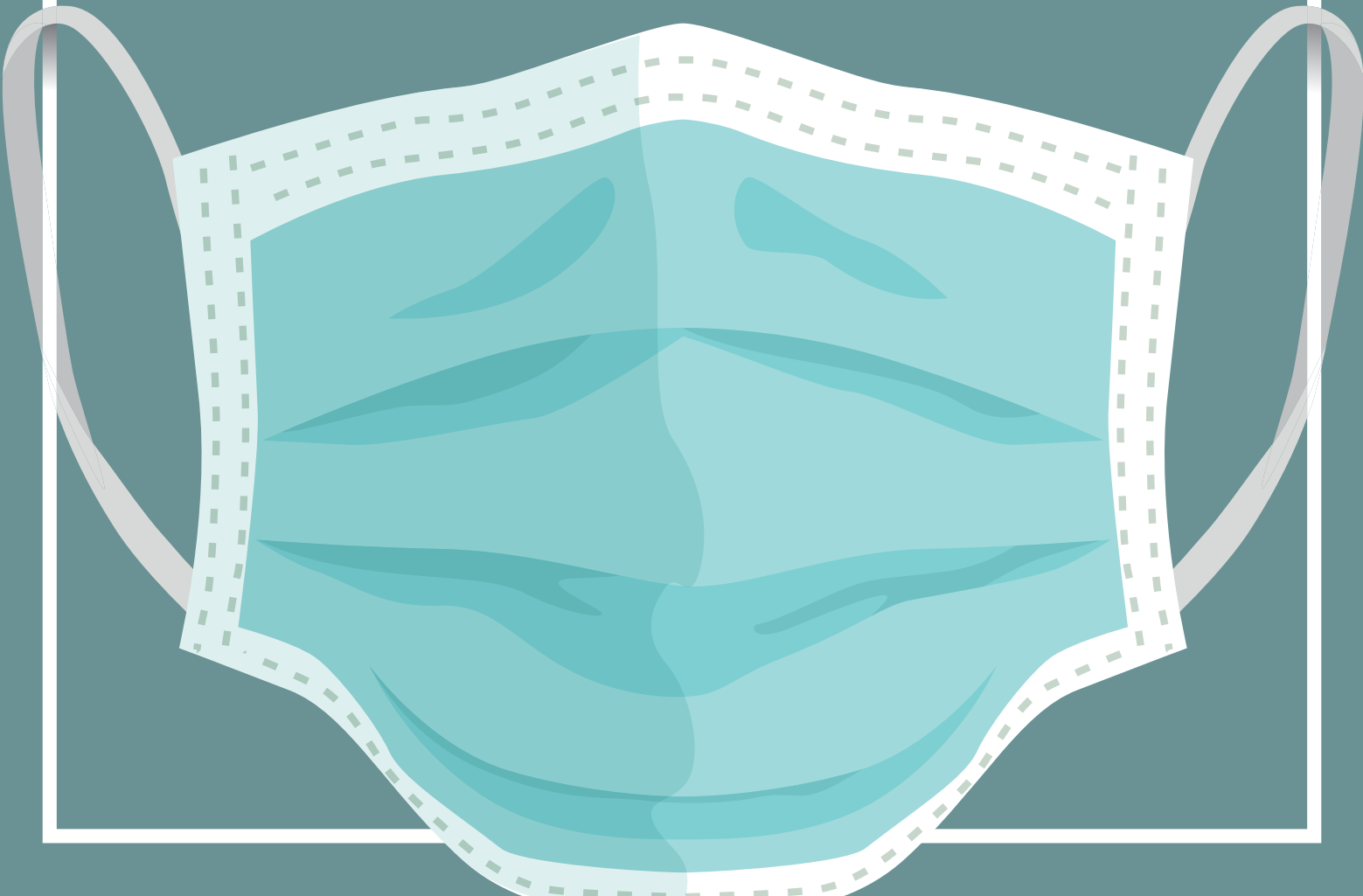
## Overcoming Adversity During A Crisis

### **PART 3:**

Coping with Crisis

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**Sangh Sandesh**  
**September 2020**



# CONTENTS

## COPING WITH CRISIS

### Page 4

#### Akshaya Tritīya Havan Yajña: Reflections

Dipvandana Mehta

### Page 6

#### Sewa International Part 1:

#### Latur – the Birth of SEWA

Hasmukh Veljibhai Shah

### Page 8

#### Sewa International Part 2:

#### Gujarat Earthquake – SEWA, a household name

Hasmukh Veljibhai Shah

### Page 10

#### Historic Crises – How Hindus Responded

Ravi Ladva

### Page 13

#### Online Yoga in Lockdown

Pratibha Mistry

### Page 15

#### Continuing the Manthan from Home

Rajashekar Asireddy

### Page 17

#### The Uncertainty of Life

Dr Ramesh Pattni DPhil (Oxford) OBE,  
Trustee and Vice-President, Chinmaya Mission UK

### Page 19

#### Countering Food Poverty in a Global Pandemic - The Akshaya Patra Story

Bhawani Singh Shekhawat

### Page 21

#### Care-Connect

Vishal Patel

Unsung Heroes: Overcoming Adversity During A Crisis

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# AKSHAYA TRITĪYA HAVAN YAJÑA: REFLECTIONS

DIPVANDANA MEHTA

On the morning of Sunday 26 th April 2020, the auspicious day of Akshaya Tritīya (Vaishakha Shukla Tritīya), **1250 sevikas, swayamsevak and their families** from the UK and internationally collectively participated in a sacred havan yajña from their homes led by Professor Nawal Kant ji Prinja.

