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BAPS YOUTH CELEBRATE GLORIOUS INDIAN CULTURE AND ACHIEVEMENTS

The Anaheim Convention Center witnessed dance, music and color this weekend as the youth of the Bochasanwasi Shree Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS) put on a tour de force performance to celebrate Indian culture and the achievements of the BAPS under the leadership of His Divine Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Held in the presence of Pramukh Swami Maharaj during June 26-27, the first day saw via a mock newscast, the immense growth of BAPS from the early days of the local BAPS mandir in Whittier to its present day international activities.

"In the joy of others resides our own", is the conviction of Pramukh Swami Maharaj which has become the guiding principle for BAPS activities worldwide. Its achievements include the construction of schools, hospitals and cultural centers as part of mandirs. Coupled with this it is also highly active in anti-addiction campaigns. For inspiring and guiding BAPS to serve society in this way, the youth wing of BAPS presented "Lifetime Achievement Awards" to Swamishri through thought provoking multimedia presentations and motivating speeches.

Approximately 100 BAPS youths ranging in age from 14-18 years planned and presented the entire event. Youths from the states of California, Oregon, and Arizona combined their efforts to prepare the presentations. The program took the form of a news broadcast where the youths highlighted BAPS achievements from 1984-2004. Trushar Patel, from Portland, Oregon, said, "It was amazing to see Swamishri presented with many awards. His achievements have inspired us in our own lives."

Many dignitaries were present in the assembly. Honorable Judge James Gray of the Superior Court of Orange County presented a plaque to Swamishri for his commitment to Hinduism and compassion for humanity. He stated his appreciation for the organization with, "What we need is your unity, your values, and your family." Prominent Indo-American business leaders and politicians were also welcomed in the assembly.

The second day was filled with an extraordinary musical titled; "Saanskruitik Viraasat" or "Cultural Heritage of India" organized by the West region children's forum. The event focused on young heroic figures from the Hindu scriptures, such as Shraavan, Dhruv and Nachiketa. Shraavan exemplified true dedication and service to his parents, whereas Dhruv showed the importance of unwavering faith in God. Nachiketa demonstrated detachment from the pleasures of this world and curiosity for the knowledge of the soul and God. These musical dramas, performed entirely in Hindi, emphasized universal morals such as respect and service to parents, faith in God and knowledge of the Divine.

The entire program was prepared by children ranging from 5-14 years of age from the states of California, Arizona and Oregon. The costumes worn by the dancers and actors were designed according to ancient Indian traditions; numerous costumes of various colors which were worn by the dancers included crowns, jewelry and other accessories. The costume styles ranged from deity to sages and royalty. Ajay Patel, father of Akash, proudly stated, "This unique cultural program has allowed my children to not only participate but also to learn about their rich cultural history."

Pujya Doctor Swami, a senior saint of the organization, stressed how important it is for parents to teach their kids about their culture at a young age. In his discourse he relayed Pramukh Swami Maharaj's message, "A family that prays together, eats together, plays together: stays together". Swamishri concluded the evening gathering with his blessings reiterating the need for culture and values. He stated

that it is the responsibility of parents to teach their kids about basic values and that the first three years of a child's life is the most crucial time for developing a moral foundation. During this time children are constantly in the company of their parents, who must instill their children with the values they will carry on throughout their lives.

Both of these events concluded His Divine Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj's 12-day program in Los Angeles which is a part of his 95-day tour of North America until August 17th. After Los Angeles, Swamishri will be visiting Orlando and Toronto. This trip will be capped with the inauguration of two traditional Hindu mandirs in Houston and Chicago. These mandirs are designed and constructed using authentic techniques inscribed in the Vedic scriptures and are the first of their kind in North America.

About BAPS

The Bochasanwasi Shree Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS), a worldwide socio-spiritual organization in Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations, is dedicated to community service, peace and harmony. Founded on the pillars of practical spirituality, BAPS strives to care for the world by caring for societies, families and individuals. Through a number of medical, cultural, educational, environmental, social and spiritual activities, BAPS endeavors to produce better citizens of tomorrow, who have very high esteem for their roots - the rich Indian culture. Its youth centers across the world support these activities of character building. Under the guidance and leadership of His Divine Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj, BAPS aspires to build a community free of addictions and that is morally, ethically and spiritually strong.

About Pramukh Swami Maharaj

His Divine Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj, the fifth spiritual successor of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, has inspired millions of devotees across the world to lead a God-conscious, character-centered life. As the present leader of BAPS, he travels from village to village, continent to continent, inspiring people of all ages to center their lives on moral values and sound judgment. He emphasizes the importance of family harmony, community service and spiritual progress among others. Representing the essence of Hinduism, his compassion for humanity, universal wisdom and striking simplicity have touched many world religious and national leaders.

For more information on BAPS and further details of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's North America schedule and program, please visit <http://www.swaminarayan.org>.