

**ADDRESS BY THIRU BANWARILAL PUROHIT, HON'BLE GOVERNOR OF TAMIL NADU AT THE
INAUGURATION OF VIVEKANANDA PARK AND VIVEKANANDA NAVARATRI FESTIVAL – 2018 AT
VIVEKANANDA HOUSE, CHENNAI ON 08.02.2018 AT 04.30 P.M.**

ANAIVARUKKUM MAALAI VANAKKAM

Thiru D.Jayakumar
Minister of Fisheries and Personnel and Administrative Reforms

Thiru K. P. Anbalagan
Minister of Higher Education

Thiru K. Pandiarajan
Minister of Tamil Official Language and Tamil Culture

Srimat Swami Gautamanandaji Maharaj
Vice President of Ramakrishna Math & Mission, Belur Math

Thiru S.N. Pandey

Thiru U. Venkataramanna

Thiru G Aravindan

Thiru Nalli kuppuswami Chettiyar

Distinguished Invitees

Friends from the Media

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a privilege and honour for me to be here amidst this distinguished audience on the occasion of Vivekananda Navarathri Festival. The festival is being observed to commemorate the nine days spent by Swami Vivekananda at this building in 1897 after his return to India from the West, where he had made the historic address at the Parliament of Religions held in Chicago. We are all assembled here at a historic place. It was in this auditorium that in 1902 Sister Niveditha spent a month in Chennai spreading the message of Swami Vivekananda and establishing contact with leading personalities to spearhead the women emancipation movement. It was again here that the statue of Swami Vivekananda was unveiled by the former President of India Dr. Radhakrishnan in 1964. That area has now been developed into what is going to be named as the Vivekananda Park.

To give the background, let me tell you that this building, which is known as Vivekananda Illam, was once known as Ice House. It was meant for storage of ice blocks that were brought here from the Madras Harbour into which they were imported all the way from North America. This was a highly expensive and risky exercise and as expected the business collapsed. The building was then sold to an advocate by the name Biligiri Iyengar at which time it was renamed as Castle Kernan. Biligiri Iyengar who was a disciple of Swami Vivekananda provided the building for the stay of the Swamiji during his 9 day tour to Chennai in February 1897. Knowing the desire of Swami Vivekananda to set up a permanent Mutt in Chennai, Biligiri Iyengar agreed to provide the building for the missionary activities of the Mutt. The activities of Ramakrishna Mutt were carried on here thereafter for nearly 10 years till 1906. Subsequently the building was acquired by the Government in 1914. In 1963 the building was named as Vivekananda Illam by the Government and in 1997, handed over to the Ramakrishna Mutt on long lease.

As you can see, the building has had a long and chequered history and we are all fortunate that the building which once housed Swami Vivekananda after his successful tour of the United State is now being used to propagate the teachings and uphold the memory of Swamiji.

Swami Vivekananda's teachings have been a source of inspiration for millions of people. His greatness lay in his ability to lead from the front. Those were the times when the whole of

India was reeling under the onslaught of British imperialism. Swamiji preached to the young and old to maintain one's own dignity, to be bold and to be strong. He said strength is life and weakness is death. He eloquently propounded that you cannot believe in God unless you learn to believe in yourself. One another excellent message of Swamiji to Indians who were afraid, cautious and weak was "take risks in life, if you succeed you can lead, if you fail you can guide". He called upon Indians to arise, awake and stop not until the goal is reached. The sayings of Swamiji resonate all through this building and their echoes can be heard within the precincts of this illustrious place. That dynamic vibration can be felt and experienced even today.

Today India is free and the world listens to India. 125 years back Swami Vivekananda's powerful speeches made the world listen to India. When Swamiji spoke at the Parliament of Religions at Chicago, the audience listened with rapt attention. At that historic address he stated and I quote "I thank you in the name of mother of religions for it fills my heart with joy for having been so warmly and cordially welcomed. I am proud to belong to a religion which has taught the world tolerance and universal acceptance and to belong to a nation which has sheltered the persecuted and the refugees of all religions and nations. I am proud to tell you that we have Israelites, who came to South India when their temple was shattered to pieces by Roman tyranny. We foster the remnants of the grand Zoroastrian nation". He went on to say that religious unity will come not by the triumph of any one of the religions but by assimilating the spirit of other religions while preserving the individuality of one's own religion. Assimilation and not destruction, harmony but not dissension. This was the message of Swamiji.

It was in Chennai that Swamiji lectured to the youth on various topics such as 'My plan of campaign, Vedanta- and its application to Indian life, The future of India, "The sages of India" and "The work before us". Youth in large numbers were inspired by his powerful speeches, Swamiji always loved the Tamil people. This is revealed by the fact that after Swamiji's visit to Chennai the Ramakrishna Mutt was run for 10 years in this building by his brother disciple Swamy Ramakrishnananda.

Swamy Vivekananda and Sister Nivethitha believed that misery and poverty in India can be eliminated only through education. Infact when Sister Nivethitha spoke in Chennai it had such an enormous impact that Mahakavi Bharathi went to meet her in Calcutta, soon afterwards in 1905. It was Sister Nivethitha who explained to Bharathi the importance of recognizing women as free and equal beings on par with men. It was after this that Bharathi envisioned the concept of 'Puthumai Pen' and went on to create literary history.

The vision of Swamy Vivekananda went beyond religion. He engaged himself with the problems of day to day life likepoverty, slavery, education and of arousing the national consciousness. This interesting anecdote about the meeting between V.O. Chidambaram who is known as 'Kappalotiya tamilan' and Swamy Ramakrishnananda at this very building reveals this interesting dimension of Swamiji's thought process. The incident is mentioned by V.O. Chidambaram in his autobiographical poem. When V.O. Chidambaram was confused about the path he had to take in his personal life, he approached Swamy Ramakrishnananda and started asking questions about philosophy and spirituality. Swamy Ramakrishnananda realized that V.O. Chidambaram was a leader among men and that it was not enough if he merely followed the part of spirituality. He felt that V.O.Chidambaram should engage himself in national service and therefore exhorted him to fight for the nation using the weapon of Swadesi. It was this inspiration that sowed the seeds of the Swadesi Navigation Company of V.O. Chidambaram.

Nation building is a long and arduous task and it is important that honesty, transparency, selfless service and total devotion and dedication towards the nation become watchwords in this tremendous effort.

No nation has become great without a patriotic spirit among its people. No nation has become great if the common people are not provided with opportunities for education, employment and enterprise in a honest and transparent manner. No nation has become great unless the poor and downtrodden are served by the better endowed people with a sense of brotherhood and selflessness. It is therefore important for us to inculcate the values of honesty and transparency and devotion to the nation in our youth.

On this special occasion when we are inaugurating the Vivekananda park and commencing the Vivekananda Navarathri Festival in 2018 let us resolve unto ourselves that we will strain every nerve and muscle to spread the message of Swami Vivekananda far and wide amongst the people of India and the people of the world so that India rises to a position of preeminence and ascends to the level of being the Jagath Guru. I am thankful to the organisers for having invited me to this auspicious function. In Tamil, there is a proverb which says "*Thai piranthavazhipirakkum*". We are assembled here in the month of 'Thai', which is a very auspicious month for marriages and functions. The function is taking place at a great place and at a historic moment and I am sure that this is going to be the beginning of great things to come. I wish everybody associated with the name of Swami Vivekananda success and brightness in their lives and congratulate the Ramakrishna Mutt and the Government of Tamil Nadu who have made this function possible.

Nandri Vanakkam
Jai Hind Jai Tamil Nadu