

NATIONAL COMMITTEE ON COMMEMORATION OF 150TH BIRTH ANNIVERSARY OF SWAMI VIVEKANANDA MEETS IN NEW DELHI

Government of India has decided to commemorate the 150th Birth Anniversary of Swami Vivekananda and a National Committee has been constituted under the Chairmanship of Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh.

The first meeting of the National Committee was held today in New Delhi, and presided over by the Prime Minister. In his opening remarks Dr. Manmohan Singh said, Swami Vivekananda did a lot to inculcate a national consciousness among the people. His message was universal and based on rationality and righteousness. It was a message that appealed to people of all classes, castes and creeds. His message of unity and brotherhood has far-reaching appeal and relevance even today.

Here is the full text of Prime Minister's opening remarks at the meeting:

"I am grateful to the distinguished members for joining us today for the first meeting of the National Committee for the Commemoration of the 150th birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda which falls in 2013. Swami Vivekananda was one of our greatest spiritual leaders and will always be a revered figure in India's history and culture. We should work sincerely to celebrate the commemorative year in a befitting manner.

Swami Vivekananda did a lot to inculcate a national consciousness among the people. His message was universal and based on rationality and righteousness. It was a message that appealed to people of all classes, castes and creeds. His message of unity and brotherhood has far-reaching appeal and relevance even today.

We hope to use the occasion of his 150th birth anniversary to promote interest, particularly among our youth in his values, thoughts and ideals. In fact, we celebrate Swami Vivekanand's birthday on 12th January as National Youth Day every year. We recall on this day his memorable call to "Work, work, work".

Swami Vivekananda thought deeply about education and what it meant for Indian society. He conceived of education as the primary means of rebuilding Indian

society. For him, education meant secular learning that built character and instilled human values in students.

I am happy that among the proposals we have received is one from the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission in Belur that is based on this theme. It seeks to promote and implement Vivekananda's ideas on value based education. Our education system today is information based and does not give adequate emphasis on building core values. I think that thought should be given to how we can mainstream some of Swami Vivekananda's ideas on education into our school and college curricula.

We have also received proposals from the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture in Kolkata and also the Public Service Broadcasting Trust in New Delhi. We will be discussing these proposals shortly.

But I hope that we will be able to invite and receive proposals from organizations and groups interested in Vivekananda's teachings from all four corners of the country. I urge the Members of the Committee coming from different parts to identify such organizations at the local level so that we can support them to spread the message of Swami Vivekananda far and wide.

In fact, as is well known, Swami Vivekananda travelled extensively as a monk, covering the length and breadth of the country. His period of meditation at Kanyakumari is immortalized by the famous rock named after him. But his travels in other parts of the country are less well known. Perhaps some attention should be given to reviving interest in his travels and even in restoring some of the buildings or places which are associated with him.

We should be conscious that to reach our youth we will have to use media such as the internet. I am often told that much of the material on India, including on our historical figures such as Vivekananda, come from Western sources. If so, we should make strenuous efforts to develop our own information sites in a useful and attractive manner. We should also be willing to subsidise high quality publications on Swami Vivekananda to make them affordable for our youth.

Swami Vivekananda was one of India's early cultural ambassadors who was able to propagate Indian philosophy, thought and culture to the outside world. He drew

upon our ancient texts to communicate with brilliance and eloquence the message of India which lays emphasis on tolerance, plurality and openness.

Swami Vivekanand's famous lecture at the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago on 11th September 1893 is a shining moment in India's cultural history. I understand that the State of Chicago does not allow memorials of people who are not American citizens. But, we must find some way of commemorating this event in the place where it happened. I am sure that the Indian American community could be urged to find creative ways of doing so.

As we receive different proposals for the commemoration, we will have to set up a mechanism to examine, approve and later monitor their implementation. I would suggest that we set up an Implementation Committee that could take on this task and report back from time to time to the National Committee. We can discuss this matter later during the meeting.

The main purpose of today's meeting is to seek your views on how best we should move ahead to organize the commemoration events. The National Committee hopes to be able to draw on the immense intellectual resources of its members to guide the celebrations. I look forward to hearing your views. Thank you.”

