

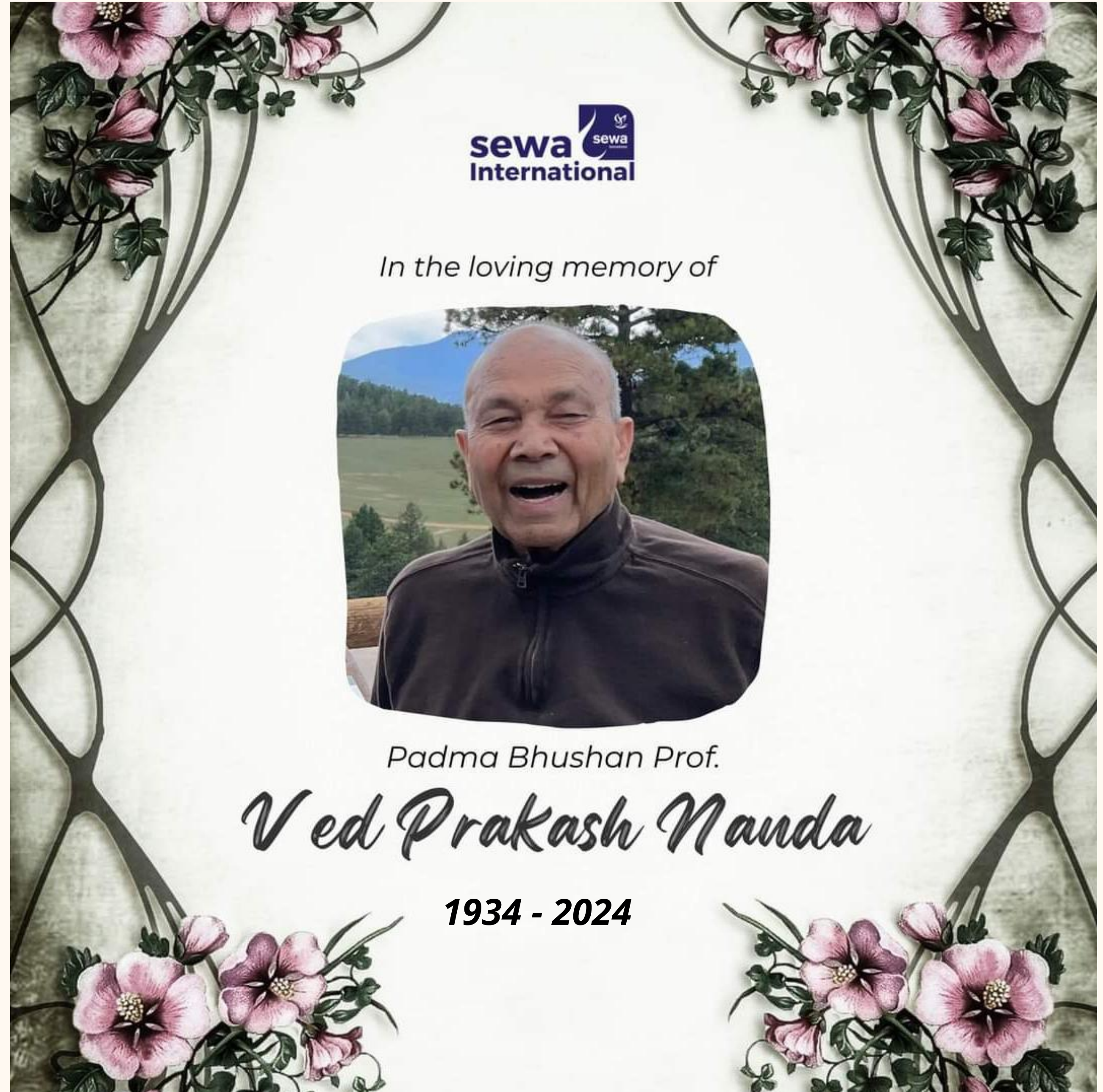
True to His Name: Prof. Ved Nanda was a Beacon of Knowledge and Guide

A Tribute ...

Veda in Sanskrit means sacred knowledge, and Nanda has many meanings including the name of a tribe, to be propitious, gracious, etc.

Prof. Ved Nanda passed away on January 1, 2024. Below, you will read tributes paid to him by those who knew him for a long time, a lot, and those who knew him only for a short while, and only a little. But he influenced all with his grace, knowledge, grit, and discipline.

His name embodied truth, he was a guiding light that shined many paths. He was a mentor and guide to Sewa International, and these tributes are a way of acknowledging our debt to him...



Prof. Ved Prakash Nanda : a Lifelong Swayamsewak, a Karmayogi -Arun Kankani

In my more than twenty-five years of association and close work with Nanda ji, I got many opportunities to spend time together. As I look back and think of all those years, I am grateful for the many life lessons that I learned from him. He influenced our family in many ways through his kindness, wit, high energy, keen attention to detail, and extraordinary memory. In his heart, he had space for everyone and was always approachable. He always had time for everyone, and everyone who met him always got his full attention.

Nanda ji, an esteemed figure in the field of international law, served as an Honorary Professor of Law at the University of Delhi, India. His leadership roles in prominent organizations such as the World Jurist Association, American Society of International Law, and International Law Association showcased his commitment to advancing legal scholarship globally. Nanda ji's active participation as a US delegate to international forums and his contributions to non-profits exemplified his dedication to shaping international relations.

As Chair of the Uberoi Foundation for Religious Studies, he played a pivotal role in fostering dialogue on religious matters. He was recognized with numerous national and international awards, including the prestigious Louis B Sohn Award as well as the Padma Bhushan. Nanda ji authored numerous books and articles, leaving a lasting impact on the field. His influence extended beyond academia, with a regular column in The Denver Post and commentary in electronic and print media, reflecting his commitment to public discourse on legal and international issues.

His achievements, his energy, and his constant travel across the globe seem impossible to achieve in one lifetime. His passion for international law to ensure that every human being should be able to live with dignity was perhaps the drive that kept him going till the last month of his 90-year-long purpose-driven life.

Contd...on Page 7



Nanda ji (Center) at S-VYASA, Bengaluru with Katherine Nanda, Venkatesh Murthy of YFS, Prof. Raghuram, and Parimala Venkatesh Murthy (from left)

Professor Ved Nanda, a towering figure in the field of international law and a tireless advocate for human rights, got merged into panchtatva on January 1, 2024, at the age of 90. His death marked the end of an era, but his legacy of scholarship, activism, and mentorship will continue to inspire generations of lawyers and Sewa volunteers around the world.

Nanda ji was born in India in 1934 and immigrated to the United States in 1956. He earned his law degree from Northwestern University and began his teaching career at the University of Denver's Sturm College of Law in 1962. Over the next six decades, he would become one of the most influential international law professors in the world.

Nanda ji's contributions to the field were immense. He authored or co-authored over 24 books and 180 scholarly articles, covering a wide range of topics, including human rights law, environmental law, and dharmic traditions. He was a leading expert on the use of force, terrorism, and the rights of refugees.

Nanda ji's impact extended far beyond the classroom. He was a passionate advocate for human rights, working tirelessly to promote peace and justice around the world. He served as a consultant to the United Nations and other international organizations, and he played a key role in the drafting of several important human rights treaties.

Nanda ji was also a committed mentor, inspiring countless students and young lawyers to pursue careers in international law and human rights. He was known for his kindness, generosity, and infectious enthusiasm, and he always had time for a student in need. Nanda ji's legacy is one of dedication to justice, scholarship, and *sewa*. He was a true pioneer in the field of international law, and his work will continue to have an impact for generations to come.

In addition to his academic and professional achievements, Nanda ji was also a deeply spiritual person. He was a practicing Hindu and believed that all people are interconnected and deserve to be treated with dignity and respect.

Nanda ji's passing is a loss to the world, but his memory will live on in the hearts and minds of those who knew and loved him. He was a true champion of justice, and his work will continue to inspire us to make the world a better place.