A havan yajña is one of the most ancient forms of Hindu prayer in which a sacred fire is lit and Sanskrit mantras recited. The prayers and process of a havan yajña contain important reminders to help establish peace and sustainability within an individual, community and society. The sipping of water (achman) reminds us of the gift of water without which there cannot be any life. We touch different parts of the body with water in the ang saparesh to recognise the five senses and sense organs, praying for physical health and strength.

Through Īśvara upāsana we recall the powers and qualities of the divine as well as the eternal laws of the universe. In the swasti vachanam, we recite prayers for all branches of science that benefit





humankind, materials and technology, those who serve and protect society and the twenty-one things that make up the world. By lighting the fire and placing the firewood on it, we recall the importance of nature and that work has to be carried out to achieve any goal.

At the end of all the shlokas, when the sāmāgri is placed into the havan, we chant 'idam na mama' (it is not for me but for others), reminding us about the importance of making sacrifices for others. The fire itself is a symbol of this, as it burns to provide light and heat to our surroundings. The pūrṇāhuti and shānti paṭh at the end pray that our yajñas be successful, for everything to be perfect and for peace throughout the world. This yajña for viśva shanti is thus a reminder of some of the core values of our culture and Sangh work.

At a time when most of the world was in lockdown with people isolated from their loved ones, many facing illness and economic concerns, the havan yajña provided families with many benefits. Even though families were all participating from home,

**the havan yajña brought a sense of togetherness between everyone and a true spirit of vasudhaiva kutumbakam (the whole world is one family).**

At a time of heightened anxieties, a sense of spiritual calm and peace was felt by many while chanting the mantras and offering the sāmāgri. It has brought a feeling of gratitude, through this opportunity to pray for the health and well-being of the whole world as well as those serving selflessly to help combat this pandemic.

Finally, it has renewed our resolve to serve society; many sevikas and swayamsevakas working hard either on the frontline or on various sewa activities gained the spiritual motivation and renewed energy to continue with these efforts. Mananeeya Sanghachalak Dhiraj ji Shah and Shri Ram ji Vaidya noted examples of the work being carried out by our karyakartas at this time, whether through collecting donations for food banks, preparing meals for hospitals, spreading joy in care homes, INSA and FISL support for Indian nationals in the UK, and online activities such as e-shakhas, chair yog and skills workshops to help maintain our physical, intellectual and spiritual development while isolated at home.

This work is the practical implementation of the Viśva Prārthanā which contains the essence of our mission and directly links to the teachings of Hindu Dharma and the havan yajña. In particular the following stanza stands out:

**tvadiye puṇya-kārye'smin  
viśva-kalyāṇ-sādhake  
tyāga-sevā-vratasyāyam kāyo  
me patatu prabho**

In the pursuit of the welfare of all, which is indeed your sacred cause, and inspired to be committed to noble virtues of selfless service and sacrifice, I offer myself up at your feet, o supreme one.

Overall, the havan yajña served as an important reminder of our duty as sevikas and swayamsevakas to carry out sewa for achieving viśva shanti as well as providing an energising boost to help us continue this sacred work.

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# PART 1

## SEWA INTERNATIONAL: LATUR – THE BIRTH OF SEWA

adhikaris like Sarvashri late Ma Suryanarayan Raoji, late Ma M C Satyanarayanji, Ma Pravinbhai Ruparelia and others. Unanimous consensus was reached on the name SEWA.

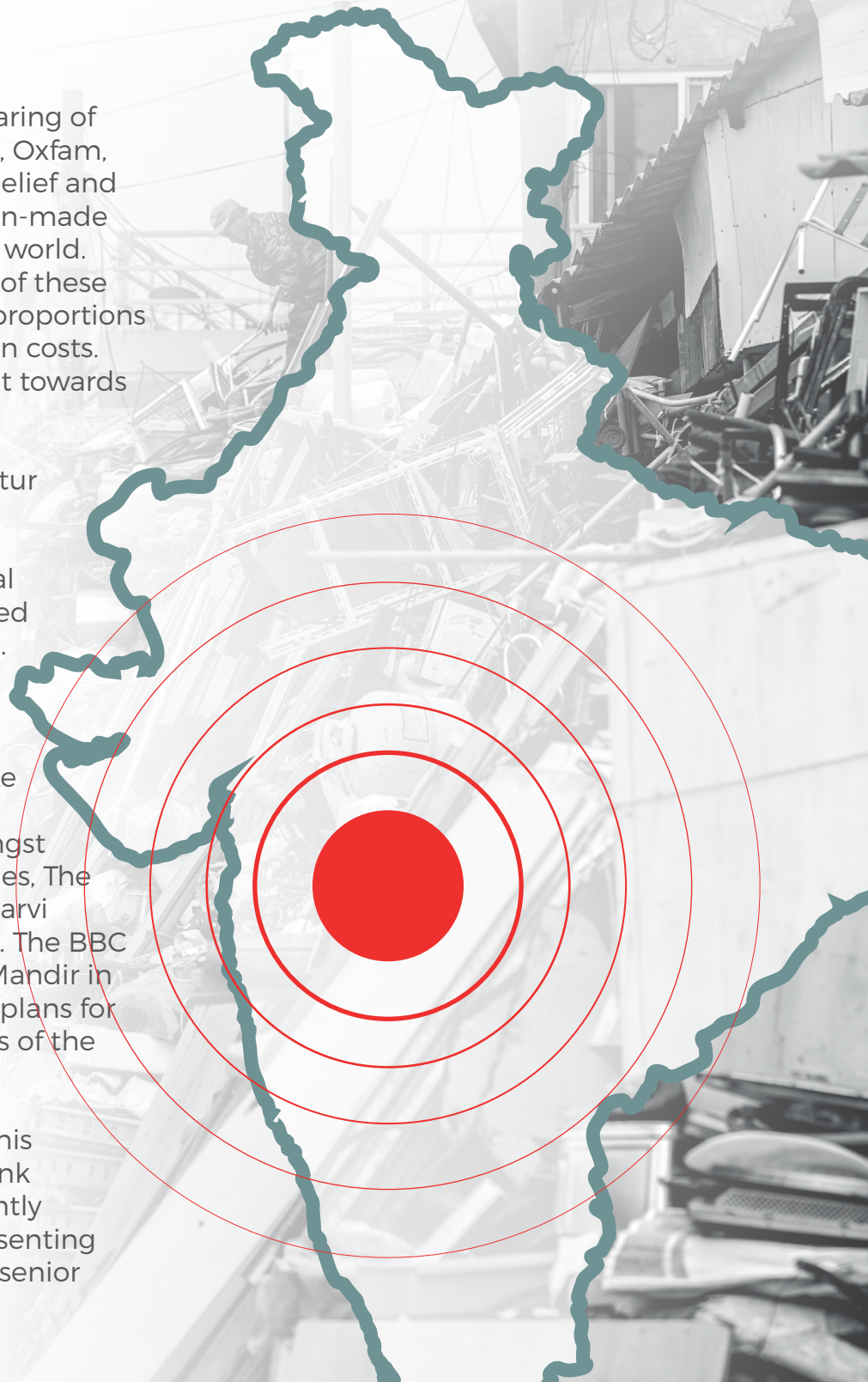
SEWA clearly was the need of the hour and the global Hindu Samaj greeted it with great enthusiasm. Within a period of 10 to 12 weeks of its launch, a huge sum of over £400,000 was collected.

