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### **Of the Youth, By the Youth, For the Youth**

When she speaks English, Sowmya Joisa sounds like any other American born Indian. *"The characteristic Indian speed together with the American accent many times makes it difficult for us to catch up with her English"*, say some of her Indian friends. *"Since she does not know Hindi most of the times we prefer to communicate with her in Sanskrit"*. Sanskrit, really?

Born in Seattle, Sowmya developed a keen interest for Sanskrit while doing her Bachelors degree in nursing at the University of Pennsylvania. In addition to attending classes at the University she went to residential camps conducted by Samskrita-Bharati, an organization dedicated to bringing Sanskrit conversations into daily lives. After her graduation this May, she decided to dedicate one year as a Samskrita-Bharati full time volunteer in the US.

At least three months of her schedule ahead seems already planned - Early in June she will be flying from the West coast to Florida to teach a weekend Sanskrit workshop, and towards the end of June she will be coordinating a Sanskrit residential camp in Pennsylvania exclusively for teenagers. The two months that follow will be spent in India taking advanced training and interacting with fellow full time volunteers in Delhi and Bangalore, only to return to US in early September for a family residential camp at Edison, NJ

Even though it is the first time in Samskrita-Bharati's history that an American born youth has taken up full time volunteering, Sowmya is not the only one who maintains an aptitude for the language and volunteers to promote it. The teenager's camp "Shraddhaa" to be conducted from June 23 to 27 has entrusted the teaching responsibility on 4 other young Americans as well - Varija, Kartik, Muthu and Prakruti. Senior Samskrita-Bharati volunteers Vasuvaj and Shanti Muthu will be guiding them. The camp promises to be lot of fun as well with activities such as hiking in the beautiful Pocono mountains, Treasure Hunt and other outdoor games in addition to indoor games - all involving Sanskrit.

So what could be attracting the Indian-American Youth to this ancient language ? The reasons seem to vary - from the fun that Samskrita-Bharati provides in its programs to wanting to know more about the culture of ones ancestors to even interest in ancient scriptures. The latter seemed quite evident given that a shloka recitation competition for school children, organized by Samskrita-Bharati in April-May this year was a huge success with a total of over 350 registrants in 6 cities in the US. Will the American Youth change the future of Sanskrit in the US and the rest of the world ?



Some of the participants from the shloka recitation competition held in Seattle on May 19



Participant Preety Sridharan at the shloka competition held in Boston on May 5