



UK-Indian Community Newsletter

May 10, 2022

Diaspora in the UK volunteer for Sewa international - aid in their efforts to help Indian nationals escape the war zone in Ukraine



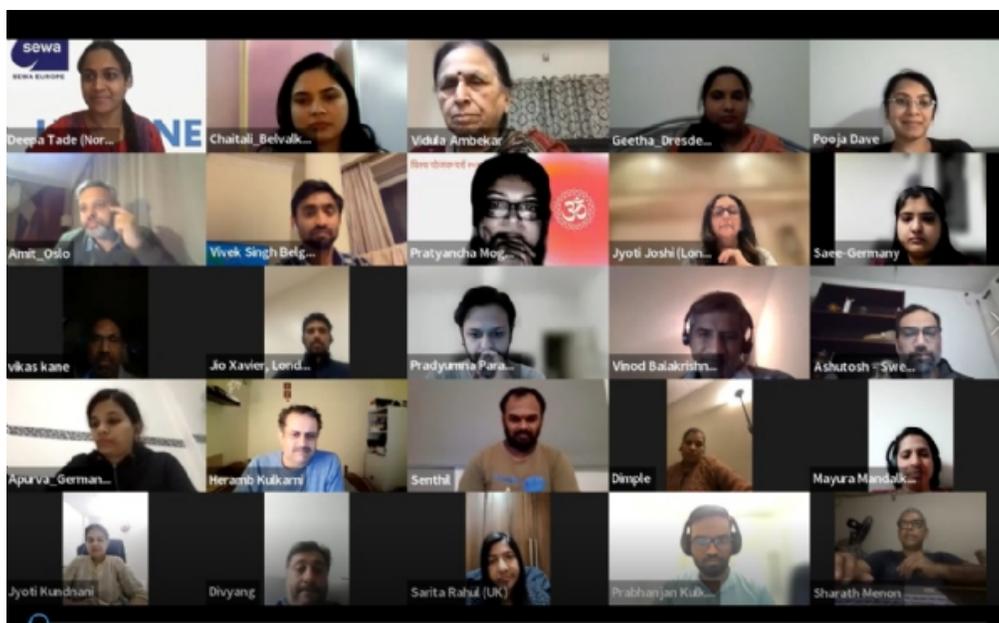
As the Russia-Ukraine crisis heightened, about 20,000 Indian students were trapped in the conflict zone. Their safety and evacuation became a priority for the Indian government and students were advised to reach the western borders of Ukraine & cross over to either Poland, Romania, or Hungary to board flights specially operated by the Indian government for taking them to India. This evacuation drive was called Operation Ganga.

To support and strengthen Operation Ganga's efforts, Sewa International played a key role as a conduit for students and other Indian nationals who were making their way to the western borders. An online form was floated on 27th of Feb' 2022 and soon Sewa was flooded with a wide variety of requests for help/assistance from students and individuals in different parts of Ukraine and different stages of movement towards the borders. Seeing the mammoth nature of the task, SEWA conceived

that over a hundred volunteers would be required to respond to these requests in the least amount of time as agility and expedition of response was the need of the hour. Volunteers from Sewa units in Poland, Finland, Ukraine, Romania, Hungary and Denmark were a part of this. Additionally volunteers from other orgs. and individuals in Europe and the UK also pitched in. As a result, more than 250 volunteers spread across many countries in Europe

worked under the guidance of Sewa International as it coordinated relief efforts in eighteen Ukrainian cities.

The nature of the work entailed reaching out to students who were seeking help and understanding the nature of their problem. There was a lot of anxiety and fear among students along with multiple challenges like non-cooperation from locals while traveling, difficulties while crossing the Ukrainian border including long queues in sub-zero temperatures, timing their movement while residing and moving in safe shelters in life threatening situations, etc. In this situation, each of the volunteers took a few students under their aegis and were their guide and sound board 24 x 7 till they were safely back home. The volunteers provided updated information and guidelines to the students that helped them make the right calls in their movement towards the borders but most importantly kept the student's morals high in this dynamic evolving situation. Sewa, on the other hand, arranged daily zoom calls for the volunteers for any unresolved queries and other difficult situations of students that needed to be collectively addressed and also it equipped the new volunteers to better understand the process. This, in turn, ensured that guidance delivered to students was apt, uniform, streamlined and swift. In addition, many WhatsApp groups were created city wise, country wise and border wise that again was useful in sharing resources and information.