### HASMUKH VELJIBHAI SHAH

We were all accustomed to hearing of British Red Cross, Christian Aid, Oxfam, Tear Fund, Water Aid, Islamic Relief and others whenever natural or man-made disasters struck any part of the world. Many did not know that many of these charities absorbed significant proportions of these funds as administration costs. Often as little as 30% was spent towards the rehabilitation of victims.

When an earthquake struck Latur in the State of Maharashtra in September 1993, many Sangh Swayamsevaks felt that a global charity needed to be established with ethics of the highest form. Swayamsevaks in the UK started a campaign to collect funds that would be given directly to the earthquake victims. The initiative created immense media interest amongst the likes BBC, ITN, Sky, The Times, The Guardian, Gujarat Samachar, Garvi Gujarat, Des Pardes and others. The BBC came to Shree Laxminarayan Mandir in Bradford to enquire about our plans for the rehabilitation of the victims of the Latur earthquake.

We had not named it yet but this triggered Swayamsevaks to think of a name that would be instantly recognisable as a charity representing Dharmic values. We consulted senior





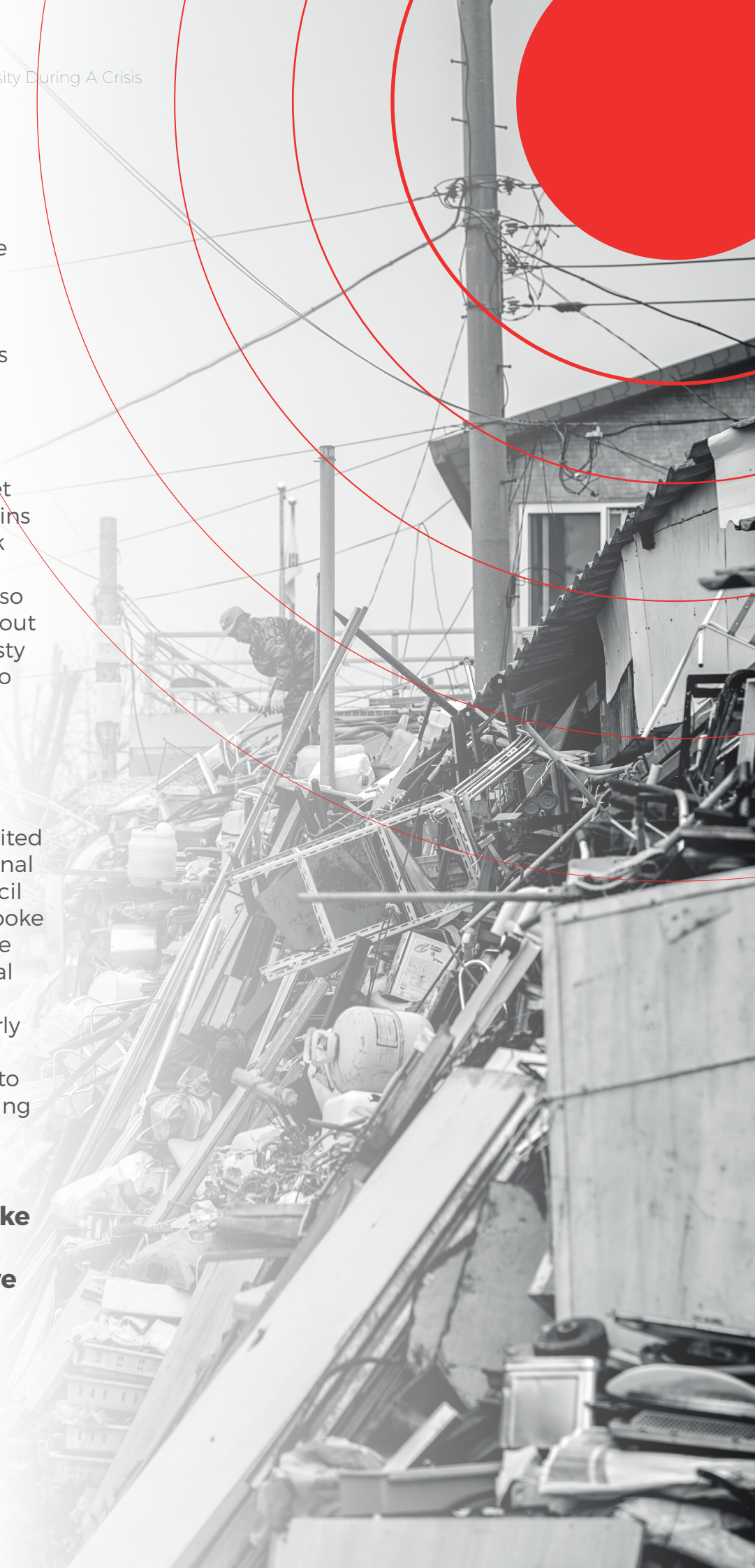
Shri Subodhbhai Thakkar, Shri Arjunlal Sharma and Shri Amratlal Shah went to Latur to hand over these precious funds to the joint administrators of the rehabilitation programme and to oversee its judicious use in the immediate provision of medical, food, water and clothing.

