

[A Celebration of Devotion](#)

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Pramukh Swami Engineers Glitzy Spiritual Extravaganza Honoring H.D.H. Yogiji Maharaj

His Divine Holiness Yogiji Maharaj (1892-1971) was surely there, though not in flesh. Reminiscent of Vijayanagarian grandeur, this was one birthday party no one would want to miss - especially the honored guest who would have been 100 years old on the occasion if still earthbound.

The Bochasanwasi Shri Aksharpurushottam Sanstha (BSAS), guided and inspired by spiritual leader and Satguru Param Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj, set about to create one of India's grandest modern-day Hindu festivals. With the help of 16,000 volunteers from all over India and abroad, they succeeded in producing an almost ostentatious spectacle which could have drawn censure for all of its glitz, but didn't. In the end, the consensus of opinion was that Yogiji's birthday party was a gold-plated success.

The Indian Express carried a full-page feature in its Sunday Magazine splashing the headline: "The Swaminarayan sect is a dazzling blend of spirituality and electronic gadgetry, pomp and humility." India Today gave the event rave reviews: "Religion's obeisance to the 21st century was nowhere more evident than in Gandhinagar, Gujarat, where a mystical magical wonderland has materialized from nowhere..."

It was entitled the Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj Centenary Celebrations, featuring the inauguration of the Akshardham, a permanent temple referred to by devotees as the pink Taj Mahal, on November, 2, 1992. Akshardham took six years and eight million man hours to build and now sits adjacent to a 125-acre landscape masterpiece entitled "Swaminarayan Nagar," especially constructed for the

centenary celebrations.

The carefully crafted Swaminarayan Nagar was elegantly designed with colorful fountains, lush green lawns and gardens, as well as eloquently rendered statues of saints and sages of the past such as Buddha, Mahavira, Narasinha, Mira, Tukaram and Chaitanya. Three majestic temples jut into the sky at artistic locations: the Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Temple, the Sitaram Temple and the Radha Krishna Temple.

An important feature of the exhibition devoted to the youth was an anti-drug emphasis highlighting the harmful effects of drugs, tobacco, meat and alcohol, convincingly displayed in modern three-dimensional panorama. Everywhere apparent in all facets of the exhibition was the "high-tech" influence. One of the more eye-catching pageants spotlighted the latest "integrovision" technology which involves the use of light, sound, video and slides all together in sequence.

But such modernity was not to steal the whole show. Time-tested cultural events of long-standing tradition featured music performances both vocal and instrumental by world renowned Indian artists like Pankaj Udhas, Pandit Jasraj, Shivkumar Sharma, and Hariprasad Churasiya.

Fulfilling a long-standing commitment to social service, BSAS set up a blood bank to yield as much as 621,600 cc of blood during the festival. Facilities were also made available for the treatment of 3,500 patients daily on the property.

Yogiji Maharaj, now increasingly famous throughout India following his recent portraiture on a one-rupee stamp, is the fourth guru of the Bochasanswami Shri Akshar Purshottam Sanstha, a Hindu movement originated by the 19th century social reformer, Swami Sahajhanand, regarded by followers as Swaminarayan. This centennial mega-event was undoubtedly the sect's most ambitious and extroverted endeavor or to spread the teachings of Lord Swaminarayan, heretofore most effective in Gurujarate.

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