Friends of India Society international (UK), along with Indian National Students Association (UK) also joined hands with Sewa International for this #SelflessServiceDrive. The orgs reached to the wider Indian diaspora in the UK and got an overwhelming response

from the diaspora for volunteering. One of the volunteers, Balaji, was grateful for getting an opportunity to serve. He had primarily helped students in Kharkiv supporting and motivating them till they reached the Suceava border în România. He relayed the difficult situation of students where he helped them with route maps, numbers of individuals and Govt. Officials who would aid them at the border, etc. He was also involved in getting quotes from different transport companies in Ukraine, Romania, Moldova, Hungary and Poland who could help the students with safe transportation to the borders. Though this sewa involved some sleepless nights, it was truly gratifying for him to see the children being reunited with their family back home.

There were other organizations and individuals who helped too. Ragasudha Vinjamuri of Sanskruti Centre in the UK also contributed significantly towards Sewa's efforts. Being a lecturer herself, she could understand the emotions of the young students and thus could provide appropriate guidance and assurance to them. She was involved quite early on in this drive and later on was also the 'Gatanayak', or a team lead, leading a group of 20/25 volunteers stationed in Norway, Switzerland, Belgium, Germany, Finland and India. The team was responsible for following up, supporting and counseling students who had reached India. The students had been through a traumatic war-like situation and it was imminent to ensure that mentally they were at peace. Ragasudhaji said that this follow-up project had some challenges like time difference and varied work patterns of team members in different professions but technology and the grit of the volunteers to deliver Sewa - saw them through. The project just ended just recently. She felt fortunate to serve humanity in these war times through Sewa International. The zeal, enthusiasm and selfless attitude of the volunteers was inspiring. It truly was a humbling experience for her and she hopes to carry forth some learning points.

Senthil Kumar Balasubramanian, director of Renovatio Systems Ltd (UK), was also concerned about the safety of Indian students and wanted to do more for them. He reached out to SEWA and was primarily involved in organizing transportation & food for students who were stranded in Lviv. Through his contacts in Ukraine, he could organize local transportation and help students find taxis to cross the borders. He admired the collective effort that went into helping these young students stranded in a war torn country.

Apart from providing the critical helpline services to Indians on route, Sewa International also had several volunteers at the border who helped in their border and refugee center. **Hindu Swyamsevak Sangh (HSS)** volunteers in Europe and the UK primarily worked closely with the Sewa team in this effort. The work involved

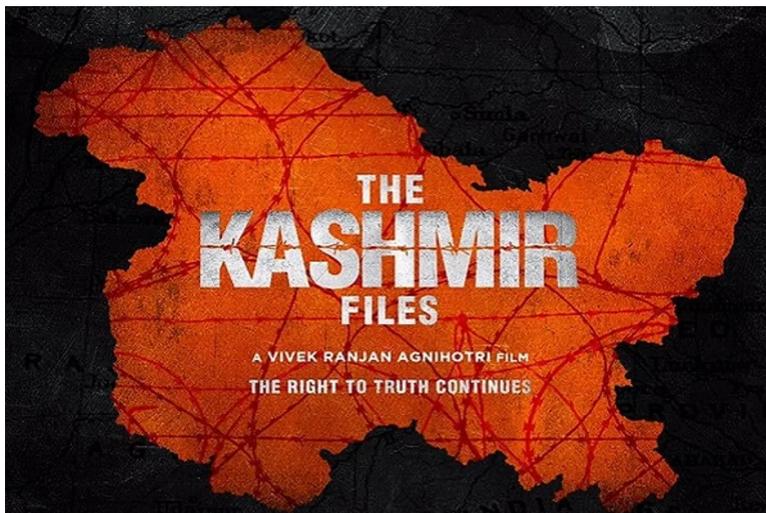
 **Hardeep Singh Puri** @HardeepSPuri
Service Before Self
More than 70 volunteers of @Sewa_Intl in Hungary, joined by 200 more from across Europe, have assisted in #OperationGanga. They have helped in evacuation of over 30,000 students of different nationalities from Ukraine so far.
The world indeed is one family.



distribution of food packets and other essentials at the border and provision of temporary shelters at the borders that were being cleaned and maintained by the volunteers. A HSS volunteer in the UK conveyed that over 1500 refugees were attending these centers on a daily basis - so cleanliness was very important. The HSS volunteers from all over the UK and Europe would go to these centers to serve on a rota basis.

