

FIRST RAMAYAN QUIZ & ESSAY COMPETITION COORDINATED BY SANAATAN DHARMA MANDIR OF NEW YORK

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NEW YORK: The Sanaatan Dharma Mandir of New York (SDMNY) coordinated the first Ramayan Quiz and Essay Competition during September, 2012. The competition, which was conducted in the strictest manner, was opened to all the youths from within the Richmond Hill community and surrounding environs. Youths from between the ages of eleven to eighteen years old were encouraged to participate in the competition.

The Ramayan Competition was the brain-child of the President of the SDMNY, Bhai Doodnauth Dasrat, who has been involved in youth development in the New York Hindu community for many, many years. He, along with others, went on a publicity blitz to promote this event, by sending out mass emails and printing hundreds of flyers and distributing them to many mandirs within the area to build awareness of this project and to attract a wider-cross section of participation.

Pandit Yoganand Ramnarain, Pandit Rishiram Persaud and Pandit Pavindrath Parsram, all prominent and well-respected spiritual leaders from the community, helped to put the essay questions together for this competition. Essay questions were all based on Saint Tulsie Das' Ramcharitamanas.

The Ramcharitamanas consists of the nectar-like exploits of Shri Hari in the Incarnation of Shri Ram. It is one of the most sacred texts in Hindu communities throughout the West Indies and further afield.

The Ramayan Competition was conducted in a very professional, business-like manner. Dr. Basdeo Mangru, one of Guyana's leading historian on the Indentured system in British Guiana and a professor at York College, CUNY, lent his academic credence and years of experience as an educator to the project. He volunteered to overlook the entire essay competition by painstakingly read all the essay entries and gave his professional advices on them all.

Though the competition was publicized to several mandirs in the community, sadly participation from the youths was below expectation. Nevertheless, those youngsters who participated must be complimented for taking the time and effort from their busy schedules to get involve in such an important project.

The organizing body of the competition held several review sessions at the mandir for all participants of the competition. The young leaders of SDMNY, including, Jaya Dasrat, Hema Ramnarain, Rudresh Ramnarain, Jessica Budhram, and Chandanie Narainram helped to conduct the review sessions. Seorie Aoutar assisted in acting as an exam proctor and collected all the essay papers at the end of the exam.

Monetary awards and trophies were given to the winners of the competition. The Shri Surya Narayan Mandir generously contributed \$1000 towards the prize money. Other individuals who made monetary contributions included Pandit Parsram, Pandit Yoganand, Danesh Dasrat, Ram Budhram, Devo Thakurdeen and Doreen Lachhman. Bhai Navin Phagu donated the trophies.

After due deliberation, the judges of the competition awarded the following youths for their outstanding work: 1st place went to Avinash Nohar, 2nd place went to Kavindra Dasrat and Parveen Nohar and 3rd place went to Gowrie Sharma. Also, each participant received a copy of the Ramcharitamanas, which was donated by Bhai Singh.

The presentation ceremony was held on Sunday November 18th at the SDMNY and the winners received their awards and prizes from Bhai Amar Persaud, the President of the Shri Surya Narayan Mandir, along with Bhai Doodnauth, Bahen Sita and Bhai Ram.