Nanda ji being felicitated, others in the picture not identified

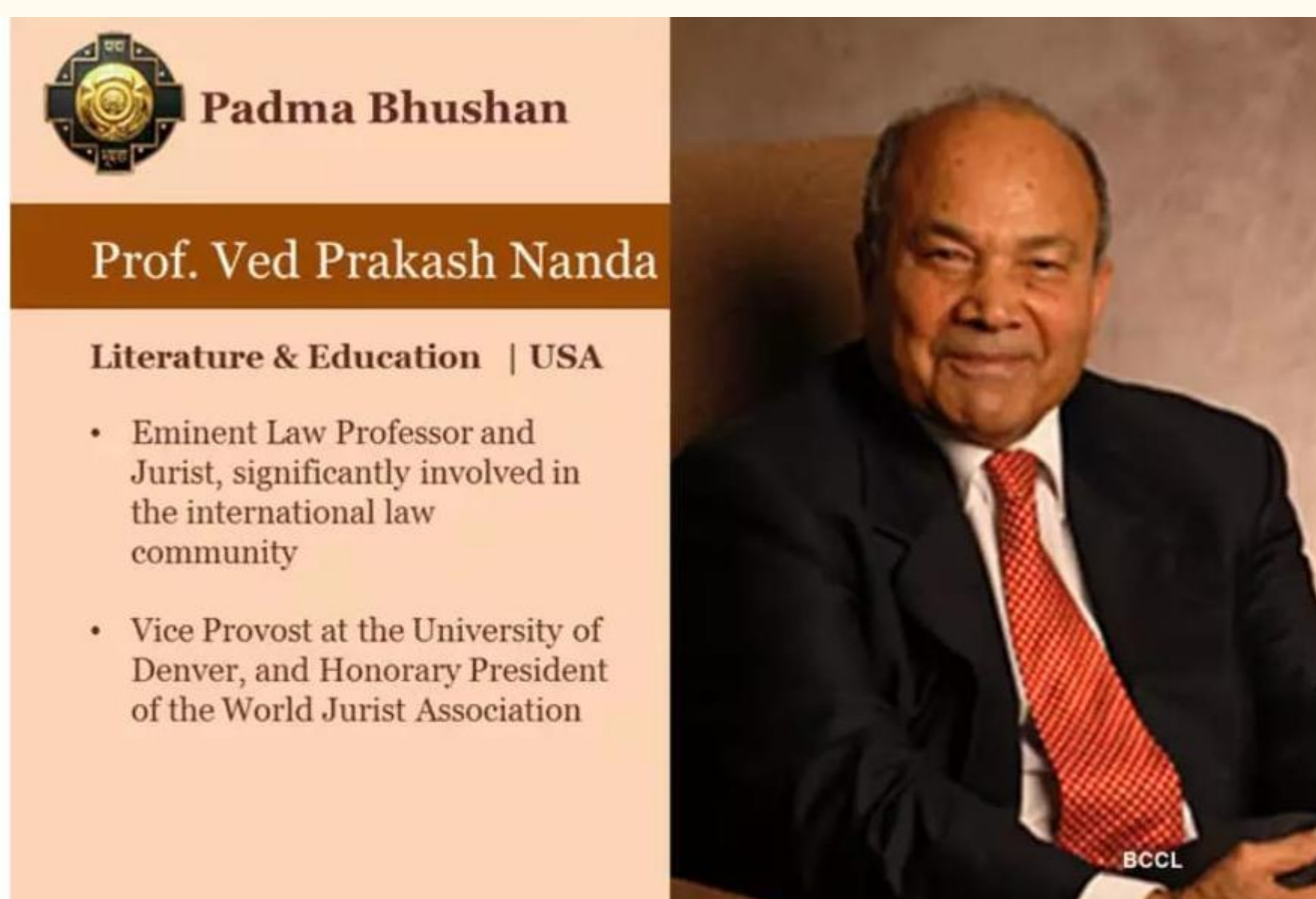
Prof. Nanda was regularly featured with renowned people including the Dalai Lama, Shri Mohan Bhagwat, the Sarsanghchalak of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, L K Advani, former Deputy Prime Minister and Home Minister of India, and Condoleezza Rice, former US Secretary of State, who was one of his students. Some of the highlights of Prof. Nanda's life include the following:

- He was awarded the Padma Bhushan, one of India's highest civilian honors, in 2018.
- He was a founding member of the American Society of International Law and served as its president from 1990 to 1991.
- He was a member of the American Law Institute and the International Law Association.
- He received honorary doctorates from Soka University in Tokyo, Japan, and Bundelkhand University in Jhansi, India.
- He was the Sarsanghchalak (head) of the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS).

Prof. Nanda's life and work are a testament to the power of law and human rights to make a difference in the world. He will be remembered as a kind, compassionate, and brilliant man who dedicated his life to making the world a more just and equitable place. He delivered several inspiring talks on *sewa*-related topics. Nanda ji will be missed by the "Sewa pariwar" (Sewa family) but his foundational work to inspire Sewa volunteers will carry his legacy for years to come.

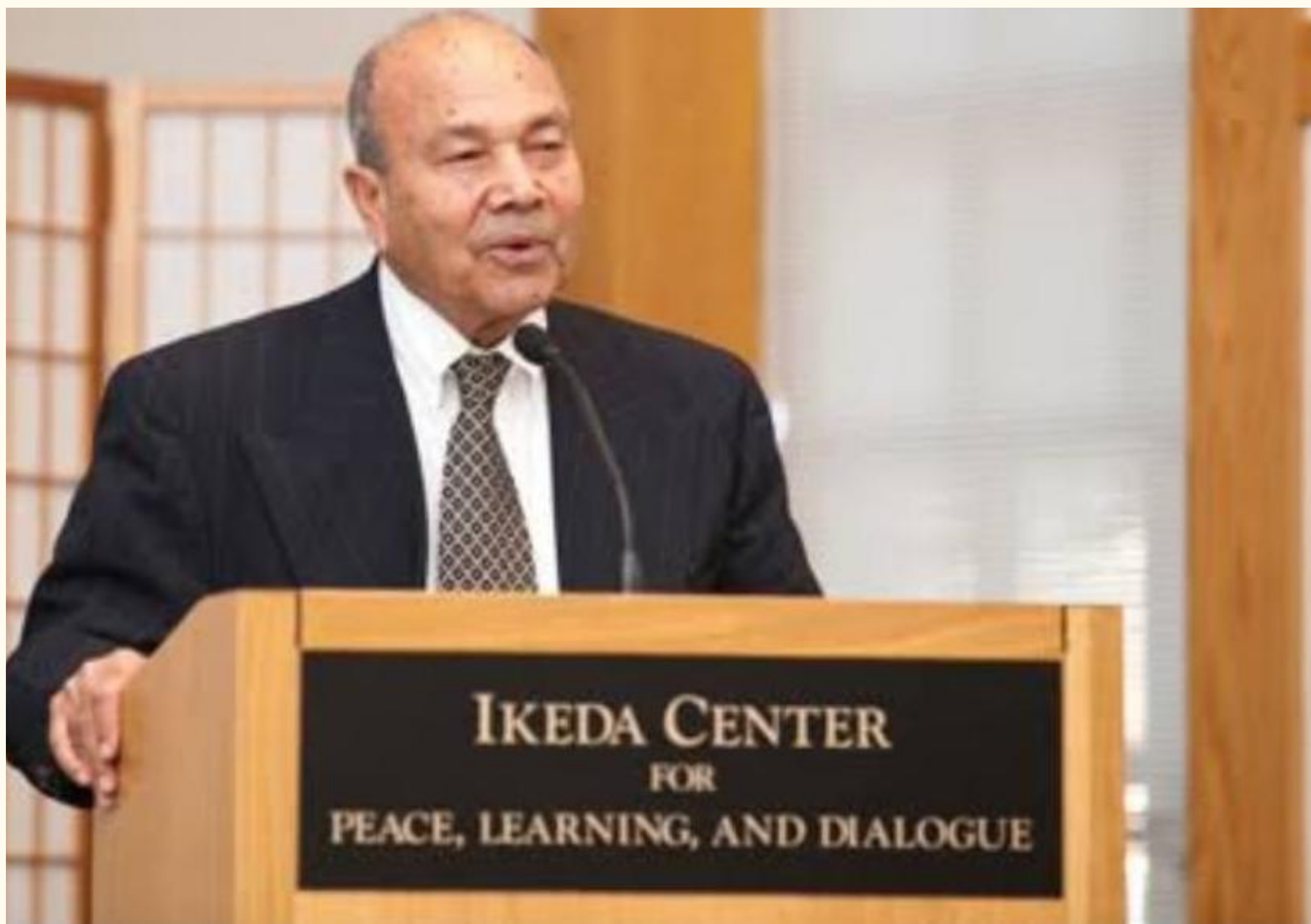
I pray to the Almighty that the departed atman be absorbed in the Divine Light.

Sumita Somani is Sewa's Associate Director of Corporate Relations.



Prof. Nanda received Padma Bhushan, one of the top civilian honors awarded by the Government of India, in 2018

A Champion of Dharma: Prof. Nanda Transcended East-West Boundaries *-Swarup Kurella*



Prof. Nanda addressing the gathering after receiving the Gandhi-King-Ikeda Award from Morehouse College in Atlanta, GA

The sun has set, yet its bright rays linger on. In the departure of Prof. Ved Prakash Nanda, we bid farewell to a luminous personality whose influence has left an indelible mark on both the societies of the East and the West. As the sun sets in one hemisphere, it is only to rise triumphantly in the other.

Nanda ji was a brave son of Bharat Mata, driven by a mission that transcended borders. A notable philosopher, leader, and guide, he illuminated the paths of scores of administrators, academicians, social workers, and activists alike. His life, spanning a remarkable ninety years, was a testament to his unwavering dedication to the values of Dharmic culture — championing the timeless concept of "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam" (World is one Family) that knows no boundaries.

He lived the life of a tapasvi committed to fostering a global family, breaking down barriers, and nurturing a world that recognizes our shared humanity. As we reflect on his legacy, let us remember and carry forward the light he ignited, and embrace the interconnectedness of all, just as he did throughout his profound journey.

Entering his teens amidst the tumultuous events of the bloody partition of Bharat, Nanda ji found himself pushed into a harsh reality. This experience exposed him to the struggles faced by refugees, chaotic riots, and the atrocities committed by aggressors. He survived a catastrophic and barbaric period that momentarily reduced human beings to their mere animal instincts.

In the aftermath of these shocking events, a determined Nanda ji emerged—resolute in his commitment to make the world a better place. Fueled by a deep sense of awakening, he dedicated his life to reshaping humanity and redefining human rights. His mission was to activate the instinct of broadmindedness, and acceptance of pluralism, to encourage a global perspective that transcends society's narrow boundaries.

In the face of adversity, Nanda ji's journey became a beacon of resilience and purpose, inspiring others to join him in the pursuit of a more compassionate and understanding world.

His response to the horrors of the partition of India in 1947 was a catalyst for positive change, reminding us all of the power of determination and compassion one can have even in the face of adversity.

After receiving a Master of Law degree from Delhi University in 1958, Nanda ji emigrated to the USA to pursue advanced studies. He was accepted into The University of Chicago, Northwestern University, and Yale Law School.

His academic journey culminated in the achievement of an LLM from Northwestern University, and he earned the distinguished title of Graduate Fellow from Yale University. Nanda ji is extensively published in law journals and national magazines and newspapers. His prolific literary contributions include authoring or co-authoring 24 books across various fields of international law and producing over 180 chapters and major law review articles.