It's heartwarming to see the Indian diaspora in the UK too participating in Sewa (selfless service) in so many varied ways during a humanitarian crisis like this. As per MEA, 23,000 thousand students have been evacuated as part of Operation Ganga. But, Sewa International with its volunteers continues its Sewa till this day. They are helping people from different nationalities also. Apart from Sewa International, many other Indian-origin organizations like the ISKCON, BAPS, Art of Living, etc. have also provided the necessary support for the stranded Indian nationals and other international refugees. The Indian diaspora have truly demonstrated 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' meaning 'the whole world is one family' in these difficult times.

British Indian community hails the 'The Kashmir Files' movie



National Film Award Director Vivek Agnihotri's film 'The Kashmir Files' had a worldwide release on 11th March 2022 and it has had an overwhelming response. The film is a brutally honest and grim portrayal of the genocide of Kashmiri Hindus in 1990 leading to their forced exodus from the Kashmir valley. It is based on video interviews of the first generation victims of the genocide of the Kashmiri Pandit Community that was

painstakingly done by Vivekji over a period of four long years. Many members of the **Global Kashmiri Pandit Diaspora (GKPD)**, an organization of Kashmiri Pandits worldwide that has branches in 20 countries, had relayed their traumatic stories to Vivekji which they had suppressed for over 32 years.

The diaspora in the UK too was eagerly awaiting the release of 'The Kashmir Files' and following up with their local theaters about show times and schedules. The film had created a lot of buzz and with the film's release, different communities within the diaspora went to

see the film in large groups. People were yearning to know about the events that transpired in Kashmir in 1989-90. The movie deeply moved, shocked and in some cases made the diaspora plain numb. The diaspora hailed the movie and the filmmaker for being courageous and showing the harsh truth to the world about the religious persecution of Hindus in Kashmir. Many questions also arose in their minds like why was this truth hidden? Why has justice been denied to the Kashmiri Pandit community? A dialogue in the movie rightly captures this emotion :“Fake News is not the problem but hiding the truth is”. Many felt sorry that the larger Indian community hadn’t done much to understand and empathize with the Pandit community. The Kashmiri Pandit diaspora, on the other hand, felt that their stories were finally being seen and heard - especially the younger generations who could now empathize with the plight of their community.

The diaspora hoped that this truth would reach many in India and abroad. They were seen raising the issue of less screenings and showtimes for the film in their areas. Some theaters were compelled to schedule the cinema in their theaters and increase showtimes due to the increased demand. Many in the diaspora also arranged for special screenings in their towns and some even traveled long distances to other cities to watch the film.

The film also found support in varied ways from British Indian society from both individuals and community members like

- a) Billboards of ‘The Kashmir Files’ were displayed on many London underground stations with a view to encourage people from all ethnicities to see the saga of Kashmiri Hindus in their nearest theaters. This was organized and financed by a member of the British Indian community Manish Tiwari, Founder of Here and Now 365.



- b) **FISI UK** organized its first twitter space discussion ‘The Kashmir Files: A Truth Not Just a Movie’ which was attended by nearly 300 people. The main speakers included lead actor Bhasha Sumbli who had essayed the pain of real life characters in the movie, Shafalica Bhan Kotwal of Global Kashmiri Pandit Diaspora, Rohit Kachru of India 4 Kashmir, Amit Raina of Roots in Kashmir and Lord Rami Ranger CBE. The discussion aimed to debunk the myth that it's a propaganda movie.



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- c) For British Indians the portrayal of the character in TKF inspired by Yasin Malik of the terror group Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) brought back memories of the cold-blooded murder of Indian diplomat Ravinder Mhatre on Feb 3 1984, by members of JKLF UK. FISI UK on its social media handles shared details of this murder and the involvement of JKLF UK. FISI UK asked how a terrorist organization known for the killings of Hindus and Indian Air Force personnel which is banned in India be allowed to operate in UK.

 - d) Another community organization for British Hindus and British Indians, **INSIGHT UK**, started a 'Call to Action' campaign urging the diaspora to write to their MPs to ban the terrorist organization JKLF UK. It is said that JKLF UK is also seen to actively campaign for UK Labor and has led violent attacks on the Indian Embassy in the past.