A new hospital was also set up and to this day, it remains a symbol of the good work done by SEWA. Such was the result of the efforts by so many karyakartas throughout the country that Her Majesty the Queen, Elizabeth II also came to know and lauded SEWA's principles.

In December 1993, at a Buckingham Palace Luncheon, where I was invited to attend as the International Trustee of the World Council of Hindus (VHP UK), she spoke in glowing terms about the work of SEWA International for the India Earthquake victims. She was particularly pleased that every penny raised by SEWA would go to the victims without incurring administration costs. She commended

**“other charities to take a leaf out of SEWA work ethic and serve humanity with dedication and sincerity”.**

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## PART 2

### SEWA INTERNATIONAL: GUJARAT EARTHQUAKE— SEWA, A HOUSEHOLD NAME

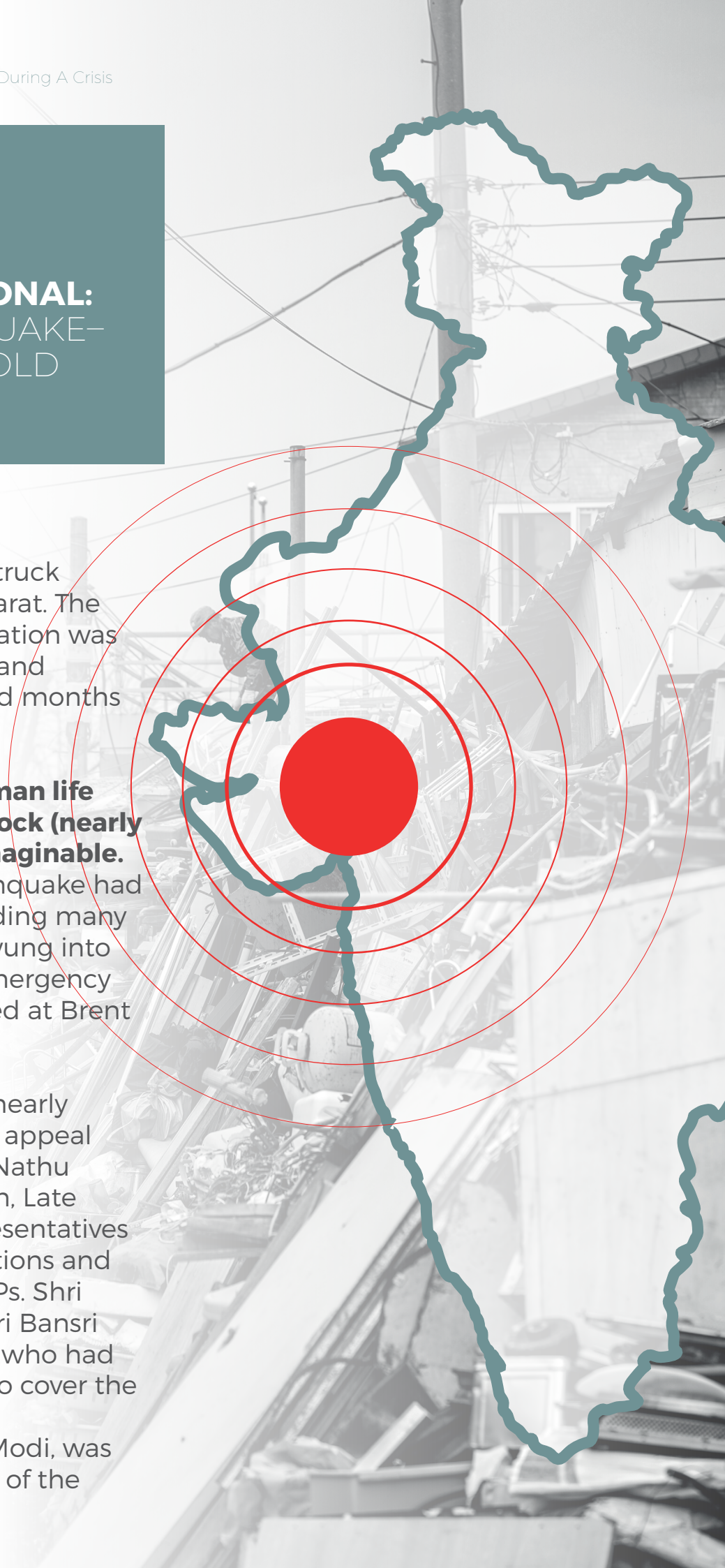
#### HASMUKH VELJIBHAI SHAH

In 2001, an earthquake struck the district of Kutch, Gujarat. The enormity and the devastation was beyond comprehension and seismic activity continued months after it had struck.