Additionally, he has held esteemed positions as a Distinguished Visiting Professor and Scholar at numerous universities in the United States and abroad. Prof. Nanda played a pivotal role in mentoring the next two generations of leaders, a cohort that includes numerous attorneys, judges, and distinguished administrators, including, former Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice.

His guidance has not only shaped individual careers but has contributed to the broader influence of these leaders across various fields, leaving an enduring impact on the realms of law, governance, and public service.



Prof. Nanda, with the statue of Lord Ganesha - a still taken from the Sewa- Diwali video

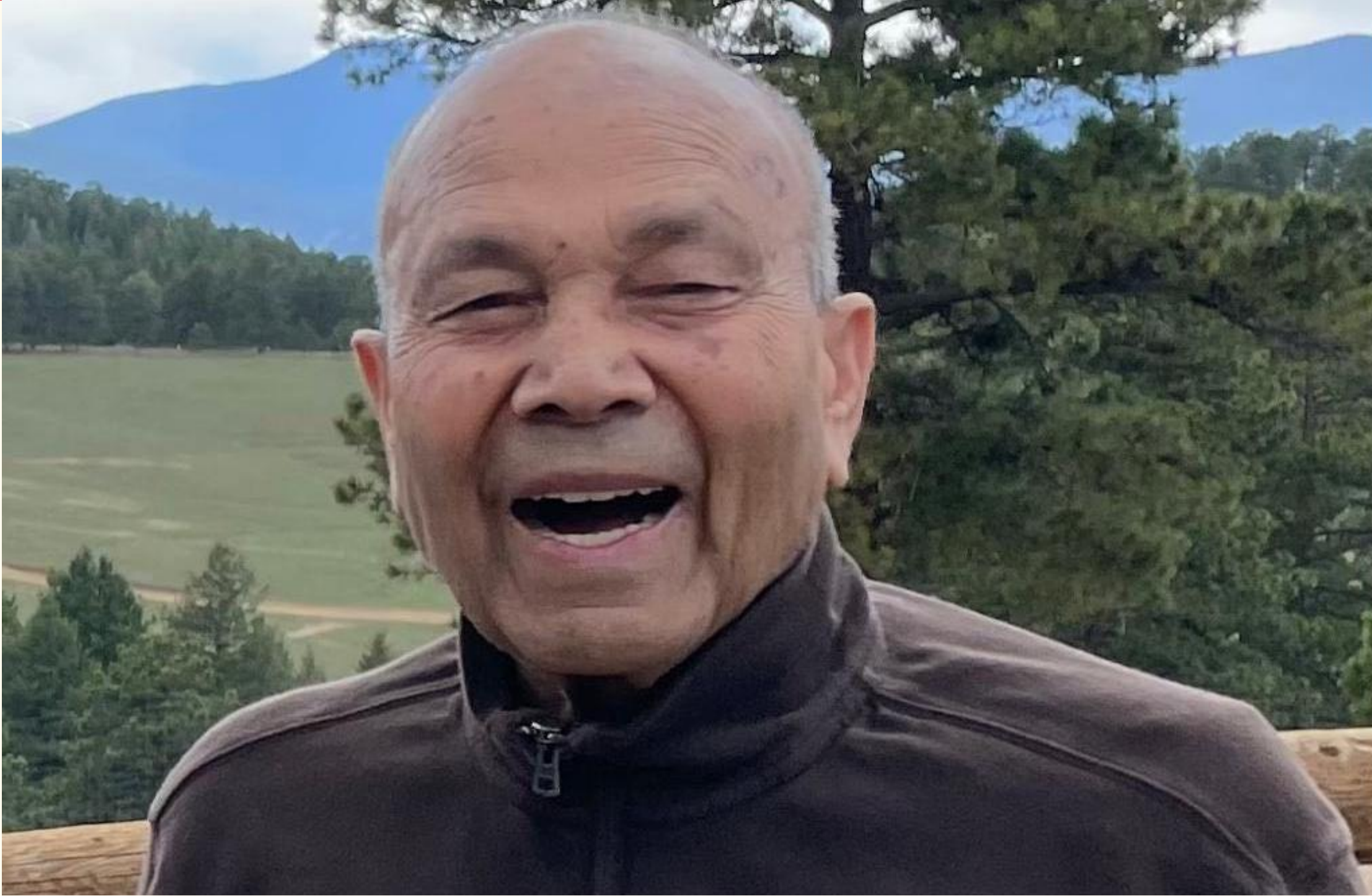
From childhood, Nanda ji grew up as a swayamsevak and also worked as an Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) volunteer before he moved to Chicago.

In 1961, Nanda ji pioneered the establishment of the first HSS shakha in the United States at the University of Chicago.

In 2001, after he accepted the role of President of HSS, he embarked on a continuous journey across the country, personally engaging with, guiding, and inspiring HSS volunteers.

Demonstrating proactive leadership, he initiated efforts to connect with key opinion-makers in society, advocating for various Hindu-American causes and fostering a greater understanding of these issues. Nanda ji's visionary efforts have left a lasting mark on the growth and impact of HSS in the United States.

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A Child like smile - Nanda ji in Rocky Mountains, Colorado

Prof. Ved Nanda, if you saw him, would not have commanded attention physically. He would not be someone who would walk into a room and suck the oxygen out of it, have everyone sit at his feet, or gather around him to hear him hold forth on matters large and small. He was not a tall and imposing figure. But then, when you first met him, he would immediately draw you to him for his gaze was always inviting, kind, curious, and affectionate. He listened. He inquired about you, and he would commend you for whatever little you would have done.

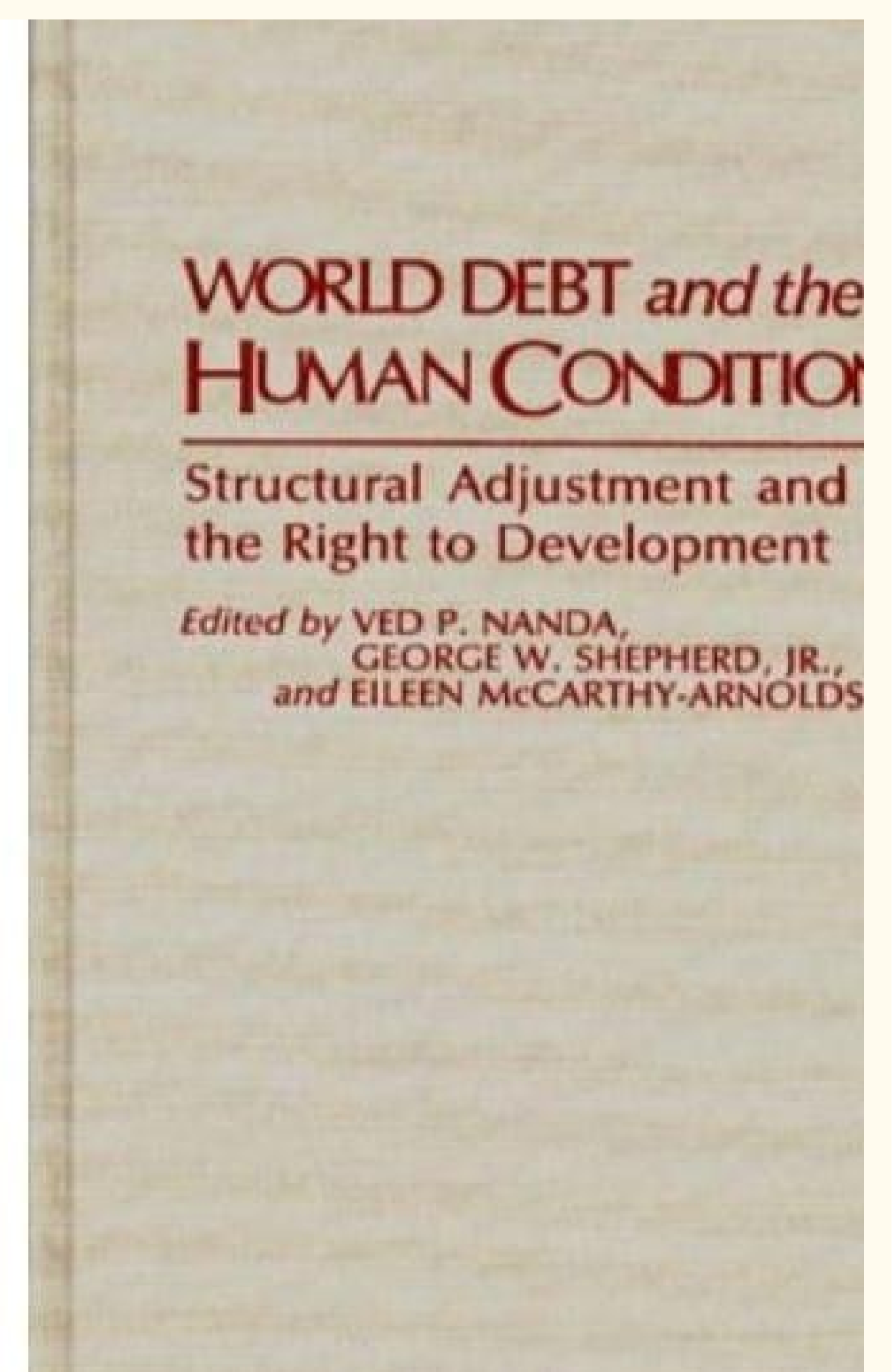
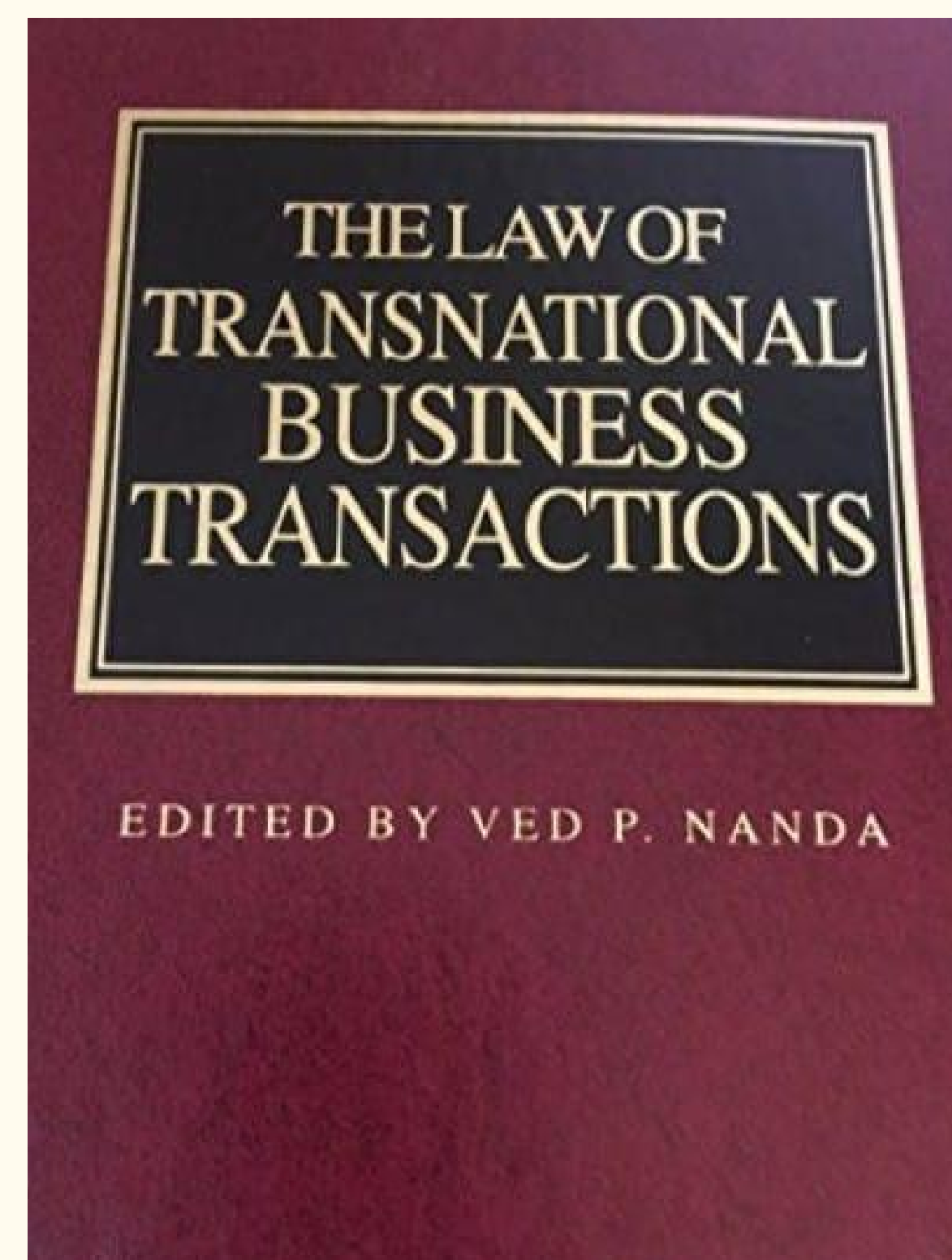
Prof. Nanda did not express opinions quickly or overwhelm you with his analysis of whatever the problem at hand. He was an expert on international law, but in the half-dozen times or so I must have met him, and on a couple of those occasions over a period of two days, he never displayed the many feathers in his cap, for indeed over the six decades of work on international law he had earned many, many laurels. He was never the one (like some other scholars I have known) to pay attention to how he was coiffured, whom he was seen with, and why his opinions mattered. The only time that I knew he was multi-tasking was when we met once at a doctor's house in Pennsylvania and had to stay there overnight to discuss matters about Hindu American activism and projects. He wanted to talk to me after the larger group had dispersed, and he took me to his assigned room, where on the bed lay some five or six large binders. He apologized and put them away saying that they were documents he had to go through for the accreditation of a university! Then we sat down and talked, and I wish I had taken the opportunity to ask him about his early life in the United States, his academic journey, his engagement with the Hindu communities, and his relationship with and ties to the RSS, and how the Sangh had shaped his worldview and his personality.