Kashmir is also a hotly debated topic in the UK Parliament and unfortunately many UK Labor Parliamentarians are found to be on the wrong side of the Kashmir debate, misinformed they peddle the Pakistani narrative. This movie has helped counter some of those narratives while pointing towards the role of Pakistan as an active agent of terrorism in Kashmir.

Undoubtedly, the Kashmir Files has become a movement and has sparked many debates and discussions around the Kashmiri Hindu genocide in particular and persecution of religious minorities around the world. There are plans of the TKF team to visit the UK in the month of May-June and some of the impact events will be held in the UK Parliament, Nehru Center and different UK Universities. The events are being coordinated and led by **Global Kashmiri Pandit Diaspora (GKPD)** organization. TKF is acting as a catalyst for the demand of Right to Justice for Kashmiri Hindus and in the UK it has also given an opportunity to raise awareness, counter the concerted anti India misinformation campaigns on Kashmir and widen the discussion to the growing threat of radical Islamist terrorism and the radicalisation that affects everyone around the globe.

Home Away from Home

'London Gangaur'

'London Gangaur' event was organized by **Rajasthan Association UK** on March 26, 2022. It was attended by more than 500 people and is the largest Rajasthani event outside India.



The word Gangaur is literally made up of two words 'Gana' and 'Gaur'. Gana is synonymous with Lord Shiva and Gaur is Goddess Gauri/Parvati. Together they symbolize saubhagya or marital bliss. Shiva and Parvati are worshiped on this day in the month of Chaitra as per the Hindu lunar calendar and women especially seek blessings from Gauri for a happy married life. The festival of Gangaur is celebrated in the month of Chaitra as per the Hindu lunar calendar.

London Gangaur brings to life the vibrant and rich culture of Rajasthan. Both married and unmarried women dressed in traditional finery participated in the celebratory dance Maha Ghoomar. The Pooja ceremony was marked by rituals and the famous Gangaur song 'Gor Gor Gomati'. The celebrations also saw people relishing authentic Rajasthani cuisine of Daal Baati, Churma, Gatte, Lahsun chutney etc.

RAUK was founded in 2015 to bring together all Rajasthanis living in the UK on a common platform to celebrate Rajasthan's rich culture and traditions and also give them a sense of belonging and cohesiveness.



'Akhand Ramayan Path'

During the occasion of Ram Navami (a festival that falls every year on the ninth day of the first month in the Hindu lunar calendar), **Uttar Pradesh Community Association of United Kingdom (UPCA UK)** organized a 24 hours recitation of **Shri Ramcharitmanas** - better known as Akhand Ramayan Path - at Brahmurishi Ashram, Hounslow, London on 10th April 2022.



Ram Navami, a festival celebrated with great joy and enthusiasm throughout India, is of special significance to the people of Uttar Pradesh as Ayodhya, the birth place of Lord Ram, is in Uttar Pradesh. It celebrates the arrival of divinity to earth that destroyed the prevailing evil spirit. Also, understanding the character of Lord Rama and his life story makes people aware about the difference between right and wrong. Lord Rama was well-accomplished and was known for virtues of prowess, righteousness, gratitude, truthfulness and firmness in his vows. He was gentle and the protector of all His people. He ruled His people so well that it came to be known as Ram-Rajya - the rule which bestowed happiness and prosperity on all. Hence reading of Ramayana reminds the people of the ideals one should aspire for and adopt in life.

UPCA UK had invited other members from the diaspora to be a part of this spiritual bliss. To ensure a continuous recitation of Ramayan, slots were allocated to individuals and groups beforehand, while making space for other devotees to join ad-hoc. The sounds of Harmonium, Dholak and Kartal with the recitation made the ambience enchanting. Popular radio presenter Mr Ravi Sharma was part of the event and sang some soulful bhajans. The recitation concluded with Havan (ritual burning of offerings such as grains and ghee) and Prasadam (consecrated food) for devotees. This was an excellent effort by UPCA- UK to bring together all the Hindu communities across the United Kingdom to celebrate the joyous occasion. Over 150 community members were part of this event. UPCA UK team is also grateful for all the support and guidance of Her Grace Surya Didi of Brahmurishi Ashram.

UPCA-UK is the voice of thousands of people of Uttar Pradesh who are living in the UK. It seeks to promote the cultural, religious and social values of India and Uttar Pradesh in the UK.