**The pain and loss of human life (over 40,000) and livestock (nearly half a million) was unimaginable.**

Many victims of the earthquake had relatives in the UK, including many Swayamsevaks. SEWA swung into action once again. An emergency public meeting was called at Brent Town Hall in London.

Prominent Hindus with nearly 500 others attended the appeal meeting, including Shri Nathu Ram Puri, Late Lord Noon, Late Shri Haribhai Halai, representatives of major Hindu organisations and some Councillors and MPs. Shri Manoj Ladwa and Kumari Bansri Shah were the joint MCs who had arranged for the media to cover the appeal. CM of Gujarat, Hon Shri Narendrabhai Modi, was on an air reconnaissance of the





earthquake disaster zone that covered at least 1/3 rd of Gujarat. His emotional message in Gujarati was telecast live to the gathering in Brent Town Hall and I had the fortune to translate verbatim. His appeal electrified those who were present.

**A sum of £2 million was pledged in a matter of an hour**, with more pouring in from Hindu organisations, individuals, corporate companies, and the ever generous non-Hindu British public. Through an immense campaign carried out by a united Sangh Parivar across the country, in a matter of just 4 months, **a total sum of £4.3 million was raised of which £2 million was sent directly to various rehabilitation projects in Bharat.**

Several devastated villages were developed by SEWA from the ground up. Shri Shantibhai Mistry, Late Shri Haribhai Halai and some others oversaw the work of rehabilitation in person with the media and politicians witnessing the development of infrastructure of whole villages.

Today, SEWA UK is acknowledged as one of the top Ethical Charities in the UK and is operating in many countries (as SEWA International), providing succour to millions of disadvantaged victims of man-made or natural disasters. A true humanitarian movement with Dharmic values.







## COPING WITH CRISIS

# HISTORIC CRISES – HOW HINDUS RESPONDED

RAVI LADVA

We will briefly examine three historic crises and observe how Hindus responded. In truth, historically, Hindus have often come off worse out of a crisis, but it has been by the smallest of margins. It is prudent to add the caveat that history is more nuanced, and I would encourage everyone to read Hindu history for themselves. Gen. George S. Patton Jr. once said,

**“pressure makes diamonds”.**

In that case then, Hindu history has a trove of personalities, women, men and queer, who are worth a thousand Kohinoors.

### 711 CE: Raja Dahir – Invasions fought with Bravery

*“I am going to meet the Arabs in open battle, and fight them as best as I can. If I crush them, my kingdom will then be put on a firm footing. If I am killed honourably, the event will be recorded in the books of Arabia and India and will be talked about by great men.”*

The Umayyad Caliphate had their eyes set on Sindh as it was the final gate between them and India. They were conscious of the mighty armies on the other side of the Pariyatra Parvat; however, as Muslims were being attacked off the coast of Sindh they found in this a necessary justification for waging war. Although Raja Dahir sent repeated letters explaining that this was in fact the work of pirates, his remonstrations fell on deaf ears.

The Caliphate dispatched the 17-year-old Gen. Mohamed bin Qasim to conquer Sindh. Facing this threat to his domain, and aware of his duty to protect Bharats border, Raja Dahir did not hesitate to mobilise all the resources he could marshal. However, at this point, his allies began to desert him, with the local Buddhist and Jain populations refusing to join the fight, alleging the principle of ahimsa as their reason.



Despite all this, Raja Dahir mustered what forces he could and met Mohammed bin Qasim at the Battlefield of Aror. As the two armies clashed, the Hindu army gained the upper hand, but unfortunate circumstances reversed Raja Dahir's advantage. Thrown from his elephant, his soldiers began to run away in their panic. With an arrow in his chest, having sustained several blows to the head and severely wounded, Raja Dahir was true to his word, holding the line of dharma until his last breath.



### 1025 CE: Raja Bhoja I – Freedom upheld by Reputation

*"Band after band of defenders entered the mandir at Somnath, and with their hands clasped around their necks, they wept and passionately entreated him [the Shiva lingam]. Then again they issued forth until they were slain, and but few were left alive. The number of the dead exceeded fifty thousand."*

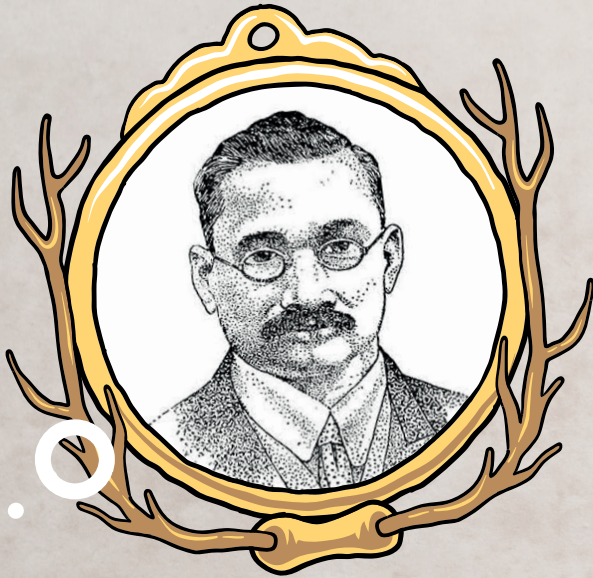
While Bharat was dealing with repeated raids from Afghanistan and domestic infighting, a leader emerged to defend his country. Raja Bhoja was a polymath and a warrior – one who was remarkable

and resolute. His reign cemented the preservation of Hindu thought and martial spirit for over a century. He managed this feat at an uncertain time in history surrounded by the pressure of unending chaos and iconoclasm. Raja Bhoja's reputation was so imposing that Mahmud Ghazni avoided him altogether.