The last time I met him was at one of the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS) shibiras or camps, here in Georgia. We stayed there overnight at one of the campgrounds, and Dr. Nanda, professor extraordinaire, Padma Bhushan, sat and ate and talked with the HSS "family" members – from those elders who led a variety of physical activities, to those who conducted discussion sessions, to the children and youth who surrounded him. He was keen on figuring out ways to help college students affirm their Hindu identity and share their dharmic values which were under threat by other Hindu Americans and their aggressive "progressive" fellow travelers. "We need to talk more about this Ramesh ji," he told me, but then we did not have the chance to follow up.

I saw him then – five years ago – on a rather cool, wet morning, take the Sangh salute as groups of children, teenagers, college students, and adults did their physical drills and marches and displayed their skills. I admired his commitment to this movement that was started in India in 1925, and which he must have imbibed as a young boy in undivided Punjab, then in Kashmir, and then as a student at Punjab and Delhi universities.

There, then, again, I missed an opportunity to ask him if he would be willing to collaborate with me on a book about his life and times. As one who arrived in the US in 1960, before the US promulgated the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, Nanda ji was among a small cohort of very talented young Indians who braved the unknown and came to enrich American life. That Nanda ji taught for nearly sixty years at the University of Denver's Sturm College of Law, where he founded the International Legal Studies Program in 1972, and where the Ved Nanda Center for International and Comparative Law was established by his students and friends, are a testament to his work.

He was not known by many Indian Americans, especially these days when the brash, the foolish, the moneyed, and the loud and intolerant activists of the "progressive" kind overwhelm us and monopolize the public spaces. I guess that his passing away has not even registered on most of the two million or more Indians who have now made America their home. That is a tragedy, but it might also indicate how Nanda ji carried himself – as a quiet but rigorous scholar, as a committed activist, an intellectual among a group of people who sometimes suspected or ignored the pursuit of knowledge, and as a man of quiet elegance, deep compassion, loving care, and mischievous humor.



Books edited by Prof. Nanda

I attended the inaugural meeting of the Uberoi Foundation for Religious Studies some ten years ago, which was chaired by Prof. Nanda. I did not know that a book edited by Prof. Nanda based on the discussions then had been published, titled, "Compassion in the 4 Dharmic Traditions: Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism". Today, I ordered a copy of the book.

We know that Prof. Nanda's atman will attain sadgati. The Gods cannot afford to ignore him!

Prof. Ramesh N Rao is the Chair and Professor of Communication in Columbus State University, Columbus, Georgia.



In his relentless pursuit of truth, books were his companions.
Credits: Legacy.com

Ved Nanda ji was in the Sangha Shiksha Varg (SSV -- the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh's training camp) in Atlanta, GA, just before the pandemic, in 2019, for a few days. I happened to share the room with him, our niwas (temporary home) a bit away from the sanghasthan (sports field). Early morning, after completing the Isha Chintan (discussion) in the main hall we were to walk out to sanghasthan.

As usual, we were chit-chatting with a few volunteers. One of the shikshaks (trainers) hurried into the hall and asked everyone to leave the hall as the dhwajaropan (flag hoisting) was about to start. Ved Nanda ji, just like a shiksharthi (trainee) started briskly walking towards the sanghasthan. At the same time, we heard the whistle, and he just said, "We are late, we got to run", and started running towards the field. Before the front-row trainees were called we reached the sanghasthan. Once the shakha (one-hour physical and personality development activities) started he suggested that we walk around the sanghasthan.

While we walked around, he enquired about how the training camp was going on. He enquired about a few volunteers whom he had met before as a shiksharthi and asked how they were doing in their shareerik (physical workout), whether these volunteers attended the shakha regularly, what responsibilities they had, and how the sambhag (clusters or units) decided about handing over responsibilities to new volunteers.

We kept on talking about these topics, and in his style, he said that this was good to see how in recent years the Sangh work had picked up in the US Southeast. I was feeling a little proud of myself, when he then began to share some stories of Chamanlal ji and Bhide ji. Suddenly, I realized that he had noticed the change in my attitude, and without giving me any advice, and just by sharing stories of Chamanlal ji and Bhide ji, he had made me aware that I was just an instrument in this whole Sangh system.

In another SSV, I heard from him the story of Guru Gobind Singh ji. We had heard his thoughtful, well-articulated, and deep sangh philosophical baudkhiks (lectures) many times, but that day he was telling the katha (story), in his deep voice, with tears in his eyes. When he shared the story, all swayamsevaks (volunteers) and sevikas (woman volunteers) were simply stunned and were crying. No one wanted to get up, and each one of us wanted to hear more and more from him. I witnessed a different Ved Nanda ji on that day. He roared like a lion, he cried like a bala (child), he looked into our eyes and challenged us to be like Guru Gobind Singh ji. He taught us how to tell a katha by setting an example.

When Saumitra ji suggested many years ago about organizing a family camp in Tampa, FL. It was a two-night niwasi (residential) camp. I was not sure how many would be attending. He told me that Ved Nanda ji would attend the camp. This was the first time that I came to know that he was a Professor of Law at Denver University, CO, and the first president of the Akhil Bharatya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP). I was so embarrassed because the number of people attending the camp would be people from just four families and two youths, with one of them a being a vistark (full time volunteer) for a few years and the second one being a monk at the Arsh Vidya Gurukulam. The location was a basement of a very small temple under-construction in Tampa. There were no beds, and we all slept using sleeping bags on the floor. But Nanda ji never said anything about the shortcomings. On the contrary, he was helpful to us in every possible way.