Some of the members who attended the meeting and contributed to the discussions were Smt.Sonia Gandhi (Chairperson, UPA), Dr. Karan Singh (M.P.), Shri Pranab Mukherjee (FM), Shri S.M.Krishna (External Affairs Minister), Shri Kapil Sibal (HRD Minister), Smt. Ambika Soni (I&B Minister), Shri B.P. Singh, Governor, Sikkim, Shri Narendra Modi (Chief Minister, Gujarat), Sh. Ramesh Pokhriyal (Chief Minister, Uttrakhand), Smt. Sushma Swaraj, Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha, Smt. Girija Vyas (Chairperson, National Commission for Women) Shri Sitaram Yechury (Chairman, Parliamentary Standing Committee on Tourism & Culture) and senior Ministers representing the Chief Ministers of West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Assam and Punjab. The Rama Krishna Mission was represented by 4 Swamjis including Swami Prabhananda. Prominent among the experts and intellectuals who attended were Prof. Lokesh Chandra (former M.P), Sh. Aweek Sarkar (Chairman, Anand Bazaar Patrika Group), Sh. Shankar (eminent author), Prof. Mirinal Miri (Former Vice Chancellor, NEHU), Prof. M.G.K. Menon, Prof.

Samten (Vice Chancellor, Central University of Tibetan Studies, Sarnath), Prof. Satkari Mukhopadhyay (Scholar) and Prof. Rudrangshu Mukherjee (Historian).

Considering Swami Vivekananda's lasting legacy being the role model of the youth, the Committee focused on the following six areas:

1. Vivekananda as an Icon for the Youth, for

- Character building;
- Value education;
- Imbibing India's plural & secular tradition

2. Vivekanand & National consciousness

- Synchronized both eternal Indian and modern India;
- Arouse dormant national consciousness

3. Vivekanand's relevance in the 21st century;

- Emphasise his ideas in contemporary context;
- Let us move forward, with his ideals

4. His service to the poor and service to the mankind

- Emphasis on BPL population, rural/tribal areas and naxalite pockets.

5. Highlight his contribution to gender issues

- Through his writings & letters
- Through special programmes for women education and health

6. Vivekananda's interest in science

- Research & re-kindle interest in scientific enquiry.

Initiatives and Interventions suggested

1. Involve youth through competitions, essays, interactions and study circles.

2. Publications

- (i) Reprint complete works in improved form
- (ii) Abridged versions for different segments
- (iii) Books of quotations and messages

3. I). Biography of Swami Vivekanand by eminent Authors

- ii). Reprint Romain Rollands biography of Swami Vivekananda

4. Education

- (i) Publish letters on secular ideas
- (ii) Education and curriculum:
 - Ø In schools and colleges
 - Ø Create Vivekananda Chairs in Universities

5. Vivekananda and Yoga

- (i) Develop its proper understanding
- (ii) Establish standards for it

6. Electronic Media as the most popular medium of propagation of the Swamy's message.

- (i) All India Radio and Television
- (ii) CDs, DVDs etc, Internet and Website
- (iii) Films on Vivekanands:
 - i. Most popular concept unanimity on it
 - ii. PBST proposal supported

7. Vivekananda Travels throughout India

- (i) Preserve some important heritage sites

(ii) Encourage students to visit through concessions

8. International Programmes on Vivekananda

(i) Organize Conferences, Lectures and Seminars

(ii) Involve overseas Indians.

(iii) Establish Chairs in Overseas Universities

9. Research on Religion and Harmony, Inter-Faith Dialogue

(i) Bring his ideas into current discourse, study including Tribal religion and their autonomy

(ii) Counter current perception of religion as violent and divisive Emphasis on secular aspects of religion

10. Commemorate Chicago Address

(i) Indian Community in U.S.A. may suggest programmes

(ii) A Chair in Chicago University may be set up

(iii) An endowment for an Annual Lecture be created

11. MISC:

(i) Coin a catch word or phrase for the Commemoration

(ii) Create a Logo

(i) Invite ideas for the Commemoration

(ii) Mobile Exhibitions

12. Prime Minister announced setting up of a National Implementation Committee under the Chairmanship of Finance Minister to work out the further details.