After the fall of the Hindu Kabul Shahi kingdom, Raja Bhoja gave sanctuary to many of the refugees. As a statesman, he understood the lurking threats posed to the rest of Bharat, and so went about building a coalition. With the support of Raja Bhimdev Solanki, he sent troops into Gujarat to stop the looting and destruction of Somnath Mandir by Ghazni, who, however, with the help of local rulers was able to evade both Rajas. In a fantastic display of strategy, Raja Bhoja blocked all but one of the roads leading back into Afghanistan.

The 'Desert Road', the same route that broke Alexander the Great's army, would now break Ghazni's. It was a reminder to the world that Bharat still had warriors to defend it.





### 1867 CE: Dr. Shankar Abaji Bhise – Identity challenged with Knowledge

Lord Mayo, Viceroy of India declared, “We are all British gentlemen engaged in the magnificent work of governing an inferior race.” When Britain controlled India, education and support given to the entire nation was smaller than the total education budget of New York State. Despite these odds, many talented and hardworking people rose to challenge the Western idea that Bharatiya people were not their equals.

Abaji was born in Bombay on 29th April 1867. By the age of fourteen, he had created a machine that made coal gas. While in Bombay, he founded a science club that published a science magazine in Marathi called Vividh Kala Prakash through which he conveyed the importance of science to ordinary people. His mind and abilities could not be contained and by the time he was sixteen, he had set sail for the UK. Abaji's most acclaimed invention was the typesetting and composing machines.

Machines at the time were slow and could cast only 150 types per minute. Abaji, challenged by engineers from the Caston-Type Foundry, a leading

typesetting firm in London, did not back down. Abaji set up his foundry, Bhiso-Type Ltd, and produced a machine in 1908. He silenced his critics and the British engineers. His machine could automatically cast and assemble 1,200 different types per minute. The Americans affectionately called him ‘the Edison of India’. Abaji has to his credit 200 inventions, in respect of forty of which he held patents.

### Conclusion: Lessons Learned

The portrayal of Hindu history, often through tragic episodes, conceals the accomplishments of our ancestors. Above are only three examples from our shared history exhibiting the benchmark that we should aspire to emulate.

**No matter the crisis or the odds there is one consistent theme in a crisis – Hindus do not give up.**

Hindus must learn to adapt to avoid being caught out in complacency: the cause should be bigger than the loss of any single leader, and with bravery, commitment, intelligence and unity, what is there that Hindus cannot accomplish?

History tells us that mandirs can be rebuilt, books rewritten, victories should be celebrated, but our darkest hours should be remembered, for that is when we shone the brightest.



# TAKE A MOMENT BEFORE YOU CONTINUE

# BREATHE IN AND OUT SMILE :)

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### ONLINE YOGA IN LOCKDOWN

PRATIBHA MISTRY

#### Let's Breathe

Simple breathing practice can work wonders for our body and mind. Just for a moment, sit comfortably, close your eyes, and bring your attention to your breath.

**Breathe in and out through  
your nose, gently and softly.**

Become aware of the sound of your breath. Smile. Observe your natural breathing pattern just as it is, without trying to force or change anything. Notice how you are feeling...

*The mind is the king of the senses.  
Breath is the king of the mind*  
– B.K.S. Iyengar.

Since April, the Yog-Kulam team have been delivering a series of online workshops called Let's Breathe to share simple prāṇāyāma, yogāsana and relaxation techniques. Suitable for all abilities, the programmes aim to help calm and centre individuals during this challenging and stressful time.

Teachers were invited to the first session, key workers to the second and a wider audience to subsequent sessions. The programme was a success and so a regular Thursday evening practice was started where participants from all parts of the UK could take a few moments to breathe, stretch and relax.

Practising simple breathing exercises sets a solid foundation for prāṇāyāma practice. Becoming aware of breath and posture can shift the body and mind from feeling stressed and reactive to feeling relaxed and responsive. Diaphragmatic breathing also supports the immune system and strengthens the lungs. Each session

includes chair exercises and yogāsanas to help to mobilise the body. Ideal for the busy world, the exercises take only a few minutes and require just a chair. The session ends with a five-minute seated savasana to help the body to relax further. A perfect routine before bedtime.

### HappYoga for children

Every Saturday afternoon in June, children in school years 3-6 were invited to attend the HappYoga workshop. These online, interactive, fun filled sessions helped to develop agility, balance and calm and take the children on a yogic exploration of happiness, and were suitable for the whole family.

### Beyond the Mat - Global Peace and Harmony through Yoga Webinar

The literal meaning of yoga is 'to unite' - on an individual level, to unite the body, mind, intellect, and soul. It can also bring together families, communities and society. The webinar will explore this topic, sharing the experiences of yoga teachers and experts from around the world.

***If you are a yoga teacher and would like to join our teaching community, we would love to hear from you.***

**Please contact [info@yog-kulam.org](mailto:info@yog-kulam.org).**



**Online Yoga for Children - Key Stage Two - Primary Years 3-6**

Every Saturday in June 2020  
3:00pm- 3:30pm

Suitable for all abilities  
Register at [www.yog-kulam.org](http://www.yog-kulam.org)  
For further information please contact [info@yog-kulam.org](mailto:info@yog-kulam.org)

### Let's breathe....

Simple yoga and pranayama techniques

**Every Thursday 8:30pm - 9:00pm**

Register at <http://yog-kulam.org/form.html>

Suitable for all abilities and no special equipment required

For further information contact  
[info@yog-kulam.org](mailto:info@yog-kulam.org)





# VICHAAR (VI'CHĀR) IDEAS, THOUGHTS; MANTHAN (MĀN'THĀN) CHURNING.

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## CONTINUING THE MANTHAN FROM HOME

RAJASHEKAR ASIREDDY

Vichaar Manthan (VM) is a public engagement platform exploring contemporary British issues from a Hindu civilisational lens and also runs book clubs across the country. The nature of work involves bringing people together to discuss and share ideas. The COVID-19 lockdown meant postponing many planned activities and the team sensed this problem very quickly.