Prof. Nanda, seen at an online event a few months before his passing

My family members -- Rita, Akash, Shraddha -- and myself participated in one more SSV. One evening, after the ratri bhojan (dinner), he sat with us and had a long family conversation. Shraddha was a teenager then, and Akash was just in fifth grade. He talked to us about all the different scenarios regarding what to expect if the kids decide to get married to someone from a non-Hindu background. He shared his example and stated that it was important not to make any compromises with the Hindu values we had been brought up with, and despite which we could prosper in different relationships. Whenever I used to reach out to him with any challenges, he used to encourage me to face the situation. He used to say, "There is no shortcut," and this is not only you who is going through a tough time. Today, looking back, I realize that every word he spoke us that night and every piece of advice that he shared with us have helped us to face all the challenges successfully in our family life. Many families today are going to miss that love from him, and the kind of guidance he offered so many. Truly, today I am feeling a big vacuum in my life.

Yashwant Belsare is the Director of Community outreach.



The East meets the West

Simplicity was one of Nanda ji's prominent traits. Whenever I dropped him off at the airport, he would stand waiting until I drove away. Even when he reached the airport late, he made it a point to stand near the entrance and see me off. He used to wave his hands until I drove off his sight to say "goodbye," and then would he go inside the airport.

Nanda ji cared for every volunteer, listened to them, and paid close attention to things around him, always willing to help. He engaged with volunteers of all ages, conversed with them, observed them, and had a unique ability to sense their emotions and thoughts, hearing the unheard beyond their spoken words. I remember him visiting my house once when I lived in an apartment. While reaching our house, he saw some police officers in the vicinity. When we met, he asked me with concern, what happened?

When we met again, almost a year after he visited my home, he asked, "Last time I saw some police activity near your apartment. Is it a safe place now?" In a gentle voice, he asked me whether I lived in a secure neighborhood.

Nanda ji, a rishi in a suit, stayed at my home a few times. Once, he chitchatted with us until midnight, and right after, he took a call from a BBC reporter in the UK. I could tell Dr. Nanda had very little sleep, and I knew he had to catch a flight at 6:30 am the following day. I expressed concern, but he said he practiced Yoga Nidra, or meditative sleep, for a deep, restful sleep during the day.

The next day, Nanda ji appeared content and active despite getting just three or four hours of sleep at night. Considering his age, extensive work across time zones, continuous travel (Sangh pravas), and staying in different homes, I wondered how he was always cheerful and productive. It was incredible how he made sure he spent many hours in the night chatting with volunteers despite his busy schedule.

During one of his stays at my home, we served him the food prepared by my mother-in-law. After dinner, he bowed to her as a token of appreciation and told her that the food was good and he relished it. He recognized and appreciated the hard work and contributions of individuals in different areas with humility. He ensured that host families did not feel burdened by his presence.

He was an accomplished soul who practiced what he preached. Even though he was a great person who achieved so much, he was humble. Once, I had an opportunity to travel with him on a flight to a Sangha bhaitak (meeting).

He utilized the time to write an article for The Denver Post about international law. After some time, he asked me to review it, though I knew next to nothing on the subject. He utilized his travel time to get things done and was open to and valued suggestions from someone much younger than him. He respected junior volunteers like me by adding the honorific suffix ji to our names. Whenever we met, he inquired about my well-being, family, and work, always ready to offer assistance. These qualities emphasized his down-to-earth and compassionate nature.

Nanda ji was very disciplined and methodical in his life. He ensured that fonts, pictures, and words in our presentations, brochures, and handouts were error-free, professional, and elegant. He was meticulous, had an eye for detail, observed even small things, and never ignored structural blunders.



Prof. Nanda remained humble, disciplined, and active until his last days. Credit: The Indian Panorama

He always had a helping attitude, not as an instructor, but as a facilitator, and respected all irrespective of age or background. His supportive attitude made the learning experience informative, collaborative, and respectful. He was an excellent orator, particularly in front of a large crowd. However, his style changed in smaller gatherings, making the conversation intimate and personal. His choice of words and command of English were impressive.

Nanda ji's wife, Katherine ji, was his tremendous support. She managed his email and communication. He used to say he wished he was tech-savvy, like his wife.

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Prof. Nanda, an exceptional orator, always held the audience spellbound.
Credit: americankahani

The life and legacy of Professor Ved Nanda stand as a beacon of inspiration for all, young and old alike. His unwavering dedication, profound commitment to Hindu Dharma, and exemplary professional career set a paradigm of excellence and service. For the younger generations, his example has much to teach us as we navigate our own lives.

Prof. Nanda's life was ever marked by an unwavering commitment to the larger societal cause. He dedicated his life to serving others and making a difference. His extensive involvement and active leadership in various organizations, including Sewa International, Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh, and the Hindu University of America, showcased his deep commitment to our society and the upliftment of the community.

Prof. Ved Prakash Nanda : a Lifelong Swayamsewak, a Karmayogi

After becoming a refugee at the young age of 12, when he had to leave his hometown to reach Kashmir, he continued his education to become a full-time pracharak of the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh, imbibing the human and organizational skills which remained with him till his last breath.

A great orator and youth leader, he became the first president of the national student organization – the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) -- in Bharat. He was a founding member of Sewa International and constantly guided us till the end. Before passing away, he called and sent his last donation to Sewa.

As I offer my heartfelt shraddhanjali, I recall a few qualities that he reflected in his life and taught many of us by his actions:

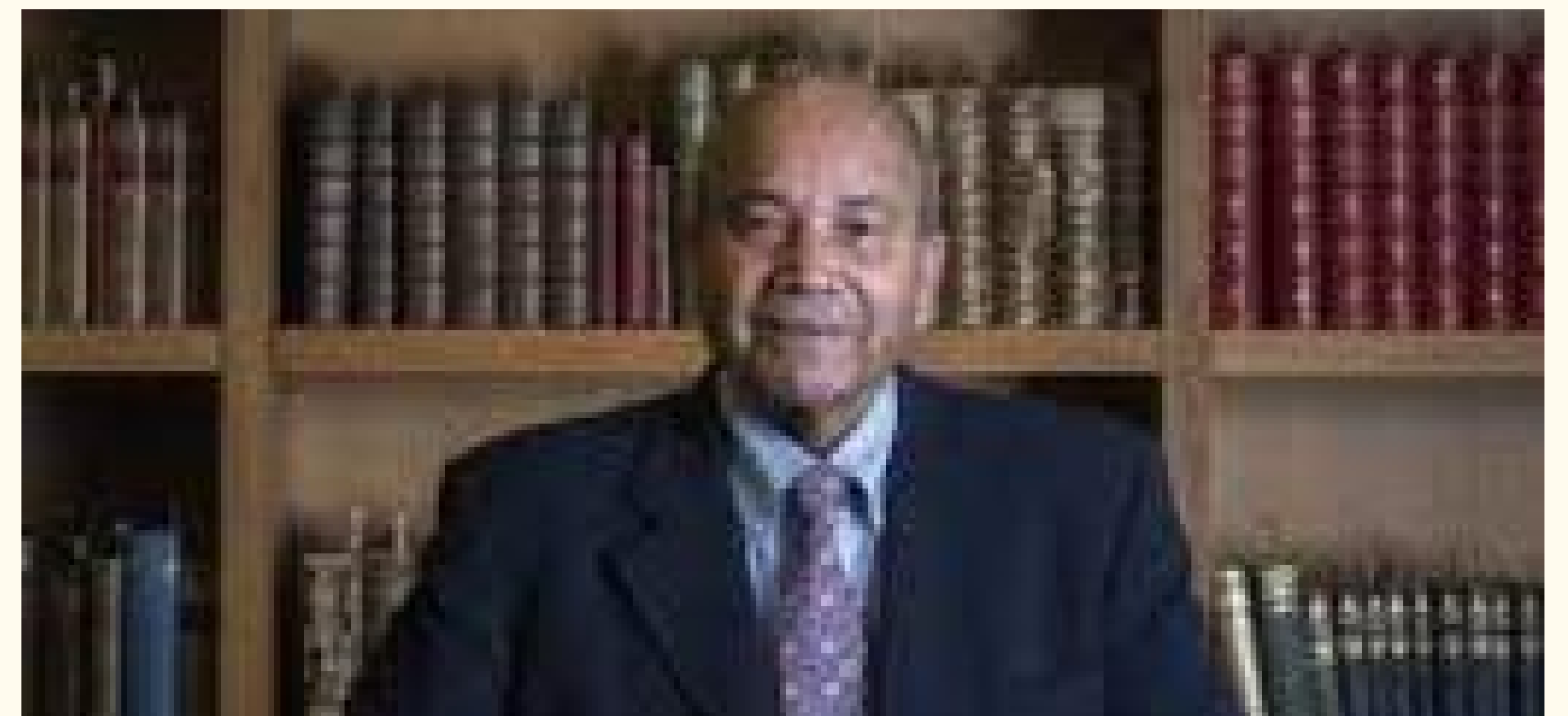
- Once a friend, always a friend: His humility and large-heartedness were reflected in always being available to all those who came in contact with him and became his friend. He gave his full undivided attention to everyone. Everyone felt satisfied that they were completely listened to and understood.
- Hard on self, soft on others: Working in organizations, many times, due to differences of opinion and styles, we become less than charitable to our colleagues. Not one time did I ever see Nanda ji with any ill words or expressing ill wishes on anyone, even if others were at fault or less than charitable to him.

For the younger generation seeking purpose and direction, Prof. Nanda's dedication serves as a powerful example of how one can contribute positively to society. In addition, Prof. Nanda's life was a living embodiment of the principles of Hindu Dharma. His commitment to his duty -- whether towards his family, his students, or the larger Hindu community -- was ever steadfast. He practiced and propagated the values of selflessness, discipline, and duty. For the younger generation grappling with the complexities of identity and belonging, Prof. Nanda's life offers a clear example of how one can stay true to their roots and values while contributing meaningfully to a global society. And finally, in his professional realm, Prof. Nanda was not just an educator, shaping the minds of countless students in his classroom, he was an inspiration and mentor to many around the country and around the world through his example.

