

**SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI PRANAB
MUKHERJEE AT THE SEMINAR ON THE OCCASION OF THE
150TH BIRTH ANNIVERSARY OF SWAMI VIVEKANANDA**

Rashtrapati Bhavan, New Delhi: 07-03-2013

1. I am delighted to join you in the Seminar being organized on the occasion of the 150th Birth Anniversary of Swami Vivekananda. It serves us with an opportunity to reflect on Swami Vivekananda's teachings and the values he preached, and renew our understanding of them.
2. A celebrated son of Mother India, Swami Vivekananda's contribution to India's cultural renaissance brought him unparalleled eminence not only in our country but throughout the world. He lived for less than forty years but he led a life of intensity and expansiveness.
3. Swamiji's teachings were in consonance with the Vedanta. He brought out the divinity lying dormant in man. He said, "*I call them God whom common men call human beings by mistake*". Being the superior creation of God, he believed that human beings and the state of their existence cannot be ignored.
4. He felt that religion should be a weapon for self transformation as well as transformation of the society. His Guru, Shri Ramakrishna Paramhansa, had taught him that service to man was service to God. Swamiji made this principle the basis of his social service programme.
5. He imbibed the message of his Guru that anything which helps to realize God in this life should be accepted as conducive to the practice of religion and realization of the Highest Truth. Swamiji never thought of his Guru in relation to his own personal life but thought of him in relation to India and the rest of the world.
6. Ladies and Gentlemen, Swamiji was undoubtedly a brilliant scholar and a profound thinker. He combined his wisdom with his concern for the nation and her suffering masses. He

travelled extensively within the country to understand their problems.

7. He was deeply troubled by the abject poverty of our masses and held that the country's downfall was primarily due to suppression of the poor, who were also immersed in ignorance and superstition. He saw that what the poor people in India needed most was the basic necessities of life such as food, clothes and shelter.
8. Swamiji believed that every human being is endowed with immense potentiality, but to realize it, people need self-confidence. He used to say, (quote) "*He is an atheist who does not believe in himself*" (unquote). In his speeches and teachings, he boosted the confidence of people by saying that and I quote: "*All power is within you; you can do anything and everything; believe in that, do not believe that you are weak*".
9. Swamiji did not prescribe any abrupt change in society. He believed that socio-economic change can be brought about through education. He felt that people should be exposed to two kinds of education – secular education comprising knowledge about new techniques in agriculture and village industries that would help them to emancipate economically, and spiritual education to revive their sense of self-belief and worth and to give them hope for a better future.
10. Swamiji established the Ramakrishna Mission in 1897 to what he described as creating the '*machinery which will bring noblest ideas to the doorstep of even the poorest and the meanest*'. The Mission has since been at the service of the poor and needy, carrying out programmes in the field of health care and education, women welfare, youth welfare, relief and rehabilitation, and work towards regeneration of rural and tribal areas. It has inspired other noble initiatives to come forward and contribute to social development in a meaningful way.
11. Ladies and Gentlemen, Swamiji attended the World Parliament of Religions at Chicago in 1893 as a true representative of his country and religion, and defined India's standing as a great

ancient civilization that offers the world a beautiful opportunity to learn from its living culture and philosophy. When I visited Chicago one year back, I had the privilege of unveiling a plaque at the place where Swamiji had delivered his famous address in 1893.

12. Through his speeches at Chicago, and his subsequent work in America and England, Swamiji showed the universal relevance and significance of India's ancient philosophy and spiritual culture in solving many of the problems associated with modern living.
13. Swami Vivekananda was a bridge between the East and the West. He taught our countrymen to adapt Indian ethos to the notions of Western humanism such as individual freedom, justice and respect for women. Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose once said and I quote: "*Swamiji harmonized the East and the West, religion and science, past and present. Our countrymen have gained unprecedented self-respect, self-reliance and self-assertion from his teachings*".
14. Ladies and Gentlemen, though Swamiji never gave any political message, many freedom fighters have derived inspiration and developed a sense of patriotism through his writings and speeches. I quote what Mahatma Gandhi had once said about Swamiji: "*I have gone through his works thoroughly, and after having gone through them, the love that I had for my country became a thousand-fold*".
15. He loved and treated all human beings as equal without any distinction of caste, religion, race, nationality or gender. He believed in egalitarian philosophy and wanted equal opportunities for all by not bringing down the higher, but raising the lower up to the level of the higher.
16. Being a Universalist, Swami Vivekananda's knowledge and understanding of spiritualism went beyond Hinduism. He was deeply familiar with the messages of other religions. Swamiji

laid the foundation for harmony amongst religions and also harmony between religion and science.

17. All through his life, Swamiji had spread his Guru's message of harmony of religions: "*Yato Mat, Tato Path*" (*As many faiths, so many paths*). Swamiji viewed religion as the 'science of consciousness' and believed that religion and modern science are complementary rather than contradictory. He portrayed religion as a universal concept and liberated it from the age-old scourges of superstitions, dogma and intolerance.
18. Ladies and Gentlemen, to commemorate the 150th Birth Anniversary of Swami Vivekananda, a National Committee under the Chairmanship of the Prime Minister and a National Implementation Committee, which I had chaired when I was the Finance Minister, was constituted.
19. It is gratifying to note that under the guidance of these committees, several activities have been undertaken to mark this event such as printing of books on the life and teachings of Swamiji in different languages, production and circulation of audio visual material on Swamiji, propagation of his teachings through media, and conservation of monuments of different religions as a mark of respect to his views on religious harmony.
20. The universality of Swamiji's teachings holds great relevance in the modern world. Despite progress made by us, our society is confronted with issues challenging our ethics and morality. Swamiji's teachings should be our guiding light in our path to the future.
21. I hope that Swamiji's 150th Birth Anniversary would be an occasion to awaken our minds to the great contributions and sacrifices made by him towards the welfare, progress and enlightenment of mankind. Let us rededicate ourselves to the causes for which Swamiji devoted his entire life.

Thank you.