Before lockdown was announced officially most of our activities were moved online and we used this as an opportunity to expand our work to serve the community more. The VM format and discussion



remained the same, except that the audience and speakers were joining from their living rooms which allowed us to reach out to a global audience. Some of the speakers who couldn't come on to the platform because of various constraints have now taken part, and we have had some globally renowned speakers like Dr Pippa Malmgren and Dr Amanda Goodall on the VM platform in the last couple of months.

Hosting Vichaar Manthan online also increased the amount of work for each chapter. From hosting an event every couple of months, we now have a VM event every fortnight, engaging a wider community and addressing more issues. Book clubs too have benefited from being virtual, with more people joining not only from various parts of the UK but also from Europe and India. It helped to reach out to more people who otherwise couldn't have participated because of their location or other commitments.

**The lockdown period was hard for people; it impacted many economically, physically and mentally.**

VM karyakartas helped the community as much as possible by getting involved in many sewa activities in their personal capacities and also serving the communities with their professional skills. We also planned VMs which could help the community in these hard times, with topics including Struggling as a Society and Pandemics in which our expert witnesses shared many thought-provoking ideas that help to overcome these difficult times.

The discussions provided great insight into how we as a society should behave and prepare in this struggle, what were the major pandemics in the past and how they impacted humanity, what could we

learn from them and what challenges and opportunities are ahead of us. Virtual events and book clubs could never replace the physical meet ups where people can meet personally, get to know each other and build relationships.

Initially it was a challenge for the team to engage with the audience, but with the right facilitation and choice of topics engagement has increased. Some audience members who normally wouldn't express their opinions or ask questions in public event are now openly expressing them online, continuous dialogue is taking place when the expert witnesses are presenting their ideas, and we have increased the number of questions posed to the panel, with many people joining the manthan through the online videos after it has concluded.

VM also organised its first and biggest virtual global conference, Sustainable Narratives, focusing on the stories we tell ourselves and each other that shape our behaviour. The conference explored five major branches of society: from Governance to Religion, Wealth,

Literature and Rights through open dialogue that helps us to understand and re-imagine the stories that shape us, with expert speakers joining from around the world. Sustainable Narratives also featured eight 'Fireside Conversations', a series of informal but structured interviews with some of the brightest minds of our time. These one-to-one sessions offered an opportunity to delve deeply into the thoughts and experiences of those shaping the future of our world.

In normal times, we would encourage our audience to continue churning thoughts at home after an event; in the COVID-19 pandemic, the churning on some of the most important issues facing our society begins at home itself.

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# **THE UNCERTAINTY OF LIFE**

**DR RAMESH PATTNI**

Since ancient times, humans have grappled with the uncertainty of life and have been working out ways of dealing with it for millennia. The classical Hindu text the Yogasūtras, written more than 2000 years ago, talks about one of the fundamental drivers of human thought and behaviour, abhiniveśa – meaning the fear of annihilation, or the dread of non-being. This compels us to look for ways of dealing with it or even escaping it. It directs us to fight against this uncertainty of our own existence by looking for certainty through our thoughts and actions.

Hindu scriptures speak about this idea of change and uncertainty as one of the five aspects of life. These aspects point to the facts of life and the constant difficulties one may face by not acknowledging them. In the Bhagavad Gita (considered as the main text of the Hindus), in the Upaniṣads, the philosophical texts, and the epic narratives of the Mahabharat and Rāmāyan, we come across teachings that illustrate these aspects in many ways.

**THE FIRST** is that there is constant change and uncertainty in life;

**SECONDLY**, there is going to be suffering in one form or another;

**THIRDLY**, we will become dependent on many things in our life – whether it be material things, people or situations – and we will find ourselves constantly trying to grapple with these dependencies;

**FOURTHLY**, we will experience the limitations of our body and mind and

**FINALLY**, we will experience a constant stream of disappointments and dissatisfactions as part and parcel of our lives.

All these aspects of life have come into our experience in a stark way during this pandemic. In acknowledging them, we come to accept that we need to take care of our mental wellbeing as well as our physical selves.

This is where Chinmaya Mission worldwide and in the UK has stepped up with hundreds of thousands of volunteers who are providing spiritual sustenance in these times of great uncertainty and danger. These volunteers have created online platforms for delivering valuable scriptural knowledge to suffering individuals in their own homes.

From daily talks by the Head of the Chinmaya Mission, Swami Swaroopananda, on scriptures and themes that touch the heart of our lockdown condition like the talks on 'Outthink Uncertainty', the Gāyatri Mantra and the Bhaja Govindam, to Swami Tejomayananda who gave a wonderful series of talks on Kathopanishad.

Our own resident Chinmaya Mission UK Brahmacharini, Shripriya Chaitanya has been conducting online classes and talks on a daily basis, giving spiritual nourishment to longing individuals. And then there are many volunteers who are also taking classes daily, others who are getting in touch with people in need and still others who are serving people by conducting funeral rites and chanting and singing bhajans for the departed souls.

These are the people about whom Lord Krishna speaks in the Bhagavad Gita: they who are silently serving communities for the greater good and nourishing their minds and hearts in thought, word and deed.

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## COUNTERING FOOD POVERTY IN A GLOBAL PANDEMIC - THE AKSHAYA PATRA STORY

BHAWANI SINGH SHEKHAWAT

Enough and more has been written and said about how these times are unprecedented and how unprepared we are at all levels of a civil society to deal with situations like this.

The point of this write up is not to highlight the challenges posed by COVID19 but instead the opportunities it has thrown up for all of us to look at our lives and the world we interface with in a different light. More so, with a focus on food poverty. It is indeed a travesty that after 100s of years of development and multiple years of economic growth, the UN Strategic Development Goals (SDGs) have Poverty and Hunger as its top two challenges.

**We haven't been able to solve hunger despite having put men on the moon and missions to Mars.**

To me personally, and to the organisation that is my life's work now – The Akshaya Patra Foundation, this is unacceptable. Particularly when mathematically at least, there should be enough food for all who inhabit our planet. What causes global hunger is simply poor management of food and food-waste. **In Britain alone, we throw away over £12 billion worth**



**of food and by current estimate, over 3 million children go hungry in the UK.**

**In India, the number of children and families living in food poverty is over 100 million as a conservative estimate.**

The Akshaya Patra Foundation (TAPF) was set up to ensure that no child missed out on school because of hunger and over the last 20 years, the foundation has done exemplary work to ensure that this problem is handled with urgency, speed and scale.

TAPF utilises a combination of complex technology with a missionary zeal to serve over 1.8 million children every day and is the world's largest program of its kind, having served over 3 billion meals through its 50+ state-of-the-art manufacturing facilities fondly called "kitchens". Some of these serve over 100,000 children. The food served is vegetarian, fresh, hot, nutritious and guaranteed.



When the pandemic struck, we quickly realised that the organisation had to be repurposed. Working with various state and central government bodies in India and the UK, we created systems that would allow us to serve a very large number of the disadvantaged with speed, consistency and compassion. Working with our amazing volunteers, we created a service that would provide families a box of supplies they could use to cook with for close to a month. Those unable to cook are served hot meals and in addition, we provide a service for the Shramik Trains.

To date, we have served over 60 million meals in India and over 100,000 in London and will continue to do so as long as the situation requires us to. TAPF is a wonderful example of an organisation that has the mind of a corporate but the heart of service.

Furthermore, it is a matter of purposeful pride for that we are led by Faith but governed by science and managed by

good systems. To be able to solve our mega problems with speed and scale, all of us need courage, tenacity and a quiet mind and above all, a relentless and purposeful pursuit of serving with gratitude, compassion and kindness without compromising quality and ignoring the science.

At Akshaya Patra, that is our purpose and we are grateful to all those who have come forward to support us for we are only as good as the communities we serve.

**For more, please look up [www.tapf.org.uk](http://www.tapf.org.uk)**

Bhawani Singh Shekhawat is the CEO of The Akshaya Patra Foundation, Europe – the world's largest meals program of its kind and a highly respected NGO globally. An alumnus of Military School Belgaum, he is London based and is also an active mentor, a speaker on the London Bureau of speakers and Board Advisor





## COPING WITH CRISIS

# CARE-CONNECT

VISHAL PATEL

**“Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam”**  
is a Sanskrit phrase found in Hindu texts that means “the whole world is one family”.

The current climate of uncertainty and challenge is the ideal testament of this timeless Hindu philosophy. As world leaders, governments and charities across the globe come together to provide support and care for all those in need, His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj, the current spiritual leader of BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS), issued a call for all volunteers to act upon their dharma (duty) and serve their nation.

BAPS in the UK – headquartered at the Neasden Temple in London – immediately launched a national ‘Connect and Care’ programme to directly support individuals and communities in response to the global coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. It mobilised more than **1,100 volunteers in 61 areas around the UK as well as in Europe** to help the elderly and vulnerable in local communities, to ensure they are informed, safe and supported.

### The multi-faceted initiative includes:

- Public announcements and publications, including summaries of government guidance, to provide important advice and support for individuals as well as businesses
- A series of health awareness videos and presentations in English and Gujarati to educate the public on its collective responsibility to help stem the rapid spread of this deadly virus as well as to remain physically and mentally healthy
- More than 20,000 phone calls to over 12,000 families providing support and comfort
- Reaching out regularly to over 4,000 elderly and vulnerable people to collect shopping, medication and run essential errands, where required
- More than 42,000 meals prepared and home-delivered to the needy so far
- Supporting 194 hospitals and key work places, such as police stations, fire stations, local food banks, local councils, essential schools, care homes, etc, by providing food and supplies as well as letters of appreciation for their heroic staff
- Supporting charitable organisations by delivering more than 75 tonnes of fresh fruit and vegetables as well as grocery bags to the needy in the local community
- A parenting toolkit with resources and guidelines to keep children of all ages active and engaged

BAPS has produced an inspiring video paying tribute to the thousands of key workers serving in the UK during the COVID-19 pandemic. The video, based on a poem, features over a hundred doctors, nurses, pharmacists and more, who have joined thousands of BAME key workers currently serving on the frontline.

BAPS also continues to fulfil the spiritual needs of people through online worship, including webcasts of arti, abhishek, prayers, kirtan, religious assemblies and talks. This fusion of technology and devotion is bringing people together from around the world and providing a connection to spirituality during these times of isolation and social distancing.

His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj embodied his life motto,

**“In the joy of others  
lies our own.”**

His principles of selfless and unconditional service to humanity inspire us to care for others like we care for ourselves, to treat others with kindness and compassion, and to ensure that no one feels alone in this time. Yogen Shah, a BAPS volunteer in Watford, explained,

**“Our gurus have inspired and energised us to serve and support the people of this country and stand by them in their time of need. We’re praying together for this pandemic to subside and for God to provide strength to all.”**

**IN THE  
JOY OF  
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## SEPTEMBER 2020 - Part 3

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