Prof. Nanda's social commitments, as evidenced by his leadership roles and philanthropic efforts, highlight a life lived in service to others. For young professionals, his career is a true testament to the fact that one can achieve professional excellence while maintaining a strong commitment to societal welfare. Prof. Ved Prakash Nanda's life is a remarkable tapestry of dedication, cultural fidelity, and societal service. For the younger generation, he is not just a role model but a source of profound inspiration, encouraging them to lead lives marked by purpose, integrity, and a deep sense of duty to both self and society.

Rakhi Israni is the Vice President of Government Relations.

Contd. from Page 1



Prof. Nanda surrounded by his long-cherished book collection

- An embodiment of unselfish love and affection for colleagues: His relationship with all the karyakartas and families was strongly founded on an attitude of divine kindness and love for everyone. Young or old, new or old acquaintances, all experienced this every time they met him.

He maintained the high standard of purity of heart, mind, and action that he imbibed as a swayamsewak in the Sangh. He manifested the life of a true karmayogi in all aspects of his life -- personal, professional, and social -- working selflessly, without attachment, for the benefit of others.

Absorbing his life lessons is the true homage to this "Lifelong Swayamsewak -- a Karmayogi".

Arun Kankani is the President of Sewa International.



Prof. Nanda (first from left) with Ramesh Bhutada, Kiran Bhutada, and Thara Narasimhan at the Hindu University gala in Houston, TX, in March 2023.
Image Credit: Indo American News

True to his name, the ancient wisdom from the Vedas guided Prof. Ved Prakash Nanda. Right from his miraculous escape as a child from the massacre following India's partition, he faced many challenges in life but never let adversities dampen his spirit. A sharp intellect and a gentle and pleasant persona endeared him to all in his adopted home, breaking the glass ceiling that held back many others. Despite scaling unimaginable heights professionally in the West, he did not compromise with the values he believed in; he always fought to protect and promote them.

Prof. Nanda was recognized worldwide as an eminent legal scholar, his forte being human rights and religious freedom.

Contd. from Page 3

A Champion of Dharma: Prof. Nanda Transcended East-West Boundaries



Prof. Nanda in his late fifties. Credit: Denver University

Nanda ji maintained a close association with Sewa International from its foundational years. His remarkable guidance to Sewa volunteers and leadership not only ignited the spirit of sewa bhav (spirit of selfless service) but also played a pivotal role in nurturing the organization's successful growth. His impeccable character has left a lasting impact on numerous Sewa volunteers, contributing significantly to the organization's transformation into the impactful and compassionate entity it is today.

In heartfelt reverence, we offer our prayers for the departed soul, wishing for a serene journey as it unites with the God Almighty -- Om Tat Sat.

Swarup Kurella is the Director of North East Region.

He contributed significantly to documenting the Hindu genocide in Kashmir in the 1990s and Bangladesh in 1971 by the Pakistani Army. He organized hearings at the International Commission For Human Rights and Religious Freedom (ICHRRF), which he co-founded, and collected several first-person accounts from the victims or accounts from their families.

As a volunteer, each year, I received letters from him and handed them over to other volunteers at the annual Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS) Gurudakshina (paying obeisance to Guru) Utsav. I had many opportunities to listen to him at HSS and other organizational events. As I observed in my interactions, he was humble and lucid in his speech and writings. His clarity of vision and dedication were evident in his language and demeanor. His way of saying "pranam" (namaste) and greeting others are the best examples of humility.

At one crucial non-HSS event, he excused himself to attend the HSS shakha on time. He always encouraged volunteers to take up responsibilities to serve Sanatan Dharma and meet people in person at every socio-economic level.

As the Upanishadic verse portends, he was a complete soul who came from infinity, did his work, and merged back into infinity. Even after his passing, his life's message and memory live on in every volunteer, inspiring us to achieve the Vedantic goal of making the entire world one family.

Suresh Lohia is a Sewa volunteer from Irvine, CA.

Contd. from Page 6

Prof. Nanda: A Rishi in a Suit

When they got married in India, Prof. Rajendra Singh, the head of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) at that time, supported their marriage by performing Kanyadan (giving away the daughter in marriage, in Sanskrit), essentially standing in as the bride's father.

In a lighter vein, Nanda ji introduced Katherine as the daughter of RSS. They lived together in harmony for a long time. They were a great example of a cordial life partnership of how a husband and wife should support each other's vision, ideals, and life's mission. Katherine ji left this world about three months ago, and with her, Nanda ji lost crucial support and the will to live.

The next day after the funeral, Nanda ji attended a three-day meeting in Detroit. That was the last time I saw him. He actively participated in the meeting expressing his opinions and interacting with all volunteers, as he always did. But I knew, deep inside, he dearly missed Katherine ji. He was the founding member of Sewa International, USA. A couple of weeks before his passing, he sent a check to Sewa's President, Arun Kankani, donating a large amount to Sewa.

I extend my heartfelt condolences to the bereaved family and pray for Nanda ji to attain moksha.

Sandeep Khadkekar is the Vice President of Marketing.

Partition's Bloody Legacy: a Conversation with Survivor Dr. Ved Nanda

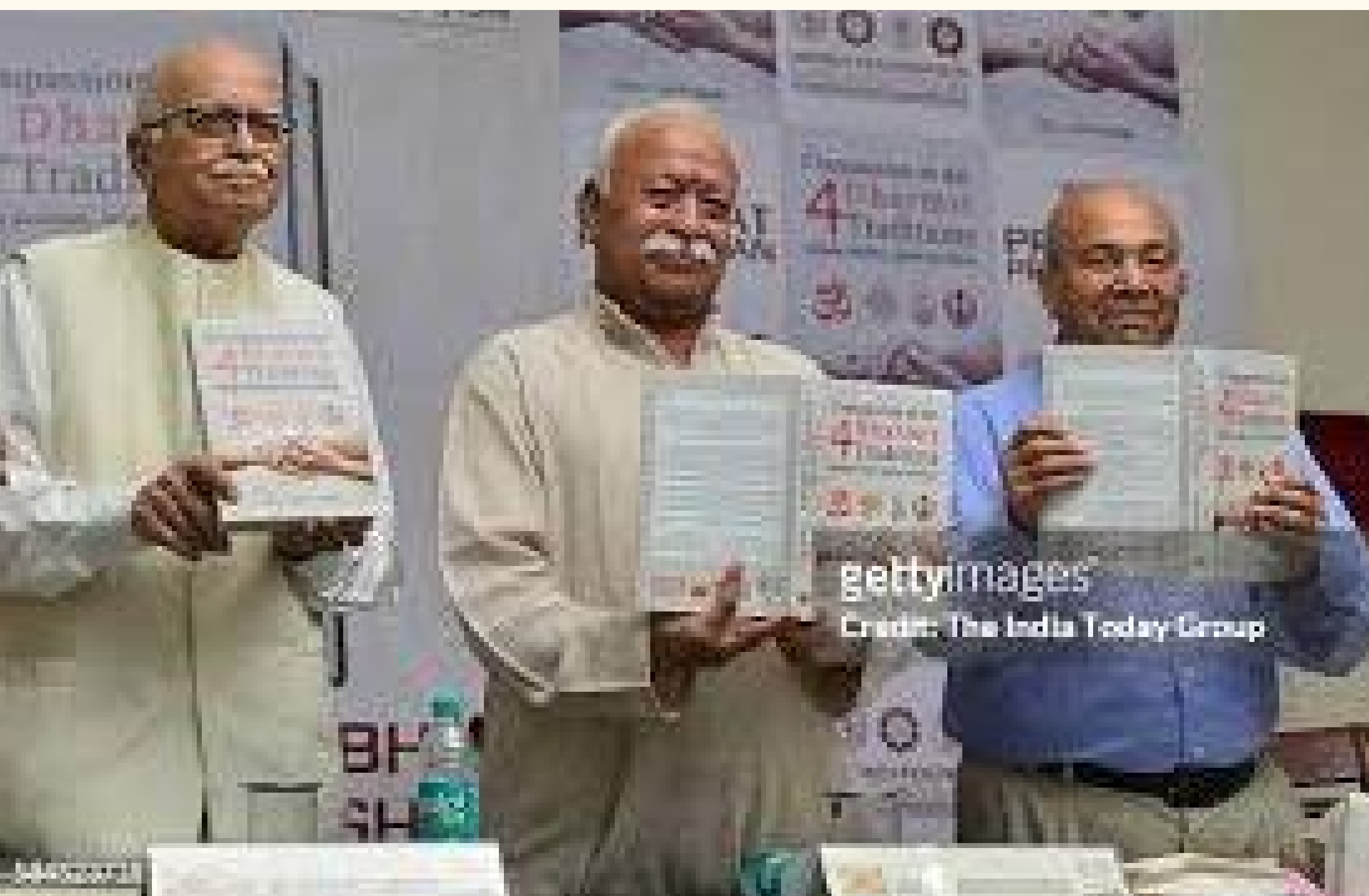


Prof. Nanda greeted people by folding his palms in a namaste pose and saying "pranam" when he met them. Credit: HSS

In August 1947, after some 300 years, the British finally were forced to quit India, and the subcontinent was subsequently partitioned into the independent nations of Hindu-majority but secular India and Muslim-majority Pakistan.

After World War 2, bereft of the resources required to retain the jewel of its empire, which was growing increasingly unstable amidst India's desire for independence coupled with the Muslim League's push for a separate Islamic state, Britain's exit was rushed, reckless, and woefully executed. Using out-of-date maps and census materials to create the new borders, which awkwardly split the key provinces of Punjab and Bengal in two, Partition triggered one of the largest mass migrations in human history, as the chaos, violence, and brutality that ensued swiftly spread, forcing millions to flee from all over, including provinces like Sindh and the North-West Frontier (now Khyber Pakhtunkhwa). Resulting in millions killed, millions more displaced, and some 100,000 women kidnapped and raped, the event is undoubtedly one of the worst to have ever taken place, though somehow, it is yet to be recognized as such.

Among those wanting to change this fact is Dr. Ved Nanda, who fled with his mother from their home in Gujranwala (a city now located in the Pakistani province of Punjab) after a Muslim friend warned them their neighborhood was going to be the next target for violence against Hindus.

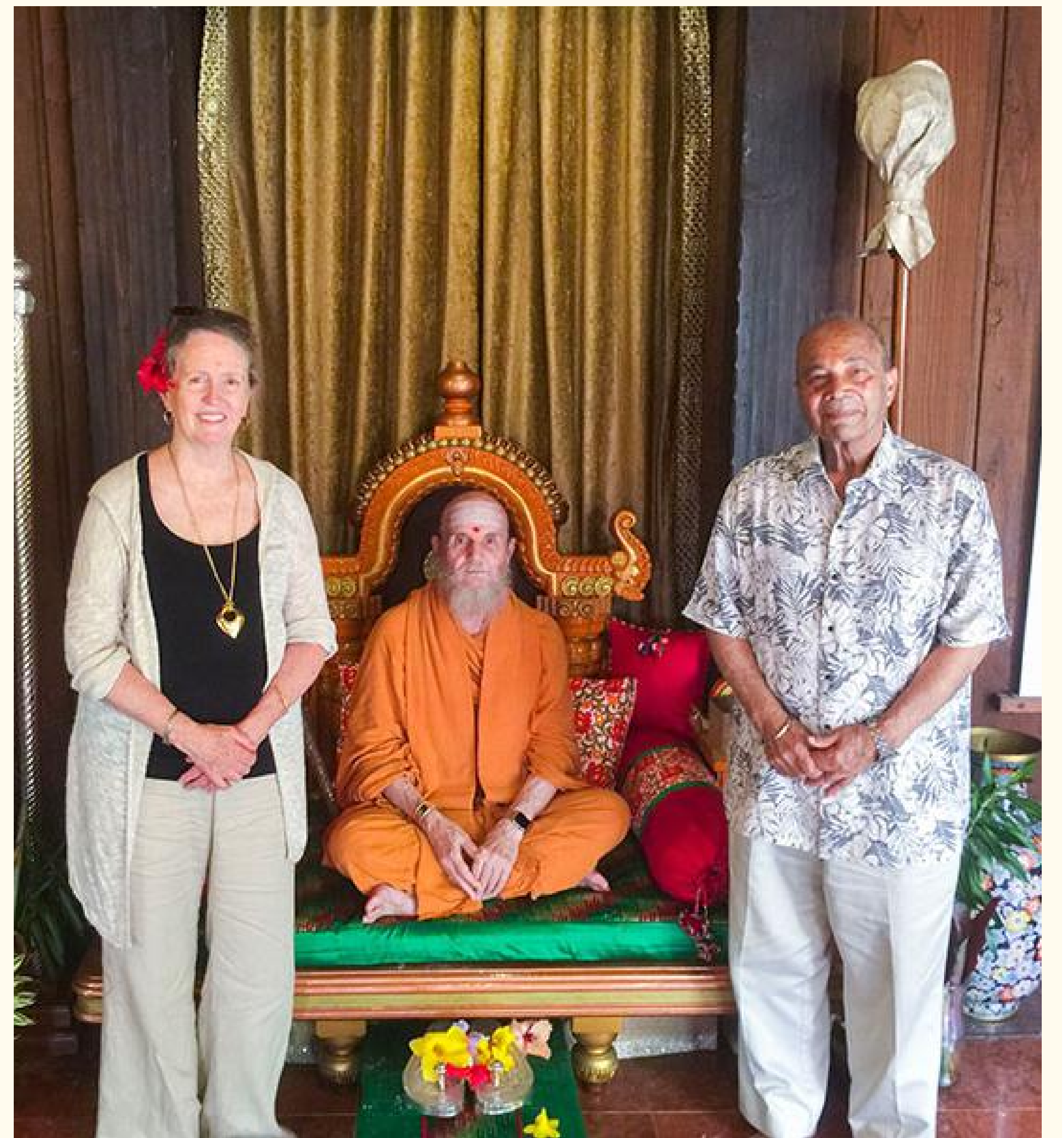


Former Deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani, (first from left) RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat, and Prof. Nanda in his book release event. Credit: Gettyimages

Now a distinguished professor who holds many leadership positions in the global international law community, he's received numerous national and international awards, including the United Nations Association Human Rights Award, and the Hiroshima Peace Award. Fueled by his experience during Partition, he has authored numerous books and is a regular columnist for the Denver Post, as he pursues his lifelong purpose of working for human rights, particularly the plight of refugees around the world.

What was life like before Partition, and how would you describe the period directly leading up to it?

Life before Partition for me, as a 12-year-old, was full of joy in the family and with friends — playing, school, and fun. It, however, changed dramatically as violence engulfed the region. My father, with the rest of the family, had left for East Punjab to find a place where we could settle. I stayed back with my mother and we watched with horror from our rooftop for several nights as houses burned all over the city.



Prof. Nanda and Katherine Nanda with Satguru Bodhinatha Velayanaswami at Kauai's Hindu Monastery, in 2015. Credits: himalayanacademy.com

What feelings and images come to mind when remembering Partition itself? How did you leave your home?

A Muslim neighbor knocked at the door one afternoon and gave us the ominous message: "Tonight your neighborhood is targeted for burning. You better leave." Panicked, my mother packed some jewelry and treasures in a small suitcase, as needed to help take care of me.

We hurried and our neighbor walked us to the nearby railway station. We heard that the trains going east to Lahore and East Punjab carrying fleeing Hindus were being stopped and passengers killed by armed bands. Hence, we decided to go to Jammu, part of Kashmir, and took the train going west.

Contd. on Page 10

Partition's Bloody Legacy: a Conversation with Survivor Dr. Ved Nanda

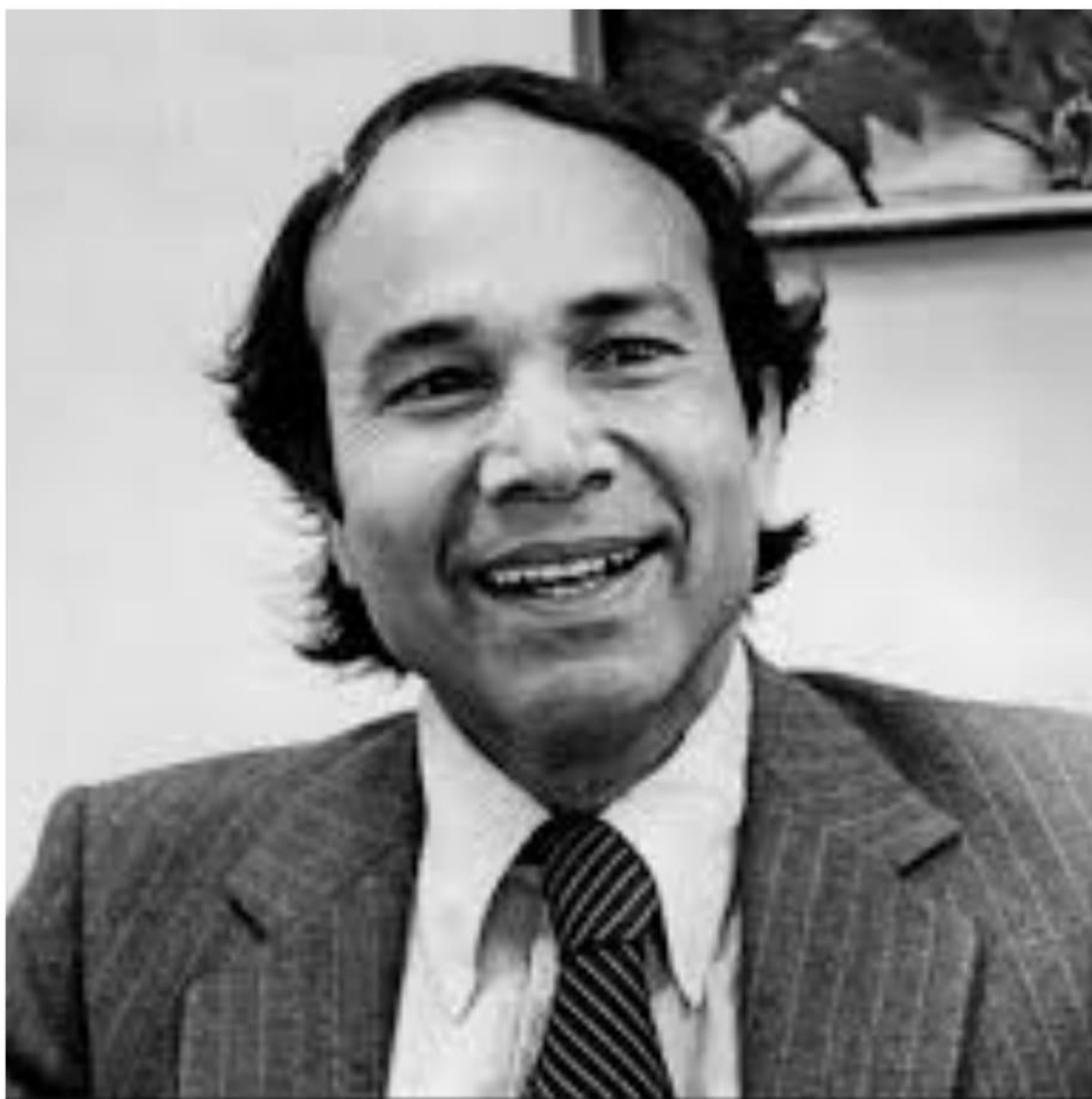
We had to change trains and, while waiting a few hours at Wazirabad Junction, it got dark and I fell asleep on a bench. A thunderous noise woke me — a bomb had fallen nearby. As we ran for cover, my mother left the suitcase behind as she was more concerned about saving my life.

The train for Jammu was stopped on the way by a group of armed men who boarded a few cars and stabbed and killed several passengers in other compartments. But in our compartment, there was a Sikh soldier with a rifle who fired a couple of shots, so no one entered our compartment. After the train was able to depart, we soon reached Jammu, with the clothes we were wearing as our sole possessions.

In Jammu, the local Hindu community had set up a camp for those like us who were uprooted. For the next few months (I can't remember the exact duration), we stayed in the refugee camp, because walking from Jammu to East Punjab was still not safe. Eventually, along with thousands of others, we started walking toward East Punjab. It was a long walk, about 200 miles. All that time, since we left Gujranwala, we could not reach my father by mail or telegraph, hence he did not know we were alright and assumed we were killed. By the time we reached Malerkotla (a city located in East Punjab), where he had found a place for us to live, the family had already done the Hindu last rites for us. We finally were able to get to them and were tearfully and joyfully reunited.



Prof. Nanda while delivering speeches in diverse locations.
Image Courtesy: ICCS, Gettyimages.ie, Colorado Foothills Association, americankahani.com, worldtribune.org & Denver University



What was life like after? What of everything you endured during that period was the most challenging?

The challenge of that period for my parents was obviously to settle in a different place, to start afresh after losing everything, including two houses and all their possessions. Fortunately, my father was in the Indian Civil Service and hence, after coming to East Punjab, he had work.

I eventually went on to study at Punjab University in Ambala and then at the University of Delhi. I did M.A. in Economics and LL.B. and LL.M. before I came to the United States for further studies at the University of Chicago, Northwestern University, and Yale Law School. After an internship at the UN, I began teaching law.

For me, as a young boy, what I witnessed in the refugee camp and along the 200-mile walk were things no one should ever have to see. That, indeed, has been the greatest challenge of my life; but experiencing my mother's courage was the greatest inspiration.

-Courtesy: Hindu American Foundation (HAF)

Prof. Nanda is depicted here engaging in discussions with various dignitaries, receiving accolades, and delivering speeches.
Image Courtesy: HSS, Denver University, X.com, Gettyimages, & Denverpost

It is hard to believe that a person like Dr. Ved Prakash Nanda lived amidst us in body and spirit, walked on the same earth with us, talked to us in his gentle, ever-loving voice, shared laughs with us, blessed us with his joyful presence, and left us with memories that will sustain us for a lifetime.

Dr. Nanda was not a mere mortal for many people who knew him personally and worked with him closely. A traumatic and bloody partition of India left an indelible mark on him when he was just 12 years old. As a young boy, he traveled from Gujranwala, his birthplace in today's Pakistan, to Jammu in India with his mother to escape death and mayhem. Dr. Nanda then walked from Jammu to the Indian part of Punjab. The difficulties he went through and the scenes he witnessed through his tender eyes in those days would have pushed anyone else to endless despair.

In his own words, Dr. Nanda saw things one should never see in life. The killing, suffering, fury, and fire burnished his steely resolve to dedicate his life to Dharma and work for human rights and refugee welfare. He worked tirelessly for various dharmic causes in the US, his adopted home, and his karma bhoomi. He became the guiding light that shined the paths of many. When he breathed his last over a month ago, he knew he had accomplished his mission, and it was time for him to leave his body. With him, we lost a remarkable man who brought fame and splendor to his motherland and gave his best to his adopted home.

I met Nanda Ji, as most people addressed him so with love and respect, in Denver, Colorado, around 2003. I would meet him at HSS or Sewa events for the next several years. He and Katherine Ji would visit our or other volunteers' homes whenever we invited them and freely interact with all.

They always inspired us with their simplicity, love, caring attitude, and dedication to HSS and Dharma. When HSS shakhas (weekly gatherings) restarted in Denver in 2003 after many years, his happiness had no bounds.

Nanda Ji would attend a shakha on the weekend whenever he was in town, a rare occurrence as he often traveled within the country or overseas on HSS work or professional engagements. Eloquent and sincere, all his addresses at HSS gatherings and elsewhere were lively and reflective. I always felt they came from his heart.

Nanda Ji rarely talked about his childhood. A few years ago, when a few of us volunteers met him and his wife Katherine over dinner at a restaurant in Denver, we were all ears when he started sharing a few snippets from his childhood and his college days in Delhi. Nanda Ji recounted how his mother took him to Jammu from West Punjab, which became a part of Pakistan after India's partition in 1947. He remembered his stay at the RSS office in Delhi along with L.K. Advani and Balraj Madhok, the erstwhile leaders of Jan Sangh in India. I wish we had many such occasions to learn about him.

Any work related to Dharma, however small, was dear to his heart. We all looked up to him, held him in high esteem, and treated him with natural deference.

We did not want to disturb him as we would other volunteers with a casual call or an unplanned visit. However, he would always take our calls or promptly call us back if he was busy. He made us feel comfortable by listening and sharing friendly moments whenever we met. He would always start the conversation, even with a child, with a mellow and gentle "Saadar Pranam". He would fold his palms in a namaste pose and say "pranam" to greet when he met people.

It was always a pleasant surprise to get a call from him. Around 2010, I was working on an HSS family camp newsletter late at night and got a call from Nanda ji. He wanted to convey his thoughts on a draft of a newsletter I had shared earlier. Later, he thoroughly reviewed all the articles in the newsletter and sent me the edited file. Again, the next day, he spent nearly an hour over a call late at night, suggesting modifications in the overall design, photo captions, headlines, and newsletter content.



Nanda ji received the Padma Bhushan award in 2018 from the then-President of India, Ram Nath Kovind. Credit: HSS

Just a couple of days before he passed away, I met Nanda Ji and stayed with him for a few hours. I noticed a green "aum" in Punjabi on the back of his right palm, a tattoo he got done in his childhood. In one of his columns in The Denver Post, he wrote he got a scolding from his mother for getting the tattoo as, most likely, it was dangerous in those days before partition to have an "aum" painted on hand. That tattoo symbolized the values he stood for all his life. While an unerasable aum on his hand stayed with him till the end, the syllable's sacredness remained etched in his heart. In his being, he carried its eternal message. As a community that strives to protect truth, pluralism, diversity of worship, and thought, we are forever indebted to Nanda Ji, Katherine ji, and many others who have dedicated their lives to uphold Dharma.

Vidyasagar Tontalapur is the Director of Communication.



Prof. Nanda remained intellectually sharp and physically active until his last days. Credit: HSS

Our beloved Mananiya Ved Nanda ji (Prof. Ved Prakash Nanda) is not physically with us anymore. He passed away on January 1, 2024, in Denver, CO, at the age of 90.

Whoever met Nanda ji, remembers him for his humility, infectious smile, and sense of humor. It is a big loss for us to bear, especially for those dozens of organizations and thousands of people who were inspired and supported by him. Ved Nanda ji was one of the founding members and Advisory Board members of Sewa International USA.

Ved Nanda Ji was a professor of law and served as provost at the University of Denver. He taught International Law at the Strum School of Law until his last days. His students established a chair in his name. He was a human rights advocate and international law expert.

Nanda ji received one of the highest civilian honors, the Padma Bhushan, by the Government of Bharat (India) in 2018. Ved Nanda ji was the President of the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh of America and an inspiration for Ekal Vidyalaya and many other Indic and Dharmic organizations.

Nanda ji was born in 1934 in Gujranwala, the "city of wrestlers," north of Lahore, in the Punjab province of then-undivided India. When he was 13, he and his mother moved to Jammu during India's Partition. Known as a brilliant student, Nanda jistudied economics and law at the University of Punjab and the University of Delhi.

Given his talent, he must have been encouraged to go earn laurels, so he came to the US and earned his LLM at Northwestern University in 1962. After completing a graduate fellowship at Yale Law School, he joined the University of Denver.

Nanda ji commanded great respect from a broad section of society globally. He authored over 24 books, was a columnist for The Denver Post, and contributed immensely to improving US-India relations.

Nanda ji lost his wife and companion Katharine only a few months ago in August 2023. They are survived by their daughter Anjali.

In 1999, Lakshmi (my wife) and I had just moved to the US from Bharat and did not have children yet. We were living in a one-bedroom apartment in Ossining, NY and I was the mukhya sikshak (chief instructor) of the Westchester-Rockland shakha. One day, our karyavaha, Sunil Govindappa ji said that Prof. Ved Nanada was going to visit us and that he would be staying at my home.

Both Lakshmi and I were hesitant because we did not have anything like a dining table, bed, etc., at home. Nanda ji came and had dinner with us sitting on the floor and he slept on a mattress on the floor. He comforted us as a father. I understand this humility and this nondiscrimination as a sangh karyakarta but for Lakshmi, with no sangh background, it was an incomprehensible experience of his humility and kindness, which made a lifelong impression on us.

I was fortunate to meet and spend some time with him recently in September 2023 at the HSS chintan baithak in Detroit and at the Hindu Mandir Executive Conference (HMEC) meetings in New Jersey. Noticeably, his body was fragile at the age of 90, but the same sharpness of mind and energy levels guided us in the meetings, just as I saw him 24 years ago. Until the last breath, he worked for the welfare of humanity inspiring thousands of us.

May his Atman attain mukti. Om Shanti, Shanti, Shanti.

Prem Pusuloori is the Vice President of Programs.

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