



SANGH MAIL

Sanskār • Sewā • Sangathan

OCTOBER 2023:
Raksha Bandhan – Protecting the Protectors

Sangh Mail is a monthly publication showcasing the activities of Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (UK) for circulation to it's members and well-wishers.

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RAKSHA BANDHAN 2023

Raksha Bandhan is a festival that symbolises the vow of protection of the wider family and to that of the whole community. A tradition on this festival, involves tying a Rakhi to one another- a cotton thread that symbolises the universal connectedness to serve and protect each other.

This Hindu festival holds a special significance as it emphasises the core values of courage, commitment, discipline, respect, integrity and loyalty, all the qualities which are present in those people who have dedicated their lives to serving the community, such as the police force and emergency services. They protect us and carry out their duty without asking for anything in return. Their courage is uplifting and inspiring, hence we use this auspicious occasion to recognise and honour that, by inviting those who protect us, to an event allowing us to express our gratefulness and tie them a Rakhi and pray for their wellbeing.



This evening the Newbury Neighbourhood Team were visited by The Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS) to celebrate Raksha Bandhan, where Officers were thanked for serving the Community. More information on the celebration can be found at <https://orlo.uk/pRJcC>.



BHARATI SHAKHA NEWBURY

Bharati Shakha Newbury celebrated Raksha Bandhan by extending gratitude to the Newbury Fire and Ambulance services. The event was a heartfelt gesture to thank these heroes for their unwavering dedication to protecting our community.

In continuation of this noble spirit of appreciation, Swayamsevaks from Bharati Shakha Newbury also paid a visit to the local Police Station. They tied Rakhis on the wrists of the police officers, symbolising a bond of protection and camaraderie. It was a touching gesture to acknowledge the invaluable service provided by the police force in safeguarding our neighbourhoods. These acts of kindness and recognition serve as a reminder of the unity and respect within our society.



SLOUGH SHAKHA

***“May this festival
bring us closer to all
beloved ones and
inspire us to be better
brother, sisters, and
members of our
community.”***

– Mayor of Slough

Laughter and joyful cheers filled the air with fun-filled games, strengthening the bonds of friendship and unity within the community. The Mayor of Slough delivered a heartfelt speech, acknowledging the efforts of HSS (UK) in promoting cultural values within the community.

Representatives from the Thames Valley Police and Fire Rescue Services also graced the event with their presence, emphasising the importance of community collaboration and safety. Their involvement highlighted the significance of maintaining strong ties between law enforcement and the community.



NORTHAMPTON NAGAR

Swayamsevaks, Sevikas and family celebrated Raksha Bandhan with the police and fire service in Northampton. 12 police and fire service personnel joined the event. We tied Rakhi's to the emergency services and explained the meaning of Raksha Bandhan - a gesture of gratitude for all that they do for us, keeping us safe and serving the community. The emergency services appreciated the kind gesture with warmth. We also had the opportunity to see and use some of their equipment whilst also learning about some of the challenges they face.





"A great event, with so many attendees from the emergency services and other health care sectors"

LEICESTER





COVENTRY SHAKHA

Coventry Shakha, organized a special Raksha Bandhan Milan event, which saw the participation of more than 150 individuals, including members from Leamington Shakha. The event aimed to celebrate the essence of Raksha Bandhan and promote Hindu culture and practices. In addition, this event received an honoured guest, the Mayor, the Mayoress and representatives from the emergency protection services who appreciated the efforts of HSS Coventry Shakha in fostering cultural harmony and community bonding.

Swayamsevaks and Sevikas tied Rakhis to the honoured guests, including the Mayor and Mayoress. This tradition symbolizes the bond of protection, love, and unity within society. Following the Rakhi tying ceremony, the honoured guest, the Mayor and others, expressed their gratitude for being a part of the event.

“They commended the HSS Coventry Shakha for its efforts in preserving and promoting Hindu culture and fostering community cohesion.”





NOTTINGHAM

Nottingham Ekta Pariwar Shakha came together with our local police and fire station officers, tying Rakhis on each of them as a symbol of our gratitude for their daily protection. We offered heartfelt prayers for their safety and well-being.

The officers kindly opened the doors of the fire station, sharing the inner workings of their valiant fire engines and the dedicated execution of their duties. This day held great significance for both children and adults, as it fostered a strong sense of unity and appreciation. Laughter and joy filled the air as we enjoyed delicious meals and an enlightening tour, and some even had the unique chance to experience the thrill of sliding down the fire station pole.





We all had plenty of fun and games at our Rugby Raksha Bandhan Utsav. The Honourable Mayor of Rugby, a member of the Fire Service, the CEO of Rugby Food Bank, and from Panahghar Safehouse, all were present to grace the occasion.

**RUGBY
NAGAR**





KESARI SHAKHA, CHELTENHAM

“Kindness is spread in
society by protecting
and teaching each
other ”

Kesari Shakha, celebrated Raksha Bandhan Utsav with representatives from the emergency services. The Police were represented by a Head Constable and two Positive Action Officers and the NHS was represented by a Gynaecologist and Urologist. The children in shakha then tied rakhi to invited the guests followed by everyone (including the guests) tying rakhis to each other. These moments created a blessed and positive atmosphere. Police Head highly appreciated our gratitude with kind words. Also, BBC Radio Gloucestershire reporter joined us and he expressed our views of Hinduism on Raksha Bandhan to the wider community of Gloucestershire. Everyone carried message of humanity and brotherhood with them to their home.





LIVERPOOL

Liverpool Shakha celebrated Raksha Bandhan at Fernley Resource Centre, fostering community protection bonds.

A special program was arranged by the children from shakha, which included a play, introducing Raksha Bandhan and presenting the meaning and purpose of this festival. Games specially tailored for people with special needs were played and all the family members and staff members also got involved- they particularly enjoyed Rakhi bingo!

All of the shakha members tied Rakhis to all the members at the centre, including the staff, who do a tremendous job running the facilities and looking after all the members, making it a joyful day for all.



FINCHLEY PRATAP & SHAKTI SHAKHA

The day was filled with a variety of activities for all ages. At the beginning there were different stations for everyone to enjoy - from making Raksha Bandhan cards, making rakhis, a bouncy castle, mendhi, face painting, jenga and chair yoga for the elderly. The formal Utsav then consisted of yoga for everyone, a Bauddhik on the relevance of Raksha Bandhan and concluding with the tying of Rakhi to our guests.

We were graced with presence of members from the Metropolitan Police and Jain Hindu Organ Donation Organisation as well as all members of the community. Police officer Joe said,

“It’s great to be appreciated for the work we do, and I am delighted to see HSS volunteers participating in this joyous festival of protection and gratitude”.





Raksha Bandhan symbolises the spirit of brotherhood and harmony with all sections of the community regardless of race, religion, colour or nationality.

BRACKNELL SHAKHA



Bracknell Shakha celebrated Raksha Bandhan Utsav with the Honourable Mayor of Bracknell Forest - Councillor Naheed Ejaz. It was wonderful to have Madam Mayor with us and she was really impressed with the program and the values that are being promoted through this festival.





BIRMINGHAM NAGAR

Swayamsevaks and Sevikas from Birmingham Nagar had the privilege of visiting the West Midlands Police Headquarters to celebrate Raksha Bandhan with the West Midlands Police. We extended our heartfelt appreciation to the Police Force for their dedicated services in safeguarding the community. Rakhis were ceremoniously tied to several officers, including Assistant Chief Constable of West Midlands region, and Birmingham's Chief Superintendent. We took the opportunity to emphasise the values we nurture through the three pillars of Sankar, Sewa, and Sangathan, and to underscore our commitment to fostering connections with various organisations, thus fortifying, and serving the wider society we live in.



Bradford Shakha and West Yorkshire Hindu Police Association celebrated Raksha Bandhan today with Chief Constable of West Yorkshire and other police officers.

BRADFORD





Photo by Tom Hermans on Unsplash

Essential Reads

*“The gift of **knowledge** is a far higher gift than that of food and clothes; it is even higher than giving life to a man, because the real life of man consists of knowledge”*

- Swami Vivekananda



DIFFERENCE BETWEEN DHARMA AND RELIGION

***“Religion is a Western concept; the Indian concept is neither religion nor even Hinduism nor any ‘ism’ – it is Sanatana Dharma, the eternal law of the universe, which cannot be formulated in any rigid and final set of tenets.”
- Michel Danino***

There is a fundamental difference between Religion and Dharma. Our failure to be conscious of this difference has resulted in the creation of several crucial problems that we, as humans, have faced in this century and continue to face even today.

In modern day language, dharma is equated, quite unfairly with religion. Organised religion demands adherence of the followers to the Book and the Prophet. Anything outside the boundaries of a faith is considered irreligious, if not downright sinful. It is believed that salvation lies only through the body of the Prophet or His words. History of mankind is often a gory testament of destruction wrought by the zealots in pursuit of faith. It is a testament of dividing people and converting them, of persecution, intolerance and subjugation, or of burning at the stakes: of the contest between the ecclesiastical and the temporal, the doctrine of two swords and of intrigues. Religion has been one of the most potent divisive forces in all history.

Dharma, however is different. It is different because it unites. There can never be divisions in dharma. Every interpretation is valid and welcome. No authority is too great to be questioned, too sacred to be touched. Unlimited interpretative freedom through free will is the quintessence of Dharma, for Dharma is as limitless as truth itself. No one can ever be its sole mouthpiece.

Dharma has the Sanskrit root *dhri*, which means “that which upholds” or “that without which nothing can stand” or “that which maintains the stability and harmony of the universe.” Dharma encompasses the natural, innate behaviour of things, duty, law, ethics, virtue, etc. Every entity in the cosmos has its particular dharma – from the electron, which has the dharma to move in a certain manner, to the clouds, galaxies, plants, insects, and of course, man. Man’s understanding of the dharma of inanimate things is what we now call physics.



Essential Read

The Western cultural traditions are built around religions. The emergence of the nation-state in the 16th and 17th centuries was the product of religious conflicts of the secular State with the Church. Much of what we call modern political vocabulary emerged and acquired meaning during those turbulent periods. Much of this vocabulary was directed at defining spheres - of the individual, of the State, of the Church as well as their inter-se relationship. The concepts of identity, ethnicity and autonomy are the products of this separation between the Church and the State. The emergence of science as a discipline made the issue of identity vis-a-vis religion more acute. Due to the dominance of much of the world by the Western countries, modernity and modernism came to be associated with these divisive concepts that originated in the West.

Hindus always recognized and respected the infinite multiplicity of approaches to *satyam*, the Truth (what is commonly, but incorrectly, called “tolerance”), but under the Western spotlight those approaches became so many “sects” almost rivalling each other (perhaps like Catholics and Protestants!). Hinduism was thus cut up into convenient bits – Vedism, Brahmanism, Vaishnavism, Shaivism, Shaktism, Tantrism, etc. – of which Indians themselves had been largely unaware, or at any rate not in this rigid, cut-and-dried fashion. As for Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism, which had been regarded in India as simply new paths, they were arbitrarily stuck with a label of “separate religions.” Similarly, thousands of fluid communities were duly catalogued and crystallised by the British rulers as so many permanent and rigid castes.

The concept of God is central to the definition of religion. Many Western thinkers have treated God as the most central religious concept. So much so, that they have gone to the extent of defining “religion” in terms of “God”. For example, according to James Martineau, *“Religion is the belief in an ever living God, that is, in a Divine Mind and Will ruling the Universe and holding moral relations with mankind.”*

Dharma is a very ancient word. Dharma is non-divisive, non-exclusive, and non-conclusive. Dharma is a quest for understanding cosmic order of the universe and consciousness order at a personal level.

The word religion as used in the standard form carries three connotations as reflected in the Abrahamic religions:

- That a religion is conclusive, that is to say it is the one and only true religion;
- That a religion is exclusionary, that is to say, those who don't follow it are excluded from salvation and
- That a religion is separative, that is to say, in order to belong to it one must not belong to another.



Essential Read

These three notions of religion – conclusive, exclusionary and separative, give Abrahamic religions a hard-edged identity. In Abrahamic religions there has been a strong emphasis on the separation of “believer” and “non-believer” and a religious imperative to move as many people from the latter category to the former. Truth has been conclusively and unquestionably revealed and captured in a book, and those that follow it are the only ones that are on the right path. Quite literally, this means that you are “with us or against us” – that the believers are right and represent the good who are “with God”; and all the others are misguided and are part of the darkness and deprived of any direct access to what is the ultimate good.

The worldview of the dharmic traditions is that while scriptures can be very helpful, Truth cannot be found by scripture alone but by a path of experiential realization and Self-discovery – and in that sense religion is not conclusive. It is also not separative and exclusive in the sense of dividing the world into believers and non-believers. The dharmic worldview is that there are many tribes throughout the world, and many teachers and teachings. Each tribe has good and bad people in a continuum; people that have a greater degree of access to truth and “goodness” are worthy of respect; and others less so. Since there is a continuum of “goodness” among individuals of each tribe, the need for converting other tribes to a particular conception of God as a religious imperative is not really there. A teacher can share his or her understanding of the truth; and means and ways for others to access this; but there is no underlying belief that only one such way exists. These ideas find clear expression as far back as the Rig Veda, with its famous quotation:

"Ekam sad, vipraha bahudha vadanti"

(I.164.46, Rig Veda)

It means: While Truth is One, the wise describe it in different ways. So dharma itself does not create a religious identity. One's worldly self-identity in the dharmic model derives from one's local community, profession or ancestry, *jati* or *kul*, but that identity is not a religious identity, fundamentally opposed to the existence of the identity of the “other” as a manifestation of falsehood.

- Anon

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WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

When submitting your articles, here are a few points to consider:

- Provide a summary- keep articles short, highlighting the best parts
- A picture tells a thousand words - select your best photos (maximum of 8) to go with your article in the same email
 - Don't forget to include your Shakha name and location

Send all articles to sanghmail@hssuk.org

