

Thiru. Banwarilal Purohit, Hon'ble Governor of Tamil Nadu participated as Chief Guest to unveil the mural of Swami Vivekananda and inaugurated the Vivekananda Navaratri Festival - 2019

Hon'ble Governor of Tamil Nadu, Thiru. Banwarilal Purohit participated as Chief Guest to unveil the mural of Swami Vivekananda and inaugurated the Vivekananda Navaratri Festival - 2019 at Nivedita Auditorium, Vivekananda House, Chennai today (06.02.2019) and addressed the gathering.

Hon'ble Governor said, "It is a privilege and honour for me to be here amidst this distinguished audience on the occasion of the Vivekananda Navarathri Festival. The festival is being observed every year to commemorate the nine days of stay of by Swami Vivekananda at this building after his return to India in 1897.

After the historic Chicago Address (1893) and his subsequent tour of the USA and Europe, Swami Vivekananda travelled via Colombo and using a ferry along the Ram Sethu set foot on Indian soil at Rameswaram on 25th January 1897. He was accorded a rapturous welcome by the Rajah of Ramnad who showed his devotion by walking in front of the chariot in which Swamiji was seated. Thereafter Swamiji came to Madras and during his nine-day stay here, he stayed at this building which was then known as Ice house.

The 9 nights stay of Swami Vivekananda from 6th February at Ice house is being celebrated as Vivekananda Navaratri.

This building was originally 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 very soon 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. Knowing the desire of Swami Vivekananda to set up a permanent Mutt in Madras, Biligiri Iyengar agreed to provide the building for the missionary activities of the Mutt. The activities of Ramakrishna Mutt were therefore carried on here for nearly 10 years till 1906. Subsequently the building was acquired by the Government in 1914

and in 1963 the building was named as Vivekananda Illam. In 1997, it was handed over to the Ramakrishna Mutt on long lease by the Government.

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 international tour is now being used to propagate the teachings and the message 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.

Many freedom fighters were inspired by his lectures and many of them visited him at this august house.

Sri C. Rajagopalachari, the first Indian Governor General of Independent India who met Swami Vivekananda here wrote about their meeting and I quote "I am a lucky man in that I have actually seen and touched the feet of the great Swami Vivekananda. I was then a student of Law College".

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.

Swamiji had great faith in the people of the Indian nation. He said and I quote "If there is any land on this earth that can lay claim to be the blessed Punya Bhumi, to be the land to which all souls on this earth must come to account for Karma it is India. Here is the life-giving water with which must be quenched the burning fire of materialism which is burning the core of the hearts of millions in other lands.

The debt which the world owes to our Motherland is immense. Taking country with country, there is not one race on this earth to which the world owes so much. Civilisations have arisen in other parts of the world. In ancient times and in modern times, great ideas have emanated from strong and great races. Each idea had to be soaked in a deluge of blood but India has for thousands of years peacefully existed. We, of all nations of the world, have never been a conquering race, and that blessing is on our head, and therefore we live. We never preached our thoughts with the fire or sword.

The great good fortune of this country and of the world was that there echoed a voice from generation to generation which declared एकं सद्विप्रा बहुधा वदन्ति — "That which exists is One; sages call It by various names." It is not that Shiva is superior to Vishnu, not that Vishnu is everything and Shiva is nothing, but it is the same one whom you call either Shiva, or Vishnu, or by a hundred other names. The names are different, but it is the same one.

And herein is the explanation of the most remarkable phenomenon that is only witnessed here — all the various sects, apparently hopelessly contradictory, yet living in such harmony. You may be a dualist, and I may be a monist. You may believe that you are the eternal servant of God, and I may declare that I am one with God Himself; yet both of us are good individuals. It is the spirit of co-existence that makes India the spiritual leader of the world". Unquote.

The vision of Swami Vivekananda went beyond religion. During his tours in India, he engaged himself with finding solutions to the problems of day to day life like poverty, slavery, education and of arousing the national consciousness. He feelingly spoke of Daridra Narayana wherein he expounded that service to the poor is service to God.

On this special occasion when we are commencing the Vivekananda Navarathri Festival in 2019 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.

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 an 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.

I am thankful to the Ramakrishna Mutt for having invited me to this auspicious function. 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 and have got ready this beautiful Wall Mural to commemorate the 125th anniversary of the Chicago address of Swami Vivekananda.”

On this occasion, Srimat Swami Gautamananda, Vice President, Ramakrishna Math and Mission, Thiru. K.N.Ramasamy, Director, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Padmasri Nalli Kuppuswami Chetti, Thiru. M. Balasubramaniam, Director, Brookefields Estates Pvt. Ltd., Swami Shukadevananda, Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission Vidyapith, Swami Padmasthananda, Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission and other dignitaries participated.

Raj Bhavan, Chennai -22

Sd/-

Date:06.02.2019

Joint Director